



# Novel Experience

By

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## Dedication

I would love to thank my awesome friends, Jess, Shelly, and Joyous who helped me see this book through to the end. Without you guys, I'm not sure what I would have done. You guys are total Goddesses in my book!!

I'd like to thank my friend, Dan, who has become an unshakable source of information and doesn't mind what question I seem to ask him, no matter how bizarre, and always has an answer for me.

I want to thank my very understanding husband, who stands beside me, and my dreams, even though I drive him crazy sometimes.

Without all of your support, I don't think I'd be able to be where I am, and words cannot express how thankful I am to have wonderful people like you guys in my life.

## Prologue

“Get off of me!”

Bram had been scanning the dance floor for trouble when he heard the shout. Most people continued with whatever they were doing, unable to hear the woman over the loud music. But he could hear her. Deciding to investigate it, Bram waved off another bouncer as he headed for the source of potential trouble. The throbbing beat of the music never slowed overhead, but he paid no attention to it as he drew closer to his destination.

“I said get off of me!” A beautiful brunette shouted at a pale man who held her arm captive. Looking completely out of place, she wore a pink shirt and blue jeans while surrounded by people dressed in much darker shades.

But that was no excuse for anyone to harass her.

Bram found himself unable to take his eyes off of her, not because of her choice of fashion, but because she was the most beautiful woman he’d ever seen.

Her long brown hair was pulled back in a loose ponytail at the nape of her neck. Her skin wasn’t pale, but it was light and creamy—the term *delicious* came to his mind—and he could tell she wore only the faintest hints of makeup. Even the scowl she gave her would-be attacker didn’t manage to detract from her beauty.

His cock immediately stirred to life. *And I thought after that dance with Lalita nothing else that happened tonight would surprise me.* For just a moment his mind drifted back to the way he and La danced, and how she’d confessed her true feelings. The feelings that she had for another man—for Gareth.

Brought back to the present by a low cry, he watched angrily as the jerk tried to yank the girl close to him again as she struggled against his grip. Bram’s fists clenched when the jerk grabbed the collar of her shirt with his free hand, giving her no choice but to step closer, or have it be ripped from her body.

Bram growled low in his throat at the man’s actions. Without hesitation, he reacted.

Stepping in, he grabbed the skinny wrist that clutched her shirt and tightened his grip until he knew it was painful, drawing the man’s attention to Bram instead of the brunette. “I believe the lady told you to release her.”

“Min’ yer own fuckin’ business,” the man slurred, his horrible breath, wrapping around him.

To his credit, Bram carefully kept his face calm and detached, an icy expression firmly in place that gave no indication that he thought the man’s breath could strip paint from the walls. He gave silent thanks that other scents helped detract from the man’s breath.

“This is my business,” he told the man calmly. “And, if you don’t release her now, I can guarantee you’ll be going home with a broken wrist.” Adding more pressure to his grip, he could feel the bone beneath his hand ready to snap with the slightest twist.

The man paled and nodded, quickly releasing the woman and her shirt.

Releasing the asshole, Bram turned his attention to the beautiful woman to find out if she’d been hurt in their struggle.

From the corner of his eye, he caught a glimpse of the man’s fist shooting toward him from the corner of his eye. Easily dodging the blow, he aimed for the man’s stomach and

threw his own punch. The man's breath spilled out with a whoosh as he stumbled backwards and fell. Typically he would have restrained himself more, to make sure he didn't hurt the patron, but at the moment he didn't care. Bram had never been able to tolerate any man attacking a woman—no matter how harmless the 'attack' seemed—and he wanted to teach this man a lesson.

He turned to look into a pair of blue-gray eyes, his voice gentle. "I'll be right back," he promised her. She nodded her head, her eyes never leaving her attacker as she rubbed her arm. Dark bruises already marred her creamy skin where the man had grabbed her, and Bram's anger increased when she allowed the sleeve fall down into place when she noticed his attention.

Picking the groaning man up from the floor, Bram finally got a good smell of him, without the benefit of anyone 'diluting' his stench. It took all of his control not to throw the man back down to the floor.

*The man reeks of alcohol! This should never have been allowed to happen!*

Club Strigoi had very precise rules that the bouncers and doormen were expected to follow.

Letting in anyone that was drunk or allowing them to become so drunk while there defied all of them.

Practically dragging the man through the dancers to the entrance, Bram carefully kept the man as faraway from him as possible so he wouldn't have to breathe the stench anymore than necessary. At the door, he shoved the man roughly outside.

For the benefit of those still waiting in line, he shouted at the crumpled form. "Damn, I hate it when a man doesn't know how to take his liquor. Go sober up!"

Carefully leashing his anger, he turned to the man responsible for managing the door that night and tried to remain calm. *Just my luck...a new guy!* he silently groaned.

He didn't have to look over his shoulder to know he had the attention of every person standing outside of the club, waiting to gain entrance. Taking care to allow them to hear every word he said, he addressed to the bouncer. "We do not allow drunks to enter!" His eyes narrowed as he spoke.

"If they aren't sober when they try to come in, tell them to go somewhere else, or make them stand in line until they sober up. Do *not* allow another drunk into this club. Am I clear?" he asked, his voice a mask of icy calm.

"Sure, Bram. Sorry about that man," the guy apologized to Bram, nervousness oozing from his every pore. He knew he'd fucked up big time.

Narrowing his eyes until they were mere slits, Bram stared the man down until he turned another shade paler. He typically tried to avoid using intimidation tactics with the club's employees but this was a mistake he refused to allow to happen again. One that was as unacceptable, as it was avoidable.

Satisfied that the man had been sufficiently frightened, he turned to find Lalita standing almost directly behind him, looking a bit frazzled.

His voice returned to normal immediately. "La, I didn't know you were behind me..."

"I'm heading out. I just wanted to let you know," she told him looking at him, a strange expression on her face.

He was about to ask her about it when his nose twitched, and a smile tilted his lips. "Glad to know you and Gareth have kissed and made up." After the stench coming from the drunken man he'd just thrown out, the scent of Gareth and Lalita's lovemaking was almost pleasant. Smelling like an expensive perfume in comparison.

"Not really." she said, looking uncomfortable.

Bram felt his anger building again. Why did two incidents have to happen in one night? And practically back to back! *All this shit has to happen tonight? It's not even Friday the thirteenth.*

"La, did he..." His voice broke off unable to finish the accusation.

"No, he didn't. I let him. I wanted him to. It's just everything's so complicated. And right now, I need some time away."

Bram shook his head, his anger giving way to shock then humor. "I never thought I'd see the day that you went running from anything. Damn, La, I need to write this on my calendar."

"I'm not running from him," she said, a little too forcefully. "Look, the stuff I have going on...it's not just him. My parents are coming by soon, and Kaly is on one of her kicks again."

Bram nodded thoughtfully for about a second before the effect was completely ruined when he couldn't hide his grin. "You're running from him. Try that shit on someone that doesn't know you. I think you deliberately searched for a man to piss your parents and sisters off last time they came for a visit." He shot her a knowing look.

"I did not! I can't help it if the guy I happened to be interested in at the time was the complete opposite of everything they hold dear..."

Bram laughed. "We'll be here when you're ready to come back, La. Don't stay away too long. You'll be missed," he told her honestly. Part of him had half expected her to ask him to pretend to be her boyfriend. He was thankful she hadn't. *As much as I love her as a friend, I could never pretend to be her lover.* Not when he knew the only reason she would ask that would be to gain her parent's approval.

He couldn't understand why they didn't see she was just fine exactly the way she was.

Lalita hugged Bram and smiled, looking up into his face. "You'll just miss the way I keep you hard as a rock." Her hand slipped down his body to his erection, one that, for the first time in a while, she had *not* caused.

No, this one was thanks to the lady he still needed to return to.

"Try to have fun without me," she teased, giving him a lingering kiss on the cheek.

Bram chuckled as she walked away. She was one of his best friends and he hoped she found whatever answers she was looking for soon. *But right now all I want is to get back to that beautiful brunette.* He smiled. His thoughts turned hopeful. *Maybe I can even get her number.*

"Did La come this way?" Gareth practically growled at him as he walked up to Bram with a slight limp.

"You just missed her. If you hurry, you might be able to catch up to her." Gareth gave the barest nod and quickly exited the building.

Shaking his head, he decided not to stop to try to figure out what exactly was going on between the two at the moment. *Those two are their own mini soap opera. Will they or won't they get together? Stay tuned tomorrow for the dramatic continuation of... As the Vampire Bites...*

Just as he finally began to weave through the crowd to find the brunette, she literally ran into him as she clearly headed for the exit.

"Slow down, Speedy," he teased, helping to steady her so she wouldn't fall. His hands lingered on her waist a few seconds longer than necessary as he enjoyed the feeling of holding her. A spark flashed over his body the second he came into contact with her.

"Sorry." She pulled away, attempting to walk around him.

"I was just coming back to find out if you were hurt."

"That's ok, I should have known better than to come in here."

"Can I get you a drink or something? It's on the house," he quickly added.

*She can't leave so soon, I just saw her. We just met... I don't even know her name... Of all the rotten luck...* As much as he loved his friend, he wanted to yell at her for keeping him from returning to the brunette quicker.

"No thank you. I'm just going to go..."

"Will you at least tell me your name?" he asked, wanting any little bit of information he could get about her. *Gods what's wrong with me? I'm acting like a teenager with a crush!*

"Dani." Her eyes darted around nervously. Bram wondered if she expected someone else to try to grab her, to try to hurt her. "Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I don't think your girlfriend would like you to be getting me drinks or flirting with me."

"Girlfriend?" He searched his mind for anything that would make her think he had a girlfriend. Then it hit him like a ton of bricks.

*La!*

"Oh, she's not my girlfriend, just a really good friend of mine."

"Right...Of course. Well, I should go before your 'friend' decides to come looking for you. I've had enough of being pushed around for one night."

"This is your first time here." Though he'd meant it to come out more as a question than a statement, he was sure he already knew the answer.

*It has to be or she'd know Lalita isn't interested in me.* Standing there with her, with Dani, the knowledge that La's heart belonged to Gareth didn't bother him as much as it had earlier while they danced.

She nodded her head, a look of annoyance on her face.

"Dani, I'm so sorry. Things like this practically never happen here. There is a strict code of conduct that all of the bouncers work hard to maintain."

Dani shrugged. "I guess it didn't help that I stick out like a sore thumb." She gave a half smile.

"I think you look fine." *Beautiful, not fine, beautiful! The things I'd like to do to you...* His mouth watered at the images that appeared within his mind.

"Thank you. But I really should be going."

"Feel free to come back anytime." He took her hand in his own before she could move.

"Yeah, right." She gave an obviously forced laugh. "The guy at the door barely let me in this time. I don't think I have anything in my wardrobe that will help me...blend in," she

said. He followed her gaze as a woman wearing a skintight black vinyl suit and three inch spiked heels passed them.

"If you ever want to come back, just tell the guy at the door that Bram invited you. I'll make sure they know you have an open invitation."

"Wow. You must really think I'm cute."

He stood there staring at her, embarrassed by his own eagerness to see the woman again. He was making a complete fool out of himself in front of her!

Dani laughed, a real laugh this time, and the sound went straight to his cock. "I've heard how exclusive this club is. Giving me such an open invitation... Well, it's very sweet and I'm flattered, really I am..."

"But?" he prompted.

"But, I don't know that I'll ever come in here again."

"Why did you come in this time?" he asked before he could stop himself. He enjoyed the sound of her voice, looking deep into her blue-gray eyes. He wasn't ready for their brief meeting to end. Especially if there was a chance he'd never see her again.

"Call it professional curiosity." Without any further explanation, Dani stepped around him and continued out the door.

"Remember, come back anytime," he couldn't resist calling out to her one more time.

## Chapter One

Dani couldn't get the tall, handsome redhead out of her mind no matter how hard she tried.

She sat at the computer, staring at the screen but not really seeing it, instead she saw *him*.

Him. Smiling at her, flirting with her. It had been a month since she had seen him, and every night all she could think about was his handsome face, his deep sexy voice as he told her to come back anytime. She wondered what his hands would feel like on her body...

Her eyes drifted shut as her fingers moved furiously over the keyboard.

Opening her eyes when her fingers stilled, she was surprised to find that mere minutes had passed. Reading over the scene she'd just written, Dani was shocked at the detailed description within it.

With the sexy redhead in her mind, she'd written a scene so intense, she could practically feel his hands on her body, his hair caressing her flesh...

"I need to get him out of my head!" she cried out to the empty room.

*Maybe it would help if I saw him again?* she thought with a sigh, remembering his open invitation.

*Go on*, a voice in her mind taunted. As a writer, she had gotten used to hearing 'voices' inside of her head, trying to take control. Not in an insane way, the way it sounded when she tried to explain it, but in a way that compelled her. The 'voice' would become like an obsession until she'd written the character down, breathed what life she could into his, or her, story. Unfortunately, this voice wouldn't be so easily pacified.

*Say his name, you know you remember what it was.*

"Bram," she whispered into the quiet room.

*Feel better?* She shook her head. *Then maybe you should go see him again...*

*He was just being polite*, she tried to rationalize. *He was just embarrassed that someone got rough with me while he was at work.*

*And if he wasn't? What if he was being sincere? What if he really was flirting with you?*

*Please, I would never look right with him! He's got to be a foot taller than me!*

*And? What difference does that make? Don't tell me you're going to completely dismiss the most handsome man you've seen – ever – simply because he's taller than you! If that's your biggest problem, invest in some heels!*

"Arrr.....Stop!" she told the quiet room her hands covering her ears as though that would block out the voice's taunts.

Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, she again tried logic. *It's been a month since you've seen him, let it go! He's probably already forgotten me!*

Deciding it was time to take a break, she checked her email and cringed as she saw the email from her editor.

*Dani, love the Vampire idea.*

*Can't wait to read the finished work! How soon can you send in the full manuscript?'*

She sighed. *That stupid idea is what sent me to Club Strigoi in the first place. Now I have to go back...* She tried to feel upset over the idea, but she couldn't lie to herself.

*But it does give you the chance to see him again,* the sadistic voice told her. Dani could easily imagine it smirking – if it had a face, that is. *You couldn't have asked for a better excuse.*

*"And if he's not there?"*

*Well, then at least you can say you tried.*

*"True."* And she knew if she at least tried, it would shut up that taunting voice. Looking at the clock, Dani stretched and stood up from the desk, her decision made. *Almost midnight. If I hurry, I can get there before things pick up too much.*

*Now the only thing I have to figure out is: what will I wear?*

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Bram had almost given up on seeing the brunette again. As promised, he made sure every bouncer knew about Dani and her open invitation. He'd told them that she was to be allowed in – with no cover charge!

And that their opinion of her or what she was wearing didn't matter. Some of them thought he didn't know about their tendencies to allow in women that were only dressed a certain way. He let them get away with it; he really didn't care. But he'd better not hear that she'd been turned away because of that, and made sure they knew it.

He was on his way to the control room to check on things—or more specifically Duncan—when she walked in and looked around. His mouth watered and he couldn't help smiling.

*She is as beautiful as I remembered.*

He'd begun to wonder if maybe he had made her up, or if she had been simply a dream. Her style still stuck out amongst the crowd of women walking past her. But this time it wasn't quite as obvious as before.

Black jeans hung on her hips, and her baggy shirt, in a matching shade, engulfed her body. Even though her shirt was tucked in, he couldn't get a good look at her figure. She had even pulled her hair back from her face, just the way he remembered, and she still looked incredibly nervous.

With a smile, Bram walked over to greet her, deciding she was more important at the moment than whether or not he'd have to yell at his friend for creating another mess in the Control Room.

*"I didn't think you were ever going to come back."* He had to practically shout for her to hear over the music even though he was only a few feet away. His voice seemed to startle her. He assumed she'd been so busy looking for something, or someone, that she hadn't seen him approach.

*"I can leave..."*

*"No, I'm happy that you're here. Would you like something to drink?"* Motioning for her to follow him, he led her away from the dance floor and over to an empty table.

*"No, thanks,"* she responded as she sat down in one of the chairs.

"If there's anything I can get for you, just let me know," Bram told her and began to reluctantly walk away. He refused to be one of those presumptuous guys who automatically assumed she was there to see him.

"Wait! Please..." she reached out and grabbed his hand before he could take more than a step away.

Feeling her soft, silky hand on him had his cock standing at attention as the spark he'd dismissed as his imagination returned. Cocking an eyebrow, he looked at her and waited for any excuse, however flimsy, to remain with her.

"Would you sit with me for a few minutes? If it won't get you in trouble with your boss, that is."

Bram smiled. *Gee boss, what do you think?* he asked himself humorously. *I think you're a fool if you don't sit down with her this second,* he replied with a chuckle.

"I won't get in trouble," he reassured her, sitting down in the chair next to hers.

They sat in silence for several long minutes.

"Are you sure there's nothing I can get for you?" he asked. "Soda, water? The bartender can make practically any drink you can name."

*Breakfast...* he silently added, licking his lips.

"I'm fine. Thank you," she told him, watching the crowd.

After a few more long minutes of silence, she spoke. "Wow, are they dancing or having sex?" He followed the direction of her gaze, looking over at a couple on the dance floor that was dancing together in a very seductive manner. Lalita's hips moved against Gareth in a way that almost guaranteed to have any man hard. Watching them for a few seconds, he felt another wave of happiness that the couple had worked things out.

"Isn't that the girl you were...never mind, that's none of my business..." her voice trailed off, and she looked away from the couple but refused to look at him.

*So, she did see me and La kissing...*

This gave him a spark of hope that she had indeed returned to see him again.

Leaning in closer to Dani until his mouth was practically touching her ear, he said, "They're dancing. Trust me, you'll be able to tell the difference when things heat up between them." A smile on his face, he added on impulse, "And yes, she is the *friend* I was dancing with the last time you were here."

Nodding her head, Dani's eyes were still on the couple. She didn't respond to his comment, but the relief she felt that he and the woman weren't together was immense.

"What made you decide to come back?" he asked, his breath still caressing her earlobe.

Her breath caught and she wondered if she'd melt into a puddle from the innocent gesture. Too nervous to actually think of a response, she blurted out the first thing she could think of.

"Research." Realizing what she'd said, Dani blushed, feeling remorse that she'd said that of all things. *No, Bram, don't believe it! I came because I wanted to see you. Research was just a way to justify it to myself. Honestly, I wanted to find out if you were as handsome as I remembered. To see if I changed you into some larger than life hero and I'm glad I didn't. I don't think I could imagine any man more handsome and sexy than you...*

"I see..."

"I wish it were a little quieter, then maybe I could explain..." she told him, completely embarrassed. But she had to admit, it was better than her simply blurting out that she'd been dying for any excuse to come see him again. She didn't want to appear obsessed or desperate!

*So instead it's better to sound callous and unfeeling?* the voice taunted.

"Follow me." Standing, Bram offered her his hand. After a few seconds of indecision, Dani took it, enjoying the way her hand felt surrounded by his.

The spark that she'd begun to believe she imagined before returned and a slight smile curved her lips. Moving through the club, they headed for the back, where she saw the restrooms and, beside them, was a door that read 'Employees Only'.

When he released her hand, opening the door and standing to one side, waiting for her to enter, a twinge of uncertainty filled her. *Should I be doing this? I don't know anything about him...*

*Nothing? What about the fact that you feel comfortable around him? That you feel like he would protect you from anything? That no matter how much you lie to anyone else, the truth is you came back to see him.*

*He probably has that effect on all women...*

Looking into his vibrant green eyes, Dani smiled. His eyes were so kind, so gentle. With him looking at her that way, she trusted that he wouldn't hurt her.

*Why not,* she thought, allowing the voice to win and silencing the conversation in her head.

She entered the room, looking around, saw the room was sparsely furnished.

A set of lockers was lined up against one wall, and a faded green couch that had seen better days was directly ahead of her. The only other furnishing she saw was a table in the center of the room. Oddly there were no chairs around it.

Choosing to sit down on the couch, she walked toward it and down.

Seconds later, Bram joined her, sitting down on the opposite end of the couch. "Is this any better?" he asked with a smile, turning to look at her.

"Wow, how did you get the music to be so muted in here?" she asked, amazed that they could talk without screaming, or at the least leaning very close together. Part of her was sad that it the music was so muted. She wanted him to sit closer, so close they were touching. She wanted him to lean closer, so close that she could feel his breath caressing her ear again.

Only barely resisting the urge to slide over to him, she smiled and waited for his answer.

"Thick walls. You said something about explaining?"

She nodded her head. Taking a deep breath, she admitted, "I'm a...writer. I was just hoping to get some inspiration for a story that I'm going to write. About vampires..."

Bram began to cough so badly she thought he might choke, but he held up a hand. When his coughing fit had subsided, he looked at her skeptically. "And what drew you *here*?"

"The name, 'Club Strigoi'. According to my research, Strigoi was one of the words ancient cultures used for Vampires. It was part of a Romanian term..."

Realizing she was going into lecture mode, Dani cleared her throat, silencing her speech. "I figured what better place to use for research."

"And you're hoping to find real Vampires here?" he asked, his voice and expression curious.

"No, of course not. But I do plan on giving my book a Gothic feel. I want to listen to the music, see the style of clothes, watch the dancing." Dani lowered her eyes. "I understand if you want me to leave."

"Why would I want that?"

"Well..." What could she say? *You were flirting with me and I just told you I came here for business, not pleasure. I bruised your ego because now you think I'm not interested in you.* Dani knew she didn't have to confess anything to him. She didn't *have* to tell him the reasons she entered the club, because technically he couldn't stop her from sitting around and observing everyone and everything that happened so long as she followed the rules.

*But I want his help. I want him to still spend time with me, smile at me... Oh well,* she sighed. *You can't have your cake and eat it too.* "Uh..." she couldn't find a way to put her thoughts into words without insulting him. "That is to say..."

"You haven't done anything wrong, Dani." Bram tilted her head gently up until she was looking at him. "You didn't make me any promises when I gave you that invitation." His smiled. "I hope you find out anything you need to know while you're here." Releasing her, he stood up.

"Thank you. So, does this mean you don't mind if I come back?"

"Of course not. And please, let me know if there's anything I can help you with."

Dani nodded her head, part of her afraid that this was all just a dream. Could he really be that understanding? "I really appreciate this," she told him as he walked across the room.

"No problem. I really appreciate you being honest with me. Most women wouldn't have told me the truth. They'd have led me on so they could continue to get in the club, no questions asked."

"I couldn't do that. I hate playing head games. Except with my characters," she added with a smile. "With them, it's fun. But I always make it up to them in the end."

*And I do want you!* she wanted to add. In her over-active imagination, she could picture how the scene would unfold in one of her books. And in *her* book, they'd be acting out a torrid love scene.

*Bram walked back over to her and, pulling her off the couch, he would crush her against his chest. 'You only came for research,' he asked, a knowing smirk on his face.*

*Caught up in the overwhelming sensation of having his strong arms around her body, Dani shook her head. She couldn't lie to him.*

*'I didn't think so.'* *Leaning down, his mouth captured hers. His tongue thrust demandingly into her mouth and she gave him complete control. He tasted like cinnamon and virile man - spicy, hot, and addicting.*

*Eagerly sucking on his tongue, she willingly followed his lead until he no longer held her flesh and bones in his arms. After a few minutes of kissing him like that, she became a boneless mass of jelly that was shaped like Dani.*

*Ending the kiss, Bram smiled down at her, knowing what he'd done to her. 'You want me, don't you? Say it,' he would command.*

*'I want you, Bram. I've thought about you every night since we met. Please...'* she pleaded. *She'd play along with any game he wanted her to if it meant she'd get to feel his hands on her bare flesh.*

*Still smiling, he pulled her shirt up, inching it off of her body...*

"What do you write?" Bram asked, pulling her away from her steamy fantasy.

It took a second for her to respond, for the lust to clear from her brain. Heat flooded her face both from the question, and her thoughts.

"Romance novels." As always, she wondered what his reaction would be. Would he smirk and ask if she'd show him her skills? Would he laugh? Promise to show her tricks she'd never experienced before or call it trash? Would he ask why she'd decided to write about sex?

As she waited for his response, she realized that his reaction mattered to her.

"Cool."

His simple acceptance stunned her. Not even her family accepted that she had decided to 'waste her talent on that trash'. "What did you say? Wait? That's it?"

He looked confused. "I'm sorry, did I say something wrong?"

"No, it's just...Wow, I never really expected a guy to be so accepting of it. Usually they call it smut, or porn."

Bram shrugged. "Trust me, Dani, I'm not your average guy."

When his smile returned, her knees grew weak and she was grateful that she was still sitting on the surprisingly comfortable old couch.

"Let me know if I can help you in any way," he told her again just before he walked to the door and out of the room.

It took Dani a few minutes of taking deep, calming breaths before she could actually stand up. *Do you realize what a loaded statement that was? Let you know if you can help me in any way? Bram, I don't think you realize exactly what I would love for you to help me with right now...*

When she was finally again in control of her body, and lust filled thoughts, she left the back room and made her way back to the table they had claimed before their too brief conversation. Sitting down, she immediately felt his loss and grew annoyed when she found herself not watching the activity around her, but constantly scanning the room for him. Knowing she'd seen him on the dance floor before, she tried to catch a glimpse of him in the ever moving crowd that danced, gyrated, or just plain dry-humped to the music.

A handsome black haired man brought her a drink and sat it down on the table, distracting her. She smiled and thanked him, trying to figure out a polite way to tell him she wasn't interested.

"I'm Duncan," he introduced himself. "I'm a bouncer here. Bram asked me to bring you a drink."

Relief filled her and she was able to enjoy the man's sense of humor as he sat across from her, chatting and pointing out interesting couples. Laughing at his comments, she enjoyed listening to his opinion about some of the things they could see happening on the dance floor.

But even as she laughed she couldn't stop wishing it was Bram sitting there, flirting with her.

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Bram was disappointed. He'd hoped if Dani came back to the club, she'd be there to see him. He'd hoped she had wondered about him as much as he'd wondered about her.

*I should have known better,* he scolded himself as he stayed in the shadows, allowing himself to have a small pity party. *First La, now Dani... Women just don't feel that way about me. I'm the teddy bear, the friend...Never the lover.*

Not for the first time in his long life, Bram found himself envying others. He was happy for La and Gareth, but he found himself jealous of their happiness. He wanted someone to share everything with.

With a sigh, he decided he needed to be more like his twin—he needed to adopt his brother's 'fuck the world' attitude.

His eyes constantly strayed back to Dani as though he were unable to avoid her now that she was back inside of the club. She looked as though she was looking for someone, but he knew better. He wouldn't allow himself to hope she was searching for him.

*She's simply taking in as much as she can...*

Flagging down Duncan, Bram told him to take a soda from the bar over to Dani. Just because she hadn't wanted one earlier, didn't mean he couldn't send one now.

He watched the other Vampire like a hawk when the man handed her the soda, then sat down.

From the look of things, he could tell Duncan was flirting with her. Jealousy filled him as he saw her laughing and reacting to the bouncer's charm. With another sigh, he decided he'd take Control Room duty for the rest of the night. Maybe then he could solve two problems with one move.

With luck not only would he stop staring at Dani, and pay attention to the rest of the club, but he'd be able to keep Duncan from making another mess in the room.

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Two weeks later, Bram groaned inwardly as Dani entered the club. It was still easy to tell that she wasn't used to hanging around this type of crowd, but she seemed to be growing more comfortable.

*Especially around me. Just what I always wanted, to be one of the 'girls'.*

Shaking his head at himself, he approached her, refusing to let himself start down that path yet again. He'd thrown a big enough pity party while in the Control Room the first night she'd come back.

Wearing another pair of dark jeans and a baggy dark blue shirt, she looked wonderfully creamy. As always, her hair was pulled back out of her face and he wondered how she would look with it hanging loose. He never ceased to be amazed at how beautiful she was, how much he wanted her.

She kept almost every single inch of her body covered, but that didn't seem to deter his lust. Not for the first time in the last few weeks, Bram found himself wishing that she felt more than simple friendship towards him.

"Hi, Bram." She smiled brightly as he neared, opening her arms to hug him.

He gave her a giant hug, wishing for any excuse to keep her in his arms longer as he wondered when he'd turned into such a masochist.

"I have a huge favor to ask," she said, pulling him over to what had become her table.

Following her, he sat down. It was early enough that he'd have an easy time keeping an eye on the crowd. His curiosity piqued with what kind of favor from him Dani desired.

"Name it. If I can help, I will."

"Well, as I'm sure you've noticed, I don't exactly fit in around here." She tugged on her shirt, he assumed for emphasis.

"I think you look fine," he told her, meaning every word. *Of course you could probably walk in wearing a burlap sack and I'd think you look beautiful.*

"Thank you. You really are sweet; do you know that? But I know I stick out." She paused. "I was wondering if..." she finally continued. "If maybe you could help me with that. See, my wardrobe isn't exactly...that is, I don't really have clothes that would...blend in."

"Of course." He considered her problem, and whom he could ask to help her. *I could ask La to take Dani shopping. She has exquisite taste in clothing...*

He frowned at the thought. *But then she'd be strutting around here practically naked. How would I be able to keep my hands off her then when I'm having such a hard time of it now? And what would happen the first time I saw another man putting his hands all over her?* He admitted to himself that asking La would be a bad idea.

Searching his mind, he saw Melissa. She was always nicely dressed. Nicely dressed without showing off every inch of flesh she had.

*But she seems to have something else on her mind these days...she seems so distracted and sad...*

"I'll ask around. I'm sure I have a friend that can go shopping with you if you'd like."

"Actually, I was hoping..." Dani hesitated. "Never mind."

"You were hoping what?" Tilting his head, he watched her closely. Did she already have someone in mind to help her, but she needed him to ask for her? *Oh Gods, it's not La, is it?*

"Nothing, it's silly. I appreciate any help you can give me."

"Tell me," he coaxed looking into her blue-gray eyes. "Did you have someone already in mind?" When she blushed, he knew he'd been right.

"I was just hoping that...maybe...*you* would go with me." Her blush darkened and she quickly continued. "It's just that I'm so comfortable with you. I consider you a friend, and it would be nice to have a guy's opinion." She lowered her gaze. "I told you it was silly."

As she called him a friend, Bram heard the clichéd nails being hammered into a coffin. *She thinks of me as the type of friend she could go shopping with. Yup, no hope for romance there...*

But that didn't mean he still couldn't spend time with her.

"Sure," he told her softly. Clearing his throat, he spoke a little louder. "Of course I'll go with you. When would you like to go?"

"Whenever it's convenient for you," Dani told him without hesitation, a warm smile on her face. Her smile dimmed. "I don't want to be an inconvenience. You've already done so much for me."

Bram looked around the club. It was only ten and the big crowd wouldn't begin arriving for a few hours. There were already more than enough bouncers to handle the crowd while he was gone. "How about right now?"

"Right now," she asked, surprise written all over her face. "Sure, now is fine," she quickly added. "Are there any stores open this late?"

"Sure there are. You just have to know where to go," he told her with a wink.

“Then, let’s go,” she told him with a smile as she stood up.

## Chapter Two

Standing outside of a dressing room, Bram held a few items over the top of the door and waited for Dani to take them. "Here, try these as well."

"Are you sure about this? I look so...so...exposed. I don't think I've worn anything that showed off this much skin since middle school!"

"Open the door and let me see," he called as the sales clerk walked around snickering. They were the only people in the store and he knew she could hear their entire conversation.

"I can't. I'm practically naked!"

"Dani, *you* said you wanted to blend in better," he reminded her.

"Yeah, but that was before I realized that meant letting a bunch of strangers see me practically naked."

He fought the urge to laugh. She sounded terrified, but he knew she had to be exaggerating. Everything he'd handed her would be far too modest for La so she couldn't be *practically* naked.

"Either you come out and show me, or I'm going to open this door and see for myself," he threatened with a smile.

"You wouldn't!"

"Oh yes, I would. You asked for my help. I can't help you if I can't even see what you look like in the clothes, can I?" He paused to give her a chance to consider what he said and decided not to add that he was practically dying to see what her body looked like, under her usual clothes.

"Are they too big, too small, the wrong color? Open the door, Dani." He wasn't sure what size she wore, so he'd grabbed all different sizes, different styles. His hand on the handle, he began to open the door himself when she didn't respond.

"I'm coming out! I'm coming out!" she practically squealed.

Taking a step back when the handle turned, Bram fought back a chuckle as she carefully stuck only her head out and looked around the store.

"There isn't anyone else in here is there?"

"No, Dani, it's safe."

Assured that no one else was watching her, she opened the door only as far as absolutely necessary, her face a beautiful shade of red that only drew more attention to the corset top she was wearing.

And the delicious flesh it displayed!

Standing there, completely stunned, it took Bram a moment to remember how to breathe as he looked over the amazing body she'd hidden beneath baggy clothes.

The black leather miniskirt showcased legs that were toned to perfection. The scarlet corset complimented her light skin, and current blush, beautifully. It pushed her abundant breasts upward, making them look incredibly plump and inviting.

His gaze lingered on the creamy expanse that lay exposed to his gaze as his mouth watered for a taste of her.

Bram wanted to push her back into the dressing room and bury his face between her delectable breasts. He wanted to take her creamy flesh into his mouth and find out if she was

as appetizing as he believed. His cock seconded the motion, twitching eagerly as it grew hard. He had to shift his position, or risk her seeing just how much he enjoyed her new look.

"See. I look foolish," Dani said, turning around in the small room to look at herself in the mirror. "This just isn't me."

Bram bit the inside of his lip to keep himself from groaning as he stared at her ass.

She turned to look at him once again. "Please say something. I look ridiculous, don't I? I knew it! I'm just going to get changed and go home to die of shame now."

Before she could move he shook his head. His hand reached out to prevent her from shutting the door. "You look...beautiful. You really should get that outfit." Bram told her, unable to stop staring at her exposed body as lustful thoughts ran rampant in his mind.

*Would her nipples be large or small, brown or rosy? How they would feel against my tongue? Would she freak out if I bit her?* His cock grew harder still at the thought of his teeth buried in the swell of her breast, or the hollow of her neck.

He was forced to rearrange a dress he'd been holding until it covered the now noticeable bulge against his jeans. He'd planned on having her try on the dress, but after seeing her, he'd changed his mind.

"Really?" Was it his imagination or did she sound hopeful? "If you say so..." Dani shrugged as she reached for the door. Pausing, she asked, "Do you want to see each outfit, or just the ones I'm not sure about?"

"All of them," he quickly replied before he could change his mind. "It never hurts to have a second opinion, right?"

"True. I'll be back out in a few minutes." He could see a smile on her face as she closed the door.

Closing his eyes, Bram shook his head. *I have definitely become a masochist and this is going to be one hell of a long night...*

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"How can I ever thank you?" Dani asked Bram an hour later as she waited for her purchases to finish being rung up. She was once again dressed in her own clothing and feeling a bit frumpy after some of the sexy outfits he had picked for her. After he saw her in the first one, the tops he handed her had become progressively skimpier, and the skirts tighter.

"Are you alright? You look like you're in pain..." she asked, filled with concern when he didn't answer her.

"I'll be fine. It's just a cramp," Bram told her, stiffly.

"Do you think I should change back into one of the other outfits before we go back to the club? Which one, do you think?" she asked as though he had already responded in the affirmative.

Bram groaned slightly. "The red one."

"Which red one?" Dani asked with a laugh.

"The first one."

"Alright," she said, signing the credit card slip the salesclerk handed her. She'd spent more money than she had intended, but every outfit she'd bought made her feel incredibly sexy.

And she couldn't remember the last time she had bought clothes that actually fit her.

She'd even rationalized buying four pairs of shoes by telling herself that her sneakers wouldn't exactly look appropriate with her sexy new clothes. "I'll just be one minute...promise."

Returning to the dressing room, with the outfit he'd chosen, Dani wondered if Bram thought she looked sexy in her new clothes. She shook her head to clear the thought. Every time she'd opened the door to ask him about an outfit, he seemed to grow more uncomfortable. *He's just coming down with something*, she told herself as she sat down to put on a pair of black heels.

*Guys like him just aren't interested in me...*

When she was dressed, she opened the door to see Bram patiently holding her bags.

She smiled nervously at him. "I guess I'll just have to get used to this," she said, gesturing to her ample cleavage when she reentered the main section of the store.

"You really do look amazing. There's just one thing wrong." Before she could ask what it was, he'd grasped her ponytail gently and pulled her hair loose. "Much better," he smiled as he combed his fingers through her hair, pulling a few strands over her bare shoulders.

"Thanks." Dani reached for the bags but he evaded her hands, wanting to do this smallest of things for her.

"Why do you cover your body under such baggy clothes?" he asked as they exited the store.

"I was wondering if you would ask me that. Well...you see...I—I have a bit of a complex..."

"About what? You look..." His eyes roamed over her body. "Trust me, you have *nothing* to be ashamed of."

"Thank you. I feel so sexy in this," she said with a smile. Even she noticed the difference in her own attitude since she'd changed her outfit. When she walked, her back was straighter, her head was held higher, and she couldn't stop darting quick glances at herself in practically every reflective surface.

"It shows," Bram told her, smiling as he opened a taxi door for her. He quickly gave the taxi driver directions to the club as he sat down beside her.

She was thankful that he put her bags on the far side of the cab instead of between them, wanting nothing to separate them.

"Now, are you going to tell me why you stayed so covered up?" he asked once again.

"My family," she reluctantly admitted. "It's hard to be comfortable in your own skin when you have people all around you that constantly make you feel self-conscious. Especially when they're the ones that are supposed to accept, and love you, no matter what." She sighed. "It seems like every family gathering, since I hit puberty, turns into a conversation about how big my boobs are. It became easier to hide, to disappear, when I wear baggy clothes."

"Wow, I bet it's awkward going swimming then."

"I don't. I gave it up." She shrugged. "I hated the way my family made me feel. It was easier to give up something I loved than to continue listening to their comments."

"Well, you're certainly not hiding anymore."

"No, I'm not. I feel so naked," Dani confessed, feeling her cheeks warm with a blush. It took all of her willpower not to cover the cleavage her new top created

"How's your story coming?" Bram asked suddenly, almost as though he knew she could use a change of topic.

"It's coming along nicely. And now I can even add more details," she teased. "It's amazing how well this story is flowing. I never would have imagined it would be so easy to write a vampire story. It's almost as though it's writing itself."

"Will you let me read it?"

She was thankful for the dark interior of the cab as her face grew hot. "Um..."

*After everything Bram's done for me, he deserves to be able to read it.*

*But if he does read it, he'll know he's helped inspire so much more than he bargained for. It's so obvious even I can tell my tall, redheaded, green-eyed vampire is based on him!*

"I usually don't let anyone read my work until my editor has gotten her hands on it," she told him, finally.

"I understand. But you'll let me know when, and where, I can buy it after it's published, right?"

"Um, sure. You don't have to do that though."

"I want to."

As silence filled the cab, she looked out of one of the windows to keep her mind off of the lust she felt. He was pressed tightly against her, his thigh pressing against hers, their knees bumping each other with every pothole that was hit. Everywhere they touched her flesh was on fire as sparks of desire heated her skin. She wanted to climb up onto his lap and kiss him.

She wanted to know if it felt the way she dreamed it would.

Unable to deny her lust, her thoughts shifted to the ever-present storyboard in her mind and her eyes drifted shut. She imagined the way she would prefer the taxi ride to be.

*Bram slid closer to her, his arm going behind her to rest on her shoulders.*

*'You look unbelievable in that outfit, Dani. Would you mind if we skipped going back to the club and I took you back to my place instead?'*

*Blushing, she turned her head away, embarrassed by his praise, by his desire.*

*But Bram wouldn't allow her to turn from him. With gentle, but firm fingers, he turned her head until she faced him.*

*'Do you know what I wanted to do to you when I saw you come out of that dressing room? Do you know how hard it was for me to just stand there instead of follow you back inside?' Lowering his head until his mouth was only a whisper away from the creamy flesh of her breasts, his tongue slide across one swell.*

*Her head fell backward and she arched into his mouth, unable to get enough of the sensations he caused inside of her body.*

*She felt his fingers unhooking her top. As her breasts were freed from their confinement, his hands moved up to cup them, lifting them to his mouth...*

"Dani?"

Startled out of the erotic fantasy, she blushed as she opened her eyes and looked over at Bram. "Sorry, I got a little lost in thought."

"I hope it was something good."

*Oh yes. Something very, very good.*

"A new scene for my vamp story," she fibbed. "I'm sorry. I should have warned you. I've been known to drift off for a few minutes if something gives me a flash of inspiration for one of my stories."

"No problem," he said with a chuckle. "From the looks of you, it's going to be one hell of a scene."

"What do you mean?" she asked confused.

Lifting his hand, Bram's finger came closer until it practically touched her lips. "Your lips are parted, your breathing sped up, and you look rather flushed... I think it must have been some pretty damn good inspiration."

Dani felt her blush grow darker. "Sorry. I have a—I have an active imagination."

"Trust me. Most men see that as a good thing."

When the taxi stopped, Bram paid the driver then slid out of the car. She missed his warmth the second it was gone. Following his lead, she moved to the door and, taking the hand he offered, allowed him to help her out of the car.

"Now, where am I going to put this stuff? I guess I could always go home..." she wondered aloud, chewing on her lip. *But I don't want to go home now. I want to walk through Club Strigoi on Bram's arm, to spend more time with him...*

"I can put them up for you."

"You are the sweetest man I've ever met!" She exclaimed, glad that he'd given her the perfect opportunity to stay at the club. *And to search him out later...*

"Sweetie, if he's sweet, I want to meet the guys you're used to hanging around," a feminine voice from behind her drawled.

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Groaning when he heard Lalita's teasing comment, Bram turned around and was instantly thankful he hadn't asked her to take Dani shopping. She wore another of her infamous outfits—a sheer body dress with dark purple bra and thong.

*There is no way in hell I'd be able to keep my hands off of Dani if she dressed like that!*

"I don't believe that you folks have been introduced," he said, trying to ease the tension. "Dani, this is La and beside her, looking as grouchy as ever, is her boyfriend, Gareth. La, Gareth, this is Dani."

"Dani, that's a strange name for a girl," La said cattily, obviously looking the other woman over. Bram felt a small wave of relief that she had decided to change after all.

"It's short for Danielle. And you're one to talk, La."

Bram stood ready to step between the women as irritation flooded Dani's voice—not that he could blame her. Before he could stop the thought, he wondered if she was annoyed because of a perceived insult, or if it was because the comment came from Lalita—the woman she had seen him dancing with... and kissing.

*Stop being a fool. It's because La was being rude. Why would she be jealous? You're just 'friends'.*

Surprising him, Lalita gave a throaty laugh. "Lalita. I like this one—she has guts. Better hold on to her, Bram, honey," she winked. "You two look so perfect together."

"We're just friends," Dani added quickly.

Bram closed his eyes. *Just rub it in why don't you?*

"Just friends? He went *shopping* with you, and you're just friends?" Gareth asked skeptically.

"I wanted to be a little less conspicuous," Dani said nervously, stepping closer to him. "Bram was considerate enough to go with me to offer his opinion."

"I love La, but that doesn't mean I'd go shopping with her," Gareth said with a shake of his head.

Elbowing him in the stomach, Lalita took one of Dani's hands. "Cool. Maybe I can come by early one night and help you with your nails."

"Thank you," Dani said, pulling her hand free.

"Let's go in, La, I'm ready to watch you shake your ass. It was nice to meet you, Dani." Gareth began to usher Lalita into the club. "And for the record," he said, pausing and looking over his shoulder before they went into the actual club. "Guys *hate* to be called sweet."

"Come on, let's get your bags put away," Bram nodded to the doorman before allowing Dani to precede him into the club. Catching over half the guys in the line staring at Dani as though she were a special treat, he knew he was in for a long night.

Walking around the outskirts of the club, he avoided as much of the crowd as possible until they reached the back room. In the room, he immediately strode over to the wall of lockers and opened one, placed her bags inside.

"Won't someone mind that I'm using their locker?"

"No, I don't mind at all," he teased.

"There you go being sweet again. Wait, according to that guy – what was his name? – men don't like being called sweet. So, how can I repay you for helping me out so much?"

Turning to look at her, Bram was surprised to see Dani leaning against the lockers in a way that made her breasts look as though they could spill out of her top. When he could speak again, he said, "You don't have to thank me. It's my pleasure, really."

He was quite proud that his words came out almost in his normal tone.

She chuckled. "My eyes...are up here. Guess that means the outfit works," she teased. "And I *want* to thank you." Before he could say anything else, she crooked her finger and motioned for him to lean down.

Curious to see what she was up to, he complied. Rising to her tiptoes, she gave him a kiss, half on his cheek, half on his lips.

Bram wanted to pull her into his arms. He wanted to pin her against the lockers and kiss her until she wrapped those beautiful legs high around his waist. He wanted to lose himself in her until he forgot that there would be someone in the Control Room watching their every move. Security cameras placed throughout the club went a long way to keeping Club Strigoi secure, especially when the club was open.

Dani smiled as she pulled away from him. "Ready to go see what people think of my new outfit, Tiger?"

*No! I don't want anyone else seeing that beautiful body but me. "Sure."*

Following her out of the room, he caught her when she stumbled slightly, enjoying the feeling of having her in his arms a little too much. Going back to their table, they sat down.

Bram could notice men staring at her.

They'd only been sitting down for a minute or two before the first man showed up. "You want to dance?"

Dani looked at him, as though asking permission.

"You should," he encouraged her, wanting nothing more than to keep her glued to his side. "You look incredible. There's no reason you should sit here, when you could be having fun on the dance floor." His glance returned to the man practically drooling as he waited for her answer. *If you touch her, I'll snap you like a twig.*

"If you're sure..."

"Go have fun," he said, forcing a smile on his face.

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She was disappointed, and a little hurt, when Bram encouraged her to dance with the other man, effectively stealing her polite refusal.

*I don't want this guy putting his hands all over me, she thought grumpily as she followed the stranger onto the floor. I wanted to spend time with you. I want you to put your hands all over my body. But oh no...*

On the floor, she moved to the music awkwardly at first and blushing whenever she stumbled.

*It's going to take a little bit to get to the heels, she thought. Of course this guy doesn't seem to mind catching me, if his smirk is any kind of clue.*

After a three songs, and dance partners, she felt giddy. She wasn't used to getting this much attention from men. When yet another man moved toward her, Dani shook her head and stepped off of the floor. Looking around, she wanted to find Bram and share her excitement with him.

She noticed him watching the crowd from their table and felt mischievous.

Still feeling giddy and brave from so much attention and dancing, she decided to flirt with him. Walking over she smiled, clasping her hands tightly behind her back while she stood in front of him.

A quick glance down assured her that her breasts weren't going to burst free from her top from the position, and she almost sighed in relief.

"Having fun?" he asked, his eyes lingering for just a moment on her very exposed cleavage before finding her eyes again.

"A little." Her courage was bolstered by his glance and she sat down on his lap before she could rethink her plan. She wanted to sigh when one of his arms circled her waist, and the other rested across her lap. Moving her hands to his shoulders, she smiled.

"It looked like you were having loads of fun out there with all those guys," he grumbled.

"Dance with me?" She leaned slightly into him, resting her head on his shoulder. Closing her eyes, she breathed in his scent.

"I can't. I need to make sure no one tries to start any shit."

"Oh...I understand," she said, her previously buoyant spirit deflated. Removing his hands from around her waist, she stood up to walk away, disappointment flooding her body.

*You're too busy watching the floor to dance with me tonight, but you weren't when it was La that asked you. Don't worry, I won't make you actually say the words, she thought. But you are the only man I wanted to dance with.*

Bram grabbed her hand before she could move more than a few steps. "Dani...I wasn't trying to—"

"It's ok, I understand." *Damn could I sound more pathetic, she grumbled to herself, forcing a smile. "Really, it's ok. Maybe some other time."*

"Dance with me?" he asked. She could feel him standing behind her, almost touching her. "Please?"

She wasn't strong enough to say no—to deny *herself*. Even if he was only dancing with her out of guilt, she didn't care. Nodding, she led him onto the dance floor, feeling nervous and scared at the same time. Moving to the music, her dancing was much more sedate than it had been mere minutes before.

"Now you're making me jealous," Bram breathed against her ear. "I saw you dancing with those other guys. Just relax and let yourself go. Dance with *me*, Dani."

Nodding once again, she closed her eyes and pretended it was just a scene in a story. What would her heroine do in these circumstances? What would she write? Blocking out all thoughts of the crowd surrounding them, she forgot about everyone, and everything, except the feel of Bram, moving against her.

She could feel her movements become less reserved, and, opening her eyes, knew there was a smile on her face. Bram pulled her close to him, pressing her tight against his body, and she could feel his erection straining against his jeans.

Completely ignoring the fact that she couldn't have been the person responsible for his condition, she instead gloried in the fact that he was pressing his hard cock against her.

*I wish I could just take you to the back room and show you what I really want to do. She continued dancing against him as her mind once again slipped into another fantasy about him.*

*Dani ground her ass against him, the crowd no longer mattering.*

*Sliding his hands up each side of the leather skirt, he kept her hips pressed tightly against him. His hands circled her stomach as she continued to sway and move. Slowly his hands moved upward until he cupped her breasts. His fingertips teased the swells of both breasts, making her wish that she were topless.*

*Her breathing grew harsher as his fingers dipped just beneath the top of her corset, grazing her nipples. Her head fell backwards against his chest and a moan was freed from her throat, though she was sure no one could hear the soft sound over the pulsing music.*

*Bram's lips lowered to her neck and his teeth scraped against her flesh before his tongue began tracing an unknown design.*

*Opening her eyes, she noticed that somehow they'd managed to become blissfully alone in the club. The music still played, but just for them instead of a crowd.*

*Bram released her breasts, forcing Dani to arch her back in an attempt to feel him against her again. She whimpered in pleasure as cool air flowed over her burning flesh as her new top fell to the floor.*

*His hands set a path of fire over her skin until they cradled her breasts again, his hard cock pressing into her ass. His mouth never stopped suckling her neck in an ever upward path. Using only his nose, he shifted her hair out of the way. The tip of his tongue traced the back of her ear before following the curve and taking her lobe into his mouth.*

*Her pussy was dripping. Never before had she been this wet, this ready for any man, and Bram had yet to do more than fondle her a bit! His lips continued to press light, lingering kisses over her jaw, as she turned her head to present her mouth to him.*

*Turning her around in his arms, his eyes feasted on first her breasts then her parted lips. His glance made her pussy clench with need.*

*'Do you know how crazy you make me? Damn girl, you look so sweet...and I haven't indulged my sweet tooth in far too long.'* His lips pressed against hers and the world around her spun, forcing her to wrap her arms around his neck for additional support. If not for his arms keeping her pressed tightly against his body, she would surely be on the floor since all her bones chose that moment to melt away.

*After that slow sensual kiss, his mouth traveled down her throat, pressing kisses over every inch of skin he moved over. Wrapping one hand in her hair, the other lifted her breast to his lips. When he paused, she opened her eyes. Looking up at her, it was almost as though he awaited permission. His eyes were so dark they looked black. She gave a slight nod and he closed the distance between his mouth and her waiting bud.*

*His mouth covered her tight, aching nipple, tugging at it slightly. Arching her back to thrust her breast closer to him, Dani leaned back, eagerly drowning in the sensation of falling into his embrace.*

*"Whoa there, Dani. I have you,"* Bram said, catching her as she stumbled.

It took a few seconds to realize that she'd stumbled in real life. She'd been so wrapped up in her fantasy that she'd forgotten it was just that—a fantasy. Her cheeks quickly filled with heat as she thought about how completely aroused she had become dancing, while surrounded by people.

*I'm so turned on...and he didn't even touch me – except to catch me I must look like a fool,* she thought, hurrying off of the dance floor.

*"Dani,"* Bram called after her but she didn't slow down until she was outside the door. She fought back tears of embarrassment. She'd never been more humiliated.

*"Dani, what's wrong? Why did you leave?"*

*"I...I just got an idea, I want to get it written before I forget it,"* she told him lamely without looking at him. She prayed he wouldn't call her bluff or hear the tears in her voice.

*"What about your clothes?"*

*"Can I keep them here tonight?"* she asked, wanting to put as much space between herself and the object of her fantasies as quickly as possible. *"I promise I'll take them home tomorrow, I just really need to go while this scene is hot..."*

*"Sure. I'll see you tomorrow, Dani."*

*"Night, Bram."*

## Chapter Three

Watching her walk away, every instinct he had screamed that she wasn't all right, that there was more going on than she was telling him. And, in the six hundred plus years he'd been alive, Bram had learned to trust his instincts.

But he'd also learned that in this age women wanted to work things out for themselves.

*She's probably embarrassed that she stumbled,* he tried convincing himself. He refused to acknowledge that she'd stumbled with the other men she danced with but hadn't run away from them when they caught her – or how she hadn't flinched away from his touch earlier.

Walking back into the Club, he began to watch the patrons once again, even though his mind continuously tried to shift back to Dani. He wanted to know that she was all right.

"Where's Dani?" La asked, stepping up to him.

"She had to leave."

"Why?"

Bram shrugged. "Something came up."

"Yes, I see it did," she said. Something about her tone made him look over at her and she glanced down at his noticeable erection. The erection he'd gotten while dancing with Dani, feeling her sweet ass, her body moving against him.

"La..." Bram said, his voice full of warning.

"Calm down, I'm not going to touch. So what's the deal with you and the cutie?"

"No deal. You heard her, we're just friends."

"Uh-huh. Sweetie, you're the first 'friend' I've met that will start kissing a girl's neck while dancing. Bus--ted," she smirked. "I saw you two. Girly-girl has some moves when she relaxes, but that wasn't friendship I saw when *you* kissed her neck, or when *she* pulled you closer. This is me you're talking to, Bram. Try that shit on someone that doesn't know you," she said, spitting his words back at him.

"Mind your own business, La," he growled.

Her tone lightened, filling with concern. "Bram, you're my friend. I just want you to be happy. I think she could make you happy."

"You want me to be happy? Then stop filling my head with useless fantasies. Dani doesn't see me as anything but a friend. Nothing will ever change that."

"Pity party...table for one," she announced, much like a hostess would in a upscale restaurant.

"Yeah...well I deserve it. So go away and leave me be."

"Fine. But, as old as you are, you should know that it won't do any good, it won't make you feel better. The only way to know for sure how she feels is if you ask her. Damn, Bram, maybe she feels the same way."

"Damn it, La, she's writing a book." The words came out harsher than he'd intended, but now that he'd admitted the truth, he couldn't stop. "Dani is a writer, she's just here to do some research. To listen to the music, watch the dancing, see the clothes." His hand gestured around the club, emphasizing his point. "When she's done, she's going to walk out of Club Strigoi, and my life, and never once look back. I'll just be some vague reference in one of her stories – if even that! And, if I'm really lucky, maybe she'll add me to the dedication. Now are

you going to continue pissing me off, or are you going to leave me the hell alone so I can go sulk in peace?"

"Gods Bram, I had no idea..." La's expression grew so sad, so concerned.

Forcing himself to calm down, Bram continued. "Yeah, well no one does. Keep it to yourself, please. We don't need anyone else knowing why she's here."

"You're falling in love with her."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are. What does she write? What's her favorite color? What does she like to drink?"

Looking onto the dance floor without actually seeing any of the people, he knew he should ignore Lalita's questions but couldn't. "Romances. She writes romance novels because she loves happy endings. Her favorite color is dark blue. And she likes to drink Dr. Pepper...oh, and those cold coffee drinks, the ones with whipped cream."

"When are you gonna start serving them here?"

"Tomorrow night."

"You are so in love with her." When he glared at her, she offered a suggestion. "Who knows," Lalita said, placing her hand on his shoulder. "You said she writes romances, right? Maybe she'll help you find *your* happily ever after."

Without another word, Lalita left him alone, staring at the crowd and pretending to be working.

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"Why me?" she screamed into a pillow as soon as she sat down on her couch. "Why, why, why?" she sobbed. Dani couldn't believe how clumsy she'd become—Bram must think she'd never worn heels a day in her life!

But, even worse, she'd lost herself so deeply in that fantasy that she would have *sworn* she actually felt Bram's lips on her neck, his tongue drawing on her flesh, his hands caressing her hips.

The harsh ringing of her phone pulled her away from the sensual fantasy. Without thinking, she answered it before bothering to glance at her Caller ID.

"Hello?"

"Danielle, how are you tonight?"

*Oh God, do they have radar or something?* "I'm fine, Mom. How are you?"

"We're good! Listen I was just wondering if you were going to come home for your cousin's graduation. She's graduating from college in a few weeks, you know. We are *very* proud of her!" Her mother didn't have to finish the statement. Dani knew that what she meant was that she should give up writing, and go back to college.

They'd had the same discussion too many times in the past for her not to be able to pick up on the not-so-subtle hint.

"I'm not sure, Mom. Things are pretty hectic here."

"What can be so hectic about that little hobby of yours? I swear, you paid an outrageous amount of money on that laptop you bought. I'm sure you can just bring it with you and type here!"

"It's not a hobby, Mom," Dani corrected. *Oh, great. Here it comes.*

"Why do you waste your time writing that junk anyway? If you want to pursue this hobby why don't you at least write *real* books? You know the kind I can show my friends and proudly say, 'My daughter wrote this!'"

She sighed. "I do write real books." Dani braced herself for the rest of her mother's speech.

"I know sex sells but, really, do you have to go down *that* path? I thought we raised you right. What happened? Why did you start writing trash? We still have all those awards you won from those writing contests, the ones you entered in high school, on your bedroom wall. You know, back when you were *serious* about writing."

"I am serious about writing. It's an important part of my life. Why can't you accept that?"

"All your teachers agreed you could make such a name for yourself," her mother continued, ignoring her question—the interruption of her lecture. "I just don't understand why you want to waste your time, your talent on..."

"Mom, I really need to go," she interrupted her mother's speech. "I have to get some work done. I'm on a deadline," Dani lied.

"Alright," the other woman sighed. "But give us an answer soon. We need to make sure we have enough room. Oh, and will you be bringing your boyfriend?"

*Ouch. Subtle, Mom, very subtle.* "I'm not sure. I'll have to check his schedule."

"Really? I do hope you'll be able to make it. Both of you! I'd love to meet him. What does he do?"

*Um...danger...danger...*

Not knowing what else to say, Dani mentioned the first man that popped into her mind. "He's the owner of a club...a really exclusive club. He's really sweet, takes me shopping and dancing. He makes me feel really special," she told her mom with a dreamy sigh, remembering how great Bram was.

"Now you just *have* to bring him! Wait until I tell the girls about this!"

"I haven't said if we'll be able to make it yet..."

"Darling, please. If he *owns* the club, surely he can take time off whenever he wants. I have to call your Aunt Trudy! Wait till she hears, she's going to be absolutely green with envy!"

"Mom..."

"What's his name?"

"Whose name?"

"Your boyfriend...the owner of that club..."

"Bram."

"Alright. I'll call you later to find out when you two will be coming to visit. Tell Bram he just has to be able to come. We are all so looking forward to meeting him! Good night, Danielle." Before she had a chance to say anything more, her mother hung up the phone.

*Oh. My. God! What did I just do? First he becomes the hero in my book. Now I've made him my fictional boyfriend! Thank God my mother would never just drop in...*

Dani got up and walked over to her cluttered desk. Opening her laptop she turned on the power, heading for the kitchen as it began to boot. Rummaging around in her fridge, she

found a few Dr. Peppers hiding behind the milk and, opening a bottle, she took a long refreshing swig as she returned to her computer to work on her story.

Three hours later, Dani leaned back and stretched.

As she read over the scenes she'd written, she was amazed at how much of her personal fantasies about Bram had made their way onto the page.

*This book is just one huge fantasy about him. How can I ever let him read it? How will I ever be able to look him in the eye after he has read it?*

Thinking about Bram made Dani remember her conversation with her mother and she winced as she remembered telling her mother that they were in a 'relationship'. She sent a silent prayer that he would never find out about it.

"God, what would he think of me if he did," she asked the screen. "Why did I have to tell my mom that we were dating?"

*You know why. You're tired of being compared to your 'perfect' cousin. Her own sarcastic thoughts were replaced by her mother's voice singing her cousin's praises inside of her head.*

*Gina is graduating from college with a business degree... Gina's perfect Pre-med boyfriend gave her the sweetest diamond necklace... Gina's boyfriend bought her a drop dead gorgeous engagement ring, and is going to surprise her tonight at supper! He invited the whole family to be there! We worry that you don't have anyone in your life, Danielle. Why can't you spend less time on that 'hobby' of yours... and settle down with some nice man?*

"So who can blame me for one little lie, for not wanting to hear about the many virtues and blessings of Gina? God, if Bram ever did meet my family he'd understand why I lied." She thought for a moment. She could almost imagine her overbearing mother swooping down on him like a bird of prey.

*'How long have you two been dating? Do you love my daughter? Will you please talk some sense into her and convince her to stop wasting her talent? Are you two serious? I wonder if I'll become a grandmother while I'm still young enough to enjoy having grandchildren.'* The list went on and on.

"God, I change my mind. No one should *ever* have to meet my family."

Staring at the open document she sighed again. Hitting the save key, she minimized the program and shut it, sending it into standby mode before moving into her bedroom.

Taking one final look at herself in the full-length mirror on her closet, Dani stripped and prepared for bed.

Inside the bathroom she took a good look at her nails after she finished brushing her teeth. "They don't look *that* bad," she told her reflection. Shrugging, she cut the lights out and headed for her bed.

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Bram had felt relief when the last person finally left the club and he could go back to his apartment. But now, lying in his bed, he found himself wishing for a distraction. Closing his eyes, an image of Dani appeared before him, wearing the red corset and black mini skirt from earlier.

*He held her in his arms— exactly as he had earlier as she danced against him.*

*Her back pressed against his stomach and he lowered his lips to her neck, unable to stop himself as she tilted her head to the side, baring it for him. His tongue darted out, tasting her flesh. Her skin felt so silky beneath his lips, and he ached to suckle on her flesh, to pierce her with his teeth, and mark her as his own.*

*'Mmmmmm,' Dani moaned as his lips moved, whisper soft, against her flesh. Leaning closer she tilted her head farther, giving him better access to her neck even as her arms wrapped tightly around his neck..*

*Bram accepted her invitation, his mouth becoming more insistent on her flesh. Gliding his tongue over her skin, he marveled at how wonderful she tasted, even as he wondered how much sweeter her blood would taste as it filled his mouth.*

*His already throbbing cock became painfully hard beneath his jeans and he shifted his hips, trying to keep his erection from poking her.*

*'Someone certainly does like my new look,' she said breathlessly as his lips continued to move higher, making their way to her perfect earlobe.*

*'Baby, I liked your old look. To be honest, I'm not sure I do like your new look. I don't like the way those men keep looking at you. Like they want to devour you...'* He nipped her ear, with a groan at the thought of devouring her himself.

*'Maybe I want to be devoured,' she admitted huskily as she ground her ass against him, causing a moan to escape his lips.*

*Shifting his hands, they crept down her hip and thighs until they reached the edge of her skirt. Retracing their way back up, they paused over the zipper. He lowered it, gave a tug on the skirt and, within seconds, it pooled at her feet.*

*'What are you doing?' she asked, turning to face him.*

*Lifting her into his arms, he carried her over to their table. 'I'm granting your wish. I'm going to devour you,' he explained, setting her down on the tabletop. With slow, unsteady movements he unhooked her top and let it fall to the floor. 'Gods, you are so beautiful. You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen in my life.'*

*Dani blushed prettily. 'You're just saying that. I know I'm not prettier than La...'*

*'La is very pretty, baby. But you...you are everything I have ever dreamt of. Would you like me to show you just how perfect you are?'*

*'I'm not perfect, Bram.' Dani's hands covered her stomach, looking away from him. 'I'm far from it.'*

*With gentle persuasion, Bram tugged on her chin until she looked into his face. 'I wish you could see how you look to me. I guess I'll have to settle for showing you just what you do to me instead.'*

*He wanted desperately to kiss her lips, to taste her sweet mouth, but wanted her anticipation of their first kiss to grow until it matched his own. Lifting her breasts in his hands, he kissed first one rosy peak then the other, his tongue swirling around the tight bud.*

*Arching into his hands, Dani moaned, her hands tangling in his hair as he bit down gently, careful not to pierce her flesh with his elongated teeth.*

*'Oh God,' she breathed huskily as his fangs grazed against her breast. She pulled his head up as he began teasing her other nipple. 'What happened to your teeth?'*

*Turning his face from her, he was embarrassed that he had lost control with her. He typically had complete control over his body, his fangs.*

*'Let me see them?' she asked. 'Please?'*

*Looking at her, he was curious to her reaction. Surprising him, she slipped her finger between his lips, caressing his teeth. 'I'm not hurting you, am I?' she asked when he pulled back slightly.*

*He shook his head, moaning slightly as her finger continued to caress his fang.  
'I think they're neat, very sexy. I think you are very sexy.'*

*He arched an eyebrow in disbelief.*

*'Then let me prove it to you.'* Pushing him back slightly, Dani sat up straighter. Lowering her hands, she unbuttoned his jeans. Spreading them wide she pushed them down over his hips. Jumping off the table she pushed, forcing him to sit down on one of the chairs. Before his disbelieving eyes, she fell to her knees between his legs, kneeling on his fallen jeans.

*Staring into his eyes, her finger traced the length of his hard cock.*

*Without looking away, she licked her lips and took him into her mouth. Moaning with pleasure, as her tongue tasted the small drop of precum that escaped, she took him as far into her mouth as she could, one hand caressing his balls. She sucked him at such a leisurely pace that his hands quickly balled into tight fists, preventing them from grabbing her hair and quickening her speed.*

*His eyes wanted to roll back into his head, but he couldn't take his eyes off of her. He didn't want to miss looking at her beautiful face for a single second.*

*'I could do this forever,' she told him, mumbling around the head of his cock before quickly swallowing him again.*

*Bram groaned as she finally sped up, her beautiful mouth sucking harder as he thrust into her mouth. 'Oh Gods, Dani, I'm gonna come, baby!' he warned, his voice hoarse with pleasure.*

*She continued moving over him, purring against his flesh.*

*Thrusting his hips against her mouth, he growled her name as he felt his come shoot into her warm mouth.*

Bram was jerked out of the dream when he felt something warm and sticky land on his stomach.

He didn't remember going to sleep but knew he must have as he opened his eyes to see his own hand wrapped around his cock, instead of Dani's beautiful mouth. With a curse, he watched helplessly as spurt after spurt of creamy liquid spilled out over his abdomen.

"What is happening to me? That felt so real..." he thought out aloud, climbing out of his damp bed to change the sticky sheets.

Once his bed was re-made Bram headed for the shower, still unable to believe that it had just been one hell of a wet dream.

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Dani sat up in bed, her body coated in sweat. Her breasts and pussy ached for Bram's touch. She felt robbed that instead of tasting Bram's cum in her mouth, she tasted her usual morning breath.

She wanted to cry with the loss of his taste.

With the memory of her dream so clear in her mind she climbed out of the bed, deciding to get a little more work done on her current novel. Walking to the bathroom she quickly brushed her teeth, her thoughts lingering on her erotic dream.

"I'm just working on this story too much," she tried to convince herself. "That's why he had vampire teeth. Maybe I should reconsider my hero of the story? Change Stephen from an intense, gorgeous redhead into more of a fun-loving blonde..."

She shook her head. "That would mean a complete rewrite. And I really need to finish this book. Who knows what I'm liable to do to poor Bram if I don't!"

She could see it now. One night she would go to Club Strigoi after working on a particularly hot scene—one that involved Bram and a bowl of hot fudge—and attack the poor man when they hugged, knocking him to the floor, and practically climbing on top of him in front of everyone!

She'd just sat down in front of her computer when her phone rang. Peeved, she glanced up at the clock. *Who the hell would call me at four in the morning?*

After some deliberation she answered the phone, deciding if someone needed to talk to her that badly it must be important.

"Danielle, its Gina!"

She was wrong.

"Gina, why are you up so early? Or is it up so late? And you sound so perky..."

"I haven't been to bed yet, I'm too excited. Phillip let it slip where he's booking our honeymoon. The Virgin Islands! Can you believe it?" her cousin squealed.

"Sounds fabulous." Dani rolled her eyes upward. *It's just like Gina to think she can call whenever she wants just to brag. Hello, how did she even know I'd be up right now? Oh well, Dani thought with a silent sigh, at least she didn't wake me up.*

*After all 'That's just how Gina is', she told herself mimicking the words that her family always spouted off whenever Dani mentioned her cousin's inconsiderate behavior.*

"Now I just need to get through the last of my papers, and finals, then I can start planning our wedding full time! I'm hoping for a June wedding. I've always wanted to be a June bride, you know. Can you imagine! Everything is going perfectly!"

"I'm happy for you," Dani replied automatically as she went to her fridge to a soda.

She was tired of the way her cousin always gloated about her good fortune but, thankfully, she didn't typically have to concentrate on any of their conversations. A well placed 'uh-huh', or 'that's so great!', seemed to keep her cousin placated.

"Aunt Linda called my mom earlier. I can't believe it! I had to hear about your new boyfriend from Linda!"

*Ah, we get to the real reason you called. What's the matter, cousin dear, jealous that you won't be Ms. Perfect, the top dog anymore?*

"I thought I was your favorite cousin," Gina continued, letting her cousin hear the pout in her voice.

Dani practically choked on her sip of soda. *Favorite cousin! Gina? What is this girl taking, and should she be in rehab?*

"We, uh—we only just became serious," Dani stammered. "We, um, weren't planning on telling anyone about our relationship for a while. You know, just sit back and enjoy the newness of it before we started telling everyone." *Please buy it. Please buy it. Please!*

"Of course I understand. Perfectly," Gina purred. That was never a good sign. "Well, rest assured, I won't say a single word. I mean, it isn't as if you *made him up* or anything, right? It's not as though we are in middle school anymore. I do so hope *both* of you can make it to my graduation party. I can't wait to meet this super guy that has finally managed to catch you! Well, I've gotta get back to studying. I'll see you in a few weeks."

Dani hung up the phone when she heard her cousin disconnect.

"Shows how much you know. I didn't make him up. Bram is completely real", she said, sticking her tongue out at the phone. "Who cares if he's bouncer instead of the owner of

Club Strigoi? Not me! He is handsome, and gentle, and sweet. He's *exactly* what I want in a boyfriend."

*And well, so what if he's only a friend instead of my boyfriend...*

"But that's not the point!" she practically screamed in the quiet room. "The point is he is totally real. Unlike 'Max', the boy *you* made up in the seventh grade, Gina!"

## Chapter Four

Dani spent the entire day working on her book, determined to have it finished and in her editor's hands as soon as possible. Typing the final few words needed to end the story, she smiled.

*I may never get my happily ever after with Bram in real life, but I'll always have it whenever I read this story.*

Sitting back in her chair, she simply stared at the screen, feeling the desire to celebrate. It didn't matter that she still had to read through the story and fix any missing details, or that it sometimes meant an entire re-write.

*I am in the mood for a 'woohoo, I did it,' celebration.* Stretching as she stood, she glanced back at the clock. *Only seven...Too early to head over to Club Strigoi...*

*So, what can I do while I wait?* She finally decided on taking a shower and shaving.

Climbing out of the shower she wrapped a towel around her hair and pulled her bathrobe on. Walking out to the living room she tried to kill some more time with a little mindless channel surfing.

After two hours of television she stood up to change, deciding she might as well get dressed. Pulling items from her closet she dressed in some of her frumpy clothes. Looking at herself in the mirror, she wondered, *how could I fool myself into believing these looked good on me?*

It was still early when she got to the Club but the door was open and a bouncer waved her in. Walking through the deserted club interior, she spotted the raven-haired bouncer, the one who had been so nice to her. He was sitting down at a table and glanced up as she approached him.

Smiling she asked, "Is Bram here yet?"

"Not yet. It's Dani, right?" he asked, returning her smile.

She nodded.

"Duncan," he reminded her with a grin. "Would you like me to call him?"

"No, that's alright." *Damn, I have to stay in these clothes for a little while longer. That's ok, I'll survive.*

"You're here early," he said, leaning on the table.

"I was just hoping to have a chance to talk to Bram before he got too busy."

"Are you sure you don't want me to call him?" Duncan began to stand up.

"No. No," she insisted. "I can wait."

They sat in an awkward silence.

"Do you know what time that woman, um, La I think her name is, usually gets here? You know, the one that wears those really skimpy outfits... Last night, it was a see-through dress..." Dani cleared her throat hoping that she wouldn't have to go into more detail.

"That's La," he chuckled. "They don't usually arrive here until much later, why?"

"No reason. I was just wondering if we could have a little, uh, girl talk, that's all."

"I'll call her for you." Duncan quickly stood up, not waiting to hear her tell him no, and headed for the bar. Five minutes later, he returned with a soda in his hand.

Placing it in front of her he smiled again. "She'll be here in about ten minutes," he said before excusing himself and walking away, leaving her alone with her thoughts while she waited for La to arrive.

Less than ten minutes later, the other woman sat across from her.

"What can I help you with, Dani?" La asked, looking conservative in her black tank top and jeans.

"You said you would tell me where to go to get nails done," she responded lamely.

"Uh-huh. I'd be happy to but *that's* why you had Duncan call me down here so early? Couldn't I have just told him the shop's name over the phone? Are you *sure* there's no *other* reason you wanted to talk to me?"

"I didn't know he was going to call you. I just..." she hesitated.

"Talk to me, Dani. I know we just met but I'd really like to be friends. I know I came across as a bitch last night but that's just how I am. It's not really an excuse, just an explanation. And trust me, not a lot of people get that much."

"I want Bram to notice me," she blurted out before she could stop herself.

"So you called *me*?" La asked, confused.

"Hell, I don't know..." Her head fell to the tabletop. "Forget I said anything," she said, her voice muffled. "I just remember how he danced with you that first night I was here and...God, I would love for him to look at *me* that way."

"Don't worry, Dani," La said, patting her back. "I'll be happy to help get him to notice you," she said with a large smile.

"Do you really think he will?" Dani asked hopefully, looking at the other woman.

"I'd almost guarantee it."

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Walking through the door leading to the main section of the club Bram had only taken a few steps when Duncan approached him.

"You just missed Dani," he told Bram.

*Damn!* "She left?"

"Yeah, she grabbed a change of clothes from the back room then she and Lalita left."

"Lalita! You let her leave with Lalita!" Bram thought he was going to explode.

*Dani had worn one of the most conservative of her new outfits the previous night and look at me – I haven't had a wet dream in centuries! How will I survive a night of her wearing whatever it is Lalita helps her pick out?*

Closing his eyes, he prayed for strength.

"Looks like our little girl is finally coming out of her shell," Duncan said, oblivious to his discomfort. "That's great because, damn, she's hot. I would never have guessed that she was hiding such a killer body under those baggy clothes..."

Bram's hand balled into a fist. Quickly placing it behind his back, he hoped his friend didn't notice how much he disliked the other man speaking about *his* Dani like that.

"Do you think she'd go out with me? When she gets back I think I'm going to ask her out. Do you think she minds getting a little rough?" Duncan rambled on.

Growling low in his throat, it took every ounce of self-control that Bram had built up over his life to not grab the other Vampire by the throat and throw him against the wall. "Do what you want," he said through clenched teeth.

"Awesome. You gonna be in the Control Room later?" Duncan asked.

"Yeah." *I need to see all those men all over Dani about as much as I need a suntan. At least in the Control Room no one will see if I break or throw something...*

"Cool." Duncan paused. Then after a second, he said, "Maybe I'll follow Gareth's lead and just take Dani to the back room, fuck her brains out there..."

Before Duncan said another word Bram had the other man on the floor, his forearm pressing against his throat. "If you ever treat Dani like anything other than a lady, you'll be kissing daylight."

"Damn, it's about time. Shit, you know it's kind of fucked up that I even *had* to go there before you laid claim to her. Now will you please stop trying to crush my Adam's apple?"

Backing off slightly, Bram kept his teeth bared as he watched Duncan closely.

"Every man that works in this place knows she's off limits, Bram," Duncan said, rubbing his sore throat.

"But we're just friends," Bram forced himself to explain.

"Yeah, right. And how many of your 'friends' have you ever given unlimited access to the club? Dude, every man here knows that if Dani walks up, it doesn't matter what's going on or even if we're closed, she's to be allowed inside, and to call you."

"Then why didn't *you* call *me* when she got here?" he snapped.

Duncan shrugged. "She didn't want me to. But you were the first thing she asked about."

"I'm a thing...gee...thanks."

"You know what I mean. But, remember, just because *we* all know she's off limits doesn't mean everyone else knows. Especially when you let her go off and dance with strange men, letting them think they have a chance with her..."

It was Bram's turn to shrug.

Remembering her quiet look from the previous night, he replied, "It isn't my place to stop her."

"How clueless can you be? Maybe you *should* go up to the control room. You need to watch that video of you and her dancing, guy. You didn't even dance like that with La..."

Duncan shook his head. "Go, watch the video. I swear, even though you can see other people dancing around you two, you'd swear you were alone." His friend walked off, giving him time to think about what he said.

Deciding to take the other man's advice, he went up to the empty control room. Grabbing the disc that held the videos from the previous night, he took them to his office, positive that Duncan had only seen what he wanted to see. Resisting the strong urge to sit down and watch the videos that very moment, Bram went back into the club, determined to be there when Dani returned.

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It was almost midnight when the two women reached La's apartment. As La waved her through the open doorway, Dani smiled.

"Your home is so lovely," she said, looking around the beautifully decorated living room.

"Thank my sister, Kaly. You can change in here." La showed her the guest bedroom before saying, "I'm just going to change myself. Then we'll head back to CS."

Dani thanked her for helping her out and went into the room, eager to change. Inside the lovely green room, showing the same exquisite taste as the living room, she peeled herself out of the baggy clothes. She hooked the black strapless top around her bust, praying that she wouldn't suddenly pop out of it since it pressed her breasts higher, made them look impossibly fuller.

Sitting down on the bed, she pulled on a pair of black jeans that fit her like a second skin. Smoothing imaginary wrinkles, she looked at her reflection in the full-length mirror and had to admit she looked pretty good.

Fluffing her hair, she turned back to the pile of clothing on the bed and looked at her 'sensible' bra with disgust. *Didn't I ever get anything that made me feel sexy?* she wondered.

*Not even my underwear is pretty... Plain and sensible, that's me.* Grabbing her clothes, she left the guest bedroom and headed for the kitchen, dumping them in the trash. *Goodbye Danielle, girl that can't ever seem to feel comfortable in her skin. Say hello to the new Dani. I deserve to spoil myself now and then! And I'm going to start by going lingerie shopping!*

*With any luck Bram will want to see me model it!*

Closing her eyes, she hoped that Lalita knew Bram as well as she claimed. And she also hoped he wouldn't laugh when he found out she had a crush on him.

Dani was wandering around the beautiful living room when Gareth entered the room.

"I still don't understand why you *have* to keep that freaky bed. Damn La, we could be at my place, in a normal bed enjoying... Hello." Gareth stared at her.

Dani smiled a bit self-consciously and shifted to the side. She stuck her hand up and gave a slight wave. "Hi."

"I'm sorry, I wasn't aware that we had company."

Shifting nervously, she explained, "La went out with me. I got my nails done..." she held up her hands, showing him her nails, "and she said it'd be ok if I just changed clothes here."

Gareth nodded.

When La entered the room she smacked him on his arm. "Stop terrifying her, Gareth! Wow, that outfit looks amazing on you!"

"Thanks," Dani said, blushing. "But I'm not sure why you insisted on me getting these jeans."

"Sweetie, those sneakers – though cute – would not look right with a skirt and it's a five block walk to the club. I didn't think you'd want to walk that far in the heels you just bought the other night though I guess we *could* take a taxi..."

"No, I don't mind walking. How do you do it?" she blurted out. "How do you walk around so...exposed and not think about it?" Dani fought to keep her hands from covering her ample cleavage.

"She ignores my suggestions about wearing a parka," Gareth mumbled as he headed for the kitchen.

"It'll come with time," La said, ignoring her boyfriend and giving her a little hug. "But I'll tell you a secret. Do *you* think you look good?"

Nodding, Dani answered honestly. "I've never felt sexier."

"Then that's all that matters. It's all about attitude."

"Attitude...got it."

"Don't worry, it'll come with time," La smiled.

"If you ladies are ready..." Gareth held open the door

Stepping out into the night air, Dani sighed as a car drove by and a guy leaned out of its window to shout a catcall at her. *Ok, he obviously appreciates my look. But will Bram? With every step, she recited her new mantra. It's all about attitude. You feel sexy. You have nothing to be ashamed of... It's all about attitude...*

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Bram began to pace. A quick glance at the clock behind the bar revealed that it was just after midnight. *This can't be good...What is La doing to her?*

He could imagine Dani walking in the door wearing nothing more than a half-cup bra, and a mini skirt so short he could see the bottom curve of her ass. The thought had him growling even as his cock hardened.

When he finally saw Gareth and La he felt a wave of relief. But, when he saw Dani following right behind them, he couldn't move.

He stood there frozen as the trio approached him.

"Hey there, big boy," La said with a knowing smirk.

"Hey La." His eyes never left Dani.

"We seem to be having a problem..." La began.

"What?" Instantly paying closer attention, he looked around. "Someone harassing you, again?"

"Like I couldn't take care of that problem," Gareth sneered.

"What's the problem, La, my girl?" Bram wanted to flinch as soon as the words were out of his mouth. Looking back at Dani he saw a flash of pain cross her face, but it was gone so quickly he wondered if it had merely been his imagination.

"Dani here isn't sure she looks alright. And, well, some guy tried to grope her when we walked past the line, to come into the club. She could sure use a big, strong, '*friend*' to dance with."

Dani opened her mouth to say something then shut it. Finally, she said, "It's alright, La. I don't need to dance."

"See, Bram! This is exactly what I mean." La's arm went around Dani's shoulders. "How are we going to get this little darling to come out of her shell if she doesn't dance? Be a dear and go dance with her."

As he looked at Dani, who was clearly feeling uncomfortable at being the center of attention, he fought an inner battle. His body demanded he dance with her, that he wrap his arms around her and pretend she was all his, if only for a few minutes.

His mind, however, screamed that he shouldn't allow himself to fall for her more than he already had. Even though it acknowledged that it would be rude for him to refuse now that La had asked and made such a big deal about it, it cautioned him against it.

His heart wondered if it could survive without turning into dust when she walked away.

"I would love to dance with you, Dani. If you want to dance that is," he added, giving her a way out.

When she nodded he took her hand and led her away from the other couple, out to the center of the dance floor. Their rhythms were in sync, working in perfect harmony as though they had been moving together for years.

As the song's tempo picked up their bodies moved closer until Dani was in his arms. As she rubbed her body against his, he glanced down appreciatively at the exposed swells of her breasts, wondering how much one man was expected to take before rampant lust claimed his sanity.

Dani chose that moment to look up and give one of the beautiful, shy smiles that he loved. She crooked a finger and he leaned down so that she could whisper into his ear. Instead she surprised him by leaning slightly to the side, pressing her lips gently against his. After the briefest second, she sucked his bottom lip into her mouth and traced it with her tongue before slowly releasing it.

Lifting his head slightly, Bram looked at her in amazement, begging any Deity that cared to listen that this wasn't a dream. "Dani?" he asked hoarsely. Instead of answering him with words she smiled, rising to her tiptoes as her hands moved to lock behind his neck, pulling him back down to her lips.

This time when their lips met, his tongue swept across her lips. He groaned as she opened her mouth, allowing him entrance. Holding her tight against his body, he filled their kiss with all the passion he felt. Everything, and everyone, faded into the background.

The only thing that mattered on this earth was in his arms.

Hearing her low whimper, he pulled away. Grasping her hand he tugged her off of the crowded floor, and toward the back room. Once inside he leaned against the closed door and closed his eyes.

"You kissed me..."

"You noticed that, huh?" she said, sounding slightly embarrassed.

He could almost see the delicate blush that would change her creamy flesh into a beautiful shade of rose. "Dani, you don't have to do this..."

"Do what?"

"I don't want you to feel like you owe me anything for helping you." Opening his eyes, Bram was determined to see her reaction. *Will she look relieved?* he wondered bitterly.

Another flash of pain crossed her face, one he knew he wasn't imagining this time. It was quickly replaced by anger. "Bram, I owe you more than you know for everything you've done for me. But I *don't* repay people with my body. I have more respect for *myself* than that! Move," she demanded.

"Well if you weren't repaying me, what were you doing?"

Closing her eyes, she gave a humorless laugh. "God, I didn't think I was *that* bad at flirting."

"You were flirting?" he asked around the sudden throb of his heart as it leapt into his throat.

"No. That time I was really going for more of an obvious signal rather than subtle, but it seems like my feminine wiles just aren't what they used to be. Now if you'll just excuse me, I've embarrassed myself enough for one night. Hell, I think I might even have reached my 'embarrass myself' quota for at least a month..."

"Dani..."

"Please just move," she told him, her voice tired. "Don't worry, I can take a hint, I promise I won't bother you again."

Pushing away from the door, he walked over to her and pulled her tight to his chest, ignoring her slight struggle. Lowering his mouth to her ear, he whispered, "Please stay." When she looked up he didn't take any chances. He didn't want to hear her protests, or any nonsense about him not having to do this.

Not when this was all he'd wanted to do from the moment he laid eyes on her.

Lowering his mouth to hers, he devoured her. His tongue thrust into her mouth, exploring, teasing, tasting. Lifting her higher against him, he heard a moan from deep in her throat.

Her legs wrapped around his waist and he wondered if he had somehow died and gone to heaven as she arched against him.

Cupping her ass, he forced himself to pull away from her lips.

"Bram," confusion filled her voice.

"I won't take you here, Dani," he said before he nibbled on her shoulder. "I don't want to fuck you in the back room of this club."

"Then where *will* you fuck me?" she moaned as his tongue glided over her skin.

"Are you sure? If we take this step—I can't go back to being just your friend..."

She bit his earlobe then asked, "Where to?" as she lowered her legs from his waist.

Growling, Bram wanted nothing more than to feel her wrapped around him once again. "Follow me..."

Pulling her by the hand, he led her out of the room and through the club.

Ignoring everyone, he took her to the bar then through the door halfway hidden in the shadows. Leading her down a set of stairs he paused only long enough to shove open the door to his apartment.

"Now, where were we," she asked as soon as he shut, and locked, the door behind them.

Cupping her ass he lifted her off the ground and pulled her to his chest. He gave a half moan, half growl as her legs wrapped themselves back around his hips while her lips pressed heated kisses over his neck. Carrying her through his home he went straight to the bedroom and sitting on the edge of his large bed, was very careful to hold her close.

She wasn't going to be allowed to slide any farther away from him than absolutely necessary.

"God, Bram," she gasped, tugging on his shirt, trying to rip it off of his body. He helped her remove the offending item, hissing in pleasure as she pushed him backwards and began to nibble on his chest.

*Gods, don't let me wake up if this is a dream!*

When she reached his nipple, circling it with her tongue, she teased him until it formed a tight bud. A look of satisfaction on her face, she watched him as she gently bit down on it.

Wrapping his arms tightly around her once again, Bram rolled until Dani was beneath him, chuckling at her verbal pout. Flashing a wicked smile, he slid down her body. His tongue traced one swell, then the other. Moving slowly, he only paused every now and then to nibble on her flesh whenever she gasped, or arched, into him. Continuing to move lower, he reached his destination, and the bottom of the long row of hooks that held her top together.

Unhooking the garment, he lowered his mouth, careful to keep his eyes on her face, praying she wouldn't suddenly decide it they were about to make a huge mistake.

Every new inch of flesh that appeared received his undivided attention as he laved it. When the top was completely unhooked, he spread it away from her body. His hands continuing on their task of freeing her from her clothes as his mouth worshiped her stomach, his tongue dipping into her navel.

"God, Bram," she moaned, lifting her hips, her hands joining his in an attempt to get the tight jeans off her body quicker. As they slid off her hips, he reached back up and grabbed her panties, unsure of how much longer he would be able to wait before he buried himself inside of her once she was completely naked.

Beneath him, she kicked off her shoes as he pulled the pants off.

She was finally naked and laying on his bed.

Bram stepped back to look at her.

"Bram," she pleaded, opening her arms to him.

"You look like a Goddess." Stepping between her legs, spreading them farther apart, he knelt down. "And I intend to worship your body thoroughly." Lowering his head to her neatly trimmed mound, he blew a warm breath over her already glistening flesh. Smiling against her folds, his tongue traced her lips then dipped between them to circle the jewel hidden between them.

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Her hips flew off the mattress as she arched into his mouth.

His hands rose to her breasts, teasing her already erect nipples until her body begged for more.

Her hands turned into claws, her nails digging into his shoulders as his tongue finally entered her sex.

He growled against her body as his tongue thrust in and out of her. Continuing to allow his mouth to fuck her, his finger moved to her clit, circling the gem as he drank from her.

When her orgasm came, her entire body shuddered from the force of it. "Bram," she begged. "Bram, please!" She didn't care if she was begging, she wanted, needed, to finally feel him inside of her. He paused long enough that she believed he might ignore her pleas.

Lifting his head he looked into her face, licking her come from his lips. "You taste like honey," he said with a slow smile.

"Bram, I need you," she whimpered. "I need to feel you..."

Nodding, he placed one more kiss to her mound before standing up.

Watching him hungrily, she couldn't wait to return the favor as he removed his jeans. Her mouth watered as she saw his thick cock finally freed of the restrictive clothing and she ached to taste him.

Nudging her thighs farther apart, he positioned himself at her entrance before she could even make the offer.

"Are you completely sure?" he asked, staring into her eyes, his voice rough with desire.

Dani didn't answer him with words. She simply smiled and pulled his mouth down to hers as she arched up, burying him deep inside of her.

Moaning into his mouth, she loved the way he felt, the way he kissed her. She didn't care that she could still taste her own pussy on his tongue.

She loved the way she felt, so filled by him.

His tongue entered her mouth as his hips began to flex against hers, tearing another moan from her.

"God, don't stop," she said as his mouth kissed a path down to her neck. Her hands moved up and down his back, her nails grazing over his flesh. Wrapping her legs around his hips, she urged him to go deeper. Opening her eyes when his mouth left her body, she smiled as she saw him staring down at her as his pace increased.

"So beautiful," he said before capturing her ear. "So tight."

Her hands tangled in his hair as her body arched, trying to feel even more of him inside of her as her pussy began to contract around his hard cock.

Feeling his lips beginning to suckle on her neck, just above the pulse point, she stopped fighting her body. She stopped trying to hold back her pleasure and, instead, allowed it to consume her. Relaxing her control, her body shattered around her and she screamed out her pleasure.

Bram thrust into her a few more times before lifting his own head and growling from his own release. As he lay still, resting inside of her body, Dani wrapped her arms around his waist and he leaned down, kissing her gently before pulling out of her.

"I'm not ready for this to be over," she told him a hint of sadness in her voice. She hoped he wouldn't ask her to leave now that they'd had sex. She wanted to feel his arms around her as she fell asleep. To wake up to his lips on her body, arousing her.

"Dani, honey, I promise nothing is over between us." He smiled. "I just thought you might be a little more comfortable underneath the covers."

Gathering what little strength she had left, Dani climbed off the bed then back in once Bram finished turning the covers down. "You aren't leaving me, are you?" she asked when he didn't immediately join her, trying to fight the urge to sleep.

"No, honey. I'm just calling up to let the guys know I won't be back upstairs tonight."

"Hurry back to me?" she asked, her eyes drifting shut.

"Always." He pressed a kiss to her lips, then she felt his loss.

Fighting sleep as hard as she could, she stayed awake until she felt Bram slide between the sheets and wrap his arm around her waist. Snuggling back against him, she sighed contentedly.

"Sleep well, Dani, love." He kissed her temple seconds before she finally gave in to sleep's siren song.

## Chapter Five

Groaning, Bram woke up instantly when he felt a bare ass wiggle against his cock.

Smiling, he could still hear her moans and whimpers as he pleased her throughout the night; still taste her on his lips. Neither had been able to get enough of the other.

Hearing her even breathing, he knew she was still fast asleep, but that didn't stop his cock from reacting to her yet again when she continued to wiggle around on the bed. Looking over at the clock he kept beside his bed, he groaned. *Only noon. I should still be fast asleep.* Wrapping his arms around Dani and pulling her tighter against his body ceased her restlessness.

He kissed her neck, where he had left a rather large dark mark over the course of their couplings throughout the night. Wanting nothing more than to truly taste her, he forced himself to pull away each time before he gave in to the temptation.

*No, my love, I won't do that to you. I won't take more than you give me.*

"Bram?" she asked sleepily.

"I'm here, honey."

"What time is it?" she asked groggily, turning slightly so she could look back at him.

"Just after noon."

She lifted her head. "Really? I should go. I have a ton of things to do today." Her head dropped back to the pillow as she shifted again. Lying on her back, she looked into his face. "I'd kiss you, but I have morning breath."

"So do I," he grinned.

"I'll ignore yours if you ignore mine?"

Laughing, he kissed her, his body once again flaring to life and pressing into her hip.

"I don't want to leave, but I do have to go."

"I understand." Bram laid his head down on her chest, using the breast closest to him as a pillow.

"This isn't letting me get up," she laughed, her fingers combing through his hair.

Bram pulled her other breast toward his mouth, his tongue darting out to tease the nipple into a hard bud. "No," he said against the wet flesh. "But it is much more fun." He sucked it into his mouth, biting down gently on it as he pulled away.

Dani's hand ceased playing with his hair; instead she pressed him closer to her body as he suckled her.

"God, Bram," she whimpered. "I don't *want* to go..."

"But you need to. I understand." He sat up and stared down at her. "Will you come back to Club Strigoi tonight?"

"I don't know. I've already overslept..."

The disappointment must have shown on his face because she climbed on top of him. "Were you asking if I was coming back to CS, or back to you?"

"The club," he lied.

"Well, I'm not sure if I can make it back here tonight. But if you're interested, you are more than welcome to come over to my place..." Leaning down, Dani nibbled on his bottom lip. "Then we could pick up where we left off..."

Smiling as he looked up at her, relief filled him.

She wanted to see him again, but had left the invitation open, so he could refuse.

Looking at her, he thought, *Her hair is mussed, her lips are swollen, and she looks sexier than any other woman I've ever seen...Hell yeah, I'll be there! "I'd like that."*

"So would I." She kissed him again. "Now...where did you throw my clothes?"

Laughing, Bram sat up in the bed. "I put them on the chair last night before I climbed into the bed." His eyes followed her hungrily as she stepped from beneath the sheet and walked over to them. She smiled back at him as she picked up her clothes and sat down. Slowly pulling her underwear then her jeans on, she dressed in a reverse strip tease.

Every movement made his cock harder.

Her top and shoes on once again, she sat down beside him on the bed. "I'll understand if things get too busy here and you can't make it tonight."

"I don't need an easy out, Dani. I'll be there," he told her, pulling her into his embrace.

"The option is there if you change your mind."

His fingers gently tilted her chin. "That is not going to happen." He pressed a tender kiss against her lips. "Nothing will keep me away from you tonight." He smacked her ass. "Go on, get out of here."

"Why the sudden rush to get rid of me? Got another lover coming over?" She winked to prove she was teasing.

"Nope. I want you to get that beautiful ass of yours home and to work. Because when I get there tonight, I'm going to require your full attention."

Smiling, he climbed out of bed and pulled on a pair of boxers and a shirt.

Leading her through his home, Bram watched as she stopped at his desk to write down her address for him.

At the door, Dani paused. "Should I just go through the club, or is there another exit?"

"Just go on through the club. There are men at the door all the time. They'll let you out." He kissed her.

"Shit. I forgot my clothes. Again."

"I'll bring them tonight."

Dani smiled. "Ok." She took a step out of the door.

"Wait..." Bram called out, before disappearing through his bedroom door again. A minute later he came back out, holding another shirt. He handed it to her.

"What's that for?"

"Well, I wasn't sure if... You're still wearing..." he motioned to her top.

She looked down and smiled. "I think I look sexy. And I didn't hear any complaints from you last night about my outfit..."

Bram took a deep breath. "But that was last night. Before we..."

"It's ok to admit, you know."

"Admit what?" he asked as innocently as possible. He didn't want to feel jealous, and after the night they shared, he was sure there was no need. But the thought of all those men staring at her body turned his stomach into a knot.

Laughing, Dani shook her head. "Nothing, never mind." Taking the shirt from his hand, she pulled it over her head.

Watching with interest, Bram saw her pull the collar up to her nose and take a deep breath. *If she doesn't leave soon, I don't think I'm gonna be able to let her go without fucking her first.* "Smells wonderful," she smiled. "I should go... I'll see you tonight."

Closing the door, Bram walked over to the pad she wrote her address on. Taking it in his hand, he promised himself that not even the Gods themselves would keep him away from her that night.

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Blushing as she walked out of the club, she kept her head held high, and tried to ignore the knowing looks on the men that opened the door for her. Checking how much cash she had left on her, she hailed a taxi and started to give the driver her address. At the last minute she changed her mind, deciding to go shopping instead.

After all, she didn't want to Bram to look at her plain, 'sensible' underwear.

A couple hours later, Dani finally entered her apartment, arms filled with bags. Placing a few on her couch, she went into the kitchen to put the few groceries she'd gotten away. That task completed she picked up her phone and glanced at the caller ID before listening to the messages left on her machine.

Seeing her mother's number and Gina's, several times each, she decided to be naughty and ignore them. "I'll listen to them later. I am so not going to let them ruin my day!"

Picking up the bags, she walked into her bedroom to put the items away. Reluctantly grabbing some clothes, she decided to take a quick shower before she got to work.

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She was in the middle of reading a particularly troublesome scene when the ringing phone yanked her out of her story. Glancing down, she cursed when she remembered she'd left the cordless with built in Caller ID on her nightstand.

It continued its shrill ringing as she admitted she really didn't want to answer.

Her hand drew closer to the handset, when she thought it could be Bram. Thinking about him brought a smile to her face.

*That would be wonderful...if I had remembered to give him my phone number!* She slapped her palm to her forehead. *Jeez girl, act like you've slept with someone before!*

Her machine picked up and, after her rather boring 'leave me a message' speech, she heard the phone click. "Good, I am *not* in the mood to be sociable." Getting comfortable in her chair one more time, she turned her attention back to her writing. Once she finished the scene she was able to finish proofing the rest of the story in no time.

Deciding to reward herself, she got up to grab a soda before back sitting down.

Her voice lowered sinisterly. "Now, comes the fun part...the dreaded synopsis." Taking a large swig of her soda, she began typing slowly. After checking, and rechecking, the document she quickly attached the files and hit the send button on her email before she had a chance to reconsider.

"Deep breaths, Dani," she told herself, taking another sip of Dr. Pepper and trying to calm down. "Deep breaths. It's going to be alright."

About to go through her fan mail, she was shocked when she heard a knock on her door. *Who could possibly be coming to visit me*, she wondered as she headed for the door.

Opening it a crack, she peeked outside.

*No! It cannot possibly be that late...*

Opening it farther, she tried pasting a smile on her face and welcoming Bram warmly into her home and, instead, blurted out, "You can't be here right now!"

Bram shifted the bags of clothing he carried and his smile dimmed. "I can't?"

"No. It wasn't supposed to be this late!" Opening the door all the way, she walked away, her hands covering her face. "I was supposed to have enough time to at least change my clothes...maybe do something with my hair...to get cute..."

Behind her, he chuckled. She heard him put the bags down then felt his hands circle her waist.

"I think you look beautiful." He kissed her neck.

"Has anyone told you that you're delusional? Oh, and I'm not sure if I should blush or shove you away! I feel like I should yell at you at the very least!"

"Why?" he asked innocently, his voice filled with humor.

"While I was out today – running errands – I kept wondering why people were looking at me funny. After all, I was covered up, since you loaned me your shirt. They couldn't possibly have seen if I were hanging out of my top or anything. So, I'm walking around blissfully ignorant and just, you know, feeling confused about the looks... that was until I passed a mirror.

"Not even make up will cover this mark, Bram!" she said, pointing to the large, very dark hickey she knew to be on her neck. Hearing his laughter made her laugh as well. "I'm serious, Bram. Little old ladies were looking at me in horror." Her irrepressible giggles ruined her scolding.

"Then maybe someone should teach them what it's like to be young again," he said, kissing her again. "And, honey, you do look beautiful. I've dreamt of you since you left. Tonight couldn't come fast enough. Do you really mind that I left a mark?"

"No," she confessed. Truthfully, it had made her feel young and alive again. Every time she passed a mirror she would look at it and remember their night together. "But I still have so much to do...there was going to be candles and soft music and..." Bram's finger stilled her lips.

"All I need is you, Dani."

Looking into his eyes, she sucked his finger into her mouth and traced the edge with her tongue. "So you don't want to see the lingerie I bought then?" she asked around the digit. Turning, she leaned against him as she continued to lightly suck on his finger.

"Lingerie? What kind of lingerie?" he asked, his voice growing rougher as she felt his cock begin to press against her lower back.

"Well..." she drew out the word. "I got some cute 'barely there' undies...and this really cute, sheer black baby doll..."

Bram growled against her neck, his teeth scraping against her flesh. She arched against him when he bit her. "So is that a yes or a no," she asked, releasing his finger as her hands tangled in his hair.

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Bram was going to explode.

His heart swelled when she opened the door still wearing his shirt. He became even more excited as she told him what she'd wanted to set up just for him. But, between her talk of sheer nighties and her moaning as he bit her, he felt as though he was going to come in his jeans without even really touching her.

The desire to allow his teeth to slip into her creamy flesh, to taste her blood still amazed him. He'd had every intention of really biting her as she described the nightie but, thankfully, had been able to control the urge at the last moment.

"Yes, I would love to see you wearing them, modeling them for me," he bit down gently on her shoulder again. "But, honey, I don't think I could stand much more teasing just now." His hands crept around her waist and began inching the long shirt up.

"I haven't teased you yet." Her head fell back against him, giving him better access to her neck.

Tempting him.

"Honey, you answered the door wearing my shirt...that is classified as teasing." Finally reaching the bottom edge of the shirt, his hands slid beneath the material up to her bare breasts.

"Do you know how hard it was to find lingerie to tease you with," she gasped out as his hands began kneading her breasts. "Especially since..." her words ended as she moaned.

"Especially since what?"

"Especially since you helped me pick out all those revealing outfits."

Bram's fingers tugged on her nipples until they were stiff and tight. "Clothing that looks amazing on you," he breathed against her ear. "But do you want to know what I think looks even better on you than your new clothes?"

"What?" she asked with a moan as his fingers began to tug on her nipples.

"Me."

"Bram..." Her voice was pleading. "Please..."

"What do you want, honey?"

"You."

Pulling away from her only long enough to pull his shirt over her head, he dropped it onto the floor. When Dani began walking away he easily caught up with her, asking, "Where are you going?"

"To the bedroom, to put something on to tease you..."

Growling, he knelt down in front of her, pulling her shorts down, pleasantly surprised and instantly aroused that she hadn't worn any underwear. Throwing them across the room, he nibbled on her stomach and slid his finger deep inside her.

"You're already so wet," he purred into her belly button.

"Bram..." She grabbed his shoulders as his finger slowly thrust in and out of her.

On impulse, he leaned in and flicked her clit with his tongue, tasting her cream as his finger curved to graze the bud. Feeling her weight shift slightly he moved, quickly catching her before her knees could give out, lowering her gently to the carpeted floor. As soon as he knew she was safe, he continued his assault on her body. Tasting her flesh, nibbling on her

thighs, he continued teasing her body until her hands began to grasp at him. Allowing her to pull him up her body, to her eager mouth, he smiled. "You were the one that was so intent on there being teasing..."

Instead of responding, she bit down on the flesh that the base of his neck.

Practically ripping his shirt off, he rolled easily when she shoved him off of her. As he was in the process of pulling his shirt over his head, he felt her straddle his thighs. His eyes grew wide as she unbuttoned his jeans.

The second they were open, she pulled him out and licked the top of his cock like an ice cream cone.

Reflexively, Bram hissed and arched his hips, wanting to feel more of her mouth around him. Dani quickly pulled his clothes down and, looking at him with a smile, took him deep inside her mouth.

Slowly she pulled away from him, her tongue gliding across the top as she moaned with pleasure before sliding down his cock again. Her hand caressed his balls as she lifted her head from him. "Yummy," she said with glee before sucking him into her mouth again.

"Dani..." he pleaded. "Gods, honey, I love what you are doing to me..."

"But," she pouted around him.

"Gods," he hissed as her teeth scraped gently against the head of his cock. "I want to feel your tight pussy around me. I want to feel your body come around me..."

"Mmmm. But it was alright when you were teasing me?"

"Dani!" he practically screamed as she sucked on his head with more force.

"Party pooper," she pouted, crawling up his body. "What if I wanted to taste you coming in my mouth?" she asked.

Growling from the images her teasing comment caused, Bram pulled her down on top of him with as much force as he could. When he was buried within her, he worried for a second that he had been too rough, but instead of complaining she arched against him. His thumb found her clit and stroked it as his other hand helped direct her hips. Thrusting up into her body, he prayed for patience. He was so close to losing himself inside her, but refused to deny her any pleasure.

Dani's moans blurred into one long sound.

Pulling her down into a passionate kiss, he lost control and flooded her body with his come as she contracted around him. His hands stroked her back as she remained there, lying on top of him.

"Are you disappointed that I didn't have everything fixed and special?"

Kissing her temple, he told her, "I could never be disappointed in you." He paused, enjoying her slight weight. "But the question is, Dani, my love, do you think we can make it to the bedroom before I attack you again?"

Just as he had hoped, she giggled. "If that is what you call attacking me...then by all means, sir, attack away! I am at your mercy."

"Such insolence," he teased. "That kind of attitude will earn you a sound spanking." One hand shifted lower, fondling her firm ass.

"Mmmmm... Promise?" she asked with a flutter of her eyelashes.

Bram playfully slapped her ass before lifting her off of him. "And here I thought you were some sweet and innocent angel I could corrupt."

“Didn’t you get the memo?” she asked before she stood up. “I’m a romance writer and have a very active imagination... Someone told me that was a good thing.” Her hips swayed from side to side as she walked toward a closed door. “Now, the question is...are we going to bed or do you feel up to more teasing?” Dani blew him a kiss then disappeared behind the door.

“Ding, Ding. Round two!” Bram said, quickly jerking off his shoes. His jeans in his hand, he followed her into the room. The items fell from his hands as he saw her positioned sexily on the bed wearing only the sheer nightie and a smile. “Honey, I really do hope you got plenty of sleep last night...”

## Chapter Six

Dani smiled and stretched as the arm around her waist tightened, pulling her closer to Bram. Attempting to ease her way from beneath his arm, she tried to escape the bed without waking him.

"Where are you running off to?" he asked, refusing to release her.

Laughing, she said, "I've got to go do a bit of work. Someone seems to have kept me away from my computer last night." She kissed him.

"I didn't hear you complaining," Bram responded, cracking one eye. "You don't know how grateful I am that you have such dark curtains."

Laughing, she half-heartedly struggled to leave his embrace. "I sleep weird hours. Sometimes I don't go to bed until dawn, and they block the sun so I can get some sleep."

"I love that you're a night owl. Now come back over here..."

"Let me go so I can get some work done," she protested.

"No."

"Well," she said, ceasing her struggles. "I can either leave the bed now, while you get some more sleep and work, or..."

"Or forget it and stay snuggled up with me? That sounds nice, I like that choice."

"Or, I can stay snuggled with you, and when we do get up, I have to go to work instead of play with you."

"And if we just never leave the bed?"

"It's inevitable. One of us will eventually get hungry, thirsty, or need to go to the bathroom."

"Damn. Fine...I'm a big boy...I don't need to have anyone to cuddle with..." He gave an audible sniff.

Dani laughed as she saw him pouting. Kissing him tenderly, she whispered, "Well, I was going to suggest figuring out some way to make it up to you. But if you don't need..."

Bram silenced her by rolling her beneath him. "Oh look, I'm suddenly feeling much better..." He nibbled on her neck in the way he'd found that drove her crazy.

"That's cheating," she said, arching against him.

"Never said I play fair," he said between bites.

"Bram..." she moaned.

"Dani, honey, all you have to do is say stop," he breathed against her ear.

"But then you'd stop," she responded, amazed that she could still follow the conversation.

His hands kneaded her breasts and his cock pressed against her intimately, as though trying to gain access to her body on its own. Opening her legs, she arched into him, moaning when he slid easily into her.

"Dani..."

Lifting her head to his, she kissed his lower lip before gently biting down on it.

"Gods, Dani..." Bram thrust inside of her slowly as his mouth fanned the flames of desire that consumed her. Kissing her deeply, he increased his speed. She felt his hand skimming down her body to her leg where it was wrapped around his waist. He tugged on it

once and she unlocked her ankles for him. Raising her leg slightly, his thrusts became harder, deeper.

Shifting her head, Dani bit down on his shoulder to keep from screaming from the pleasure that built torturously within her body. Her teeth eased their pressure against his flesh and she began to suckle him. *Mine*, she thought. *For now, you are all mine.*

Her body tensed around him, her orgasm building to an intensity that nearly overwhelmed her. When it finally ripped through her body, her muscles trembled uncontrollably as raw, unadulterated pleasure consumed her. Still shivering with passion, she heard Bram growl something against her neck and felt the warmth that filled her womb as his orgasm struck.

Holding him tight in her arms, she closed her eyes. "When I can walk again, remind me that I still have work to do."

Bram laughed. "It's almost six. Shall we go take a shower?"

"A hot shower sounds heavenly, but I think you paralyzed me..." She gave a contented sigh. "But, oh man, what a way to go," she teased.

"Would milady like me to carry her?" he asked, climbing off of her.

"Mmmm," she moaned. "Milady? Milady could get very used to this."

"Good, because I intend to spoil you."

"Bram!" she squealed when he picked her up. "Put me down, I can walk."

"Maybe I'm not ready to let go of you yet."

Relaxing in his arms at once, she sighed dramatically. "Well, if it's because you're being so selfish..."

"I am," he winked.

He didn't put her down until they were in the bathroom.

She sat on the closed toilet seat and giggled at her royal treatment.

He adjusted the water, giving it time to heat while he pulled out towels for them, adding her fluffy white bathrobe to the pile. Inside the shower, however, he quickly had her moaning again as his soapy hands teased every inch of her flesh.

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One very erotic shower later, Dani finally sat at her desk, checking her email while Bram finished his shower alone. She cursed under her breath as a knock on the door pulled her away from her work.

"What the... What, *now* that I have a gorgeous guy here that wants to do decedent things to my body, I have to become Ms. Popularity?" she mumbled, standing up. Pulling her bathrobe closed a bit tighter, she headed for the door. "Yeah, yeah, I'm coming." With a less than friendly 'go away' on the tip of her tongue, Dani yanked open the door. She barely prevented the words from escaping her mouth as she recognized the two women standing impatiently outside of her door.

*Fuck me!*

"Hi, Mom, Gina...What are you guys doing here?" Dani asked, hurriedly double-checking that her robe covered her completely.

"We were worried when you didn't answer your phone! I called you all last night and all day yesterday! You never returned my calls." Her mother exclaimed with her special 'heap on the guilt' tone that all mothers seemed to have.

*Shit!*

"Now really isn't the best time for you two to be here..." *What if Bram just walks out of the bathroom? What if he calls out some wonderfully kinky scenario he'd like to act out with me?* "Mom, Gina, why don't I give you a call tomorrow and we can have lunch," Dani suggested, trying to block their entrance. Ignoring her blatant hinting, both women simply walked past her and into the apartment.

*Or you can feel free to just barge on in... she thought grumpily. It's not like I was doing anything! It's not like I was just telling you it wasn't a good time or anything!*

"Really Danielle, must you leave your clothes lying all over the floor?" her mother scolded as she picked up Bram's shirt.

*Heat flooded her entire body. God, I forgot about those! At least she doesn't seem to notice that they are way too big for me.*

*Hey! I don't dress that much like a slob...do I?*

Closing her eyes, she prayed for patience. "Mom..."

Her mother tsked. Cracking open one eye, Dani watched her pick up her shorts and both of Bram's shirts. "Really, when did you become such a slob? It's that hobby of yours! You invest too much time in it. You're letting other things, more important things, like housework and your family fall to the sidelines, unnoticed. Really, Danielle, how do you expect to ever keep a man around if you leave your apartment looking like a pig sty?"

Dani looked around. The only things out of place, and remotely cluttering her home—as long as no one counted her desk—were the few garments her mother held in her arms.

"Mom, please, now really isn't the time..." She walked over and snatched the items from her mother's arms.

"And really! You are a grown woman! Don't you think sitting around your house in your bathrobe all day is a bit immature?"

Raising her hands to her face, Dani began to massage her temples. *Oh God, please tell me I have some Excedrin in the bathroom...*

"Aunt Linda is right," Gina said, finally adding her two cents. "Phillip would be worried sick about me. What would that boyfriend of yours say if he saw you still walking around in your robe at seven o'clock at night?"

Shaking her head, Dani couldn't stop the petty thoughts from running across her mind.

*So that's why you tagged along. You weren't concerned; you just wanted to see if Bram was real and maybe get a good look at him... Or so you could be condescending if he were nowhere to be seen...*

*God Gina, grow up, this isn't middle school and we aren't kids anymore!*

"What is that thing on the side of your neck?" Gina asked, moving closer and brushing aside Dani's hair and collar. "What are you, back in high school? Ew! I'd be horrified if Phillip put something like that on me!"

Dani was saved from having to answer Gina's purposefully embarrassing questions when she heard Bram answering them from right behind her.

"He'd probably say if she weren't wearing the bathrobe, you two would still be outside knocking on the door. *He* likes that Dani let him leave a mark on her and thinks it looks incredibly sexy."

Dani felt her face burn and covered it as soon as his voice rumbled behind her. Sneaking a quick peek through her fingers, she noticed both women's shocked expressions, their mouths hanging open. Risking a quick look back at Bram her face burning hotter when she saw what he was wearing.

Or rather, what he wasn't.

*Oh. My. God!*

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Bram had been drying off when he heard the voices coming from the living room. He had grown angry as he heard one of the woman scolding Dani as though she were a small child.

*I don't care if that woman is her mother, she has no right to come into Dani's home and treat her as though she were twelve!*

Debating whether or not he should get dressed before he introduced himself, the decision was made for him when he heard their next comments to her. Hearing the contempt drip from one of the women he reached the apex of his patience. Grateful Dani had extra large towels, he wrapped one around his waist and stepped out of the bathroom, pausing for just a moment before he interrupted them.

"He'd probably say if she weren't wearing the bathrobe, you two would still be outside knocking on the door." Bram purposefully smiled widely as the two women stared at him in disbelief, and continued offering *his* opinion. "*He* likes that Dani let him leave a mark on her and thinks it looks incredibly sexy."

Peeking around to see Dani's reaction to his interference, he had to bite his tongue to prevent chuckling. Her blush glowed over her entire face, much of which she now had covered with both hands.

"It's a pleasure to meet you both, even if it was a bit unexpected," he said, walking to pull Dani back against his chest, just in case his towel decided to fall. He wrapped his free arm around her waist while the other held the towel closed.

*I'm going to need to leave a bathrobe here if her family just pops by whenever they feel like it,* he thought, suppressing a chuckle.

Though it could encourage the women to leave quicker...

"Please, just kill me now," he could hear her whispering.

"I'm..." He started to extend a hand, but decided against it, more concerned about comforting Dani, and not losing his towel, than being polite. As he glanced at the younger of the two women, he got the feeling she wouldn't mind if it did fall, as long as she had a front row seat.

"Bram, yes, Danielle has told us all about you," the older woman smiled.

"She has?" He arched an eyebrow.

"Of course. I'm Danielle's mother, but you can call me Linda. This is her cousin, Gina. We would never have stopped by so unexpectedly – especially if we'd known she was busy –

but Danielle didn't return my calls and I grew worried," she scolded her daughter again. "It isn't like her not to call me back."

*I'm not surprised she didn't return your calls.* "That was my fault," his manners forced him to admit. "I'm afraid I kept her rather...occupied, the last few nights."

"I'll bet you have," Gina smirked. "Tell me, how did you meet our shy little Danielle?"

Bram cleared his throat. *If only I had tasted Dani's blood earlier I'd know what she told them...then I'd be able to give them the same answers...*

"We met at a club..." he began hesitantly, after deciding to stick as close to the truth as possible.

"I told you all about that, Gina! Forgive my niece...she's got so much on her mind with graduating, and planning her wedding, you know. That is *one* of the reasons I was calling.

"Danielle, darling, you never called back to tell me if you would be able to make it to the graduation."

"You only gave me a day to think about it, Mom. I need a bit more time than that..."

"Oh, pish. You said you had to ask Bram. He's right here dear. Ask him now."

"I'll bet our sweet girl forgot to even mention it," Gina said, sidling to one side as though to have a better view of his exposed body. "Some of the family are getting together and throwing me a graduation party." Her eyes moved over him hungrily.

Bram had to fight the urge to go climb back into the shower. *Gods, could you be more obvious?* he wondered, watching her every move from the corner of his eye.

He wouldn't put it past her to sneak up and try to grab the towel from around his waist!

"When is it, Mrs-Linda?" Bram asked, addressing the older lady.

"A week and a half away," she said, chiding Dani with a pointed glance.

*Now would be an excellent time for you to give me any kind of clue to tell me what you want me to say Dani, love,* he pleaded silently, even though he knew she wouldn't hear the request.

Instead of answering his unspoken request, she merely stood there, her back stiff and body tense.

*Well...since you didn't actually mention it...I'm hoping you don't want us to go...*

"I'm not sure we'll be able to make it," he began hesitantly and, against his chest, he felt Dani relax slightly.

*Ok. So far, so good. She didn't want to go. Can't say I blame her... Hmmm...now, for a reason...*

"Dani has a story she's working very hard on...and well...I'm not sure I could leave the club on such short notice..."

*Nice and vague. What did you tell them, love?*

"You mean you actually encourage this nonsense?" Gina asked, the shock causing her to pause in her trek to see more of his body.

*Damn it,* he silently swore as Dani tensed back up. *What the fuck? You people are her family! You are supposed to encourage, support her, not cut her down until she feels like an insignificant little ant! Damn! If you talk about her body, like you talk about her writing, no wonder she felt like she had no other options but to hide it under those baggy clothes!*

"Dani's writing is not nonsense," he replied in a steely tone. His teeth wanted to lengthen and he wanted to rip into the women. Literally. Keeping a tight reign on himself, Bram asked, "Have you ever taken the time to actually read any of her stories?"

"Have you?" her mother challenged.

"Yes. I have. They are wonderful. She is a very talented and exceptional woman. I can't wait to read her latest book. And, yes, I will gladly wait until she finishes it. It's worth waiting for. *Dani* is worth waiting for. And if you two can't see that then it's your problem. Now, if you will excuse us, we had very important plans tonight."

*Not even my mother would have reprimanded me for that! How dare they - her own family! - treat her like that!*

Bram fought to gain control of his anger before he allowed it to make him do something he would regret to these narrow-minded women.

"What kind of plans?" Gina asked, licking her lips as she continued to stare at Bram's bare torso and muscular legs.

"I don't see why you can't take a day or two off..." Linda persisted.

"Mom, please," Dani cut the woman off. "We have to go... We're meeting some friends, and I still have to get dressed."

"Fine, fine. I'm just your mother. It isn't as though you get to see your friends *anytime*," she sniffed.

"Mom..."

"Let's go, Gina. You'll call me later?" Dani's mother asked as she walked toward the door.

To Bram, it sounded more like a command.

"I'll let you know as soon as I do about the graduation. Honest."

As the two women finally left he watched with interest as she pulled out of his embrace and walked over to the couch.

"I understand if you want to leave and, you know, never look back. Really, I don't blame you. I'd do it myself if I could, but they're *my* family..."

"They don't scare me, honey," he said gently, crossing the room to sit down beside her. Pulling her back into his embrace, he continued. "But maybe you should tell me what you told them, so we don't have any more surprises?"

Dani started to shake her head, once again covering her face.

Gently prying her hands away, he looked into her eyes. "Tell me? It can't be that bad."

"I'm a horrible person! I told them we were together..."

"We are together," he reminded her, gently pushing a strand of hair back behind her ear.

"But I told them that before we'd even kissed. But if I hadn't..." she continued in a rush of words, "...if I hadn't I would have had to listen to an hour's worth of my mom listing all of Gina's fiancée's outstanding qualities and then she would have wanted to *try* and fix me up..."

"That's not such a horrible thing to do then. You did it for a good reason."

*Hell, after just one conversation with them, I'm surprised she ever answers her phone.*  
"Anything else?"

Dani nodded her head. "I sort of told them we met at this really exclusive club..."

"That's not a lie."

"That you own." Dani cringed and looked up at him, her eyes filled with sadness.

"I see." Bram paused. *Was that a lucky guess, or do you know the truth?* "And is that really important to you? That they think I own the club?"

"Bram, I really like you. I don't care if you mop floors, or own a chain of clubs. I swear I don't. I just...God, if I have to listen to one more story about how 'Phillip is a pre-med,' or 'Phillip just got accepted to one of the top medical schools in the country,' or 'Why don't you ever find a successful man like Phillip?' I swear I'm going to scream. I just...I never believed you'd ever have to actually *meet* my family. I never believed there would be anything other than friendship between us."

"So you used me?"

"Yes. No. Please just go! Run while you still can. I won't drag you down into my family's madness. Go! Save yourself! I'll call them later and tell them that we broke up because of irreconcilable differences..."

"I'm not going anywhere, Dani."

"But I..."

"You did what I think any sane person would have done in your place. I'm not mad at you. In fact, I'm flattered. When you told them about your boyfriend you could have told them you were dating anyone, but you chose *me*. Why?"

"Because you're the one I wanted to be with." Dani looked away from him. "And thank you for defending my writing..."

"That was my pleasure, honey. Only now you just have to do one thing for me," he told her, smiling.

"What?"

"Tell me where I can buy your books."

"You don't have to do that..."

"I want to. I want to read what you've written. I meant what I said."

"So where do we have to go that's so important?" she asked in a clear attempt to change the subject.

Bram grinned. "The bedroom..."

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Propping herself on her elbow, Dani looked at Bram. "Let's go out."

"Where would you like to go?" he asked with a smile.

"Anywhere?" she asked, lying back down.

"Anywhere." *What will she say? Hollywood? The expensive restaurant down the street? My place?* With Dani, he never knew just what to expect. And it was one of the things he loved about her.

"Europe." Her voice turned wistful. "I want to see the Castles of Scotland, Paris from the top of the Eiffel Tower, The Coliseum, the temples of the Gods, the mountains of Transylvania, the canals of Venice..."

"That's a bit much to do in just one night," he teased, watching her face and delighting in her excitement.

"Yeah, but that's what I want to do. That's where I want to go someday."

"Do you have a passport?" *If I call Terry tomorrow I might be able to plan a surprise vacation for the two of us, and Dani could be in Europe before June!* The thought of traveling across Europe, with her by his side, brought a smile to Bram's face.

"Not yet."

"We'll have to correct that. We can't see Europe if you don't have a passport."

"Wait! Just like that? I say I want to see Europe, and you say we'll get me a passport?"

"Is there something wrong with that?"

"Yes. *I want to go see Europe. I want to earn the money and be able to do anything that I want. Besides, unless you're a closet millionaire, can you really afford to take off work to go on a trip like that, with me?*" Dani shook her head. "No, even that isn't important. We only just met. Bram, I wouldn't expect you to finance a trip of that sort for me. I'm not that kind of girl...hell, I wouldn't even expect that if we were living together!"

"I know you aren't that kind of girl, honey. That's why I want to do this. I'm not hurting for money, Dani. *I own Club Strigoi.*" *And a few other nice investments,* he added silently. *Being several centuries old does have some advantages.*

"Ha, ha...very funny. Next time please make the joke a bit more obvious so I can at least enjoy it as well. I said I was sorry for lying to my family about that."

"No, I really do own the club. Dani, there's a lot you don't know about me." *Gods I wish this conversation could have waited a little while longer.*

*You already know you're in love with her. Now you just need to tell her the truth.*

*So she can leave quicker? Yeah, that sounds like I love her a lot.*

*You know you do. If you didn't, you wouldn't even consider telling her the truth. Besides would you rather wait until she has you so wrapped up in knots that your world will crumble if she leaves?*

"Dani...this isn't easy for me to tell you..."

## Chapter Seven

"Oh God. You're married aren't you?" Pulling away from him she tucked the sheet around her body, covering everything she could.

"No, I'm not married!" he exclaimed, alarmed. "Why would you ask me if I'm married? I'm not the sort of man that would fool around after I've made a commitment. I'm...well, I'm probably not like anyone else you've ever met."

"That's it? You know, you should really work on your conversational skills. Starting a conversation off with 'this isn't easy for me to tell you' means you're either married, never want to see me again, this is just for fun, or you have a disease. God, that's it, isn't it?" Dani's eyes widened as she remembered they hadn't once bothered with any protection.

"Calm down. I'm *not* married," he stressed again. "I would very much like to continue seeing you. Yes, this is a lot of fun, but I hope it's more than just 'fun' to you. And, no, I do not have any diseases. Now...may I continue?"

Nodding, she opened her mouth to tell him to just say what he had to because he was scaring her. *Telling him that would probably only make him take longer to say whatever it is he needs to say*, she thought irritably. Remaining silent, she patiently waited for him to continue.

"Dani, I'm a...that is to say that...wow, I don't think I've ever had to do this before. Let's try this. You know how some people worship the sun?"

Nodding, she grew more and more confused.

"Well, the sun really doesn't like me. It hates me and if exposed to its rays, it would kill me."

"The sun will kill you?" she asked, completely confused. "And *that's* why you're glad I have dark curtains?"

"Yes, exactly," he said looking proud of himself.

Dani simply stared at him. "O...K..."

"Let me just spit this out. Dani, I'm Vampire."

She began to inch her way to the edge of the bed, careful to keep her expression calm.

"You're a vampire? Well, then it really is a good thing I have thick curtains, it would have been a bit disarming to wake up to a smoking pile of ashes." She gave a nervous chuckle. "That would have been a bit hard to explain to everyone, don't you think?"

Hoping her relief didn't show on her face as she hit the edge of the bed, she stood up slowly and released her death-grip on the sheet, taking baby steps backward toward the door. *Great, I finally find a drop dead gorgeous guy who's interested in me and he's delusional!*

*God, I should have known something was wrong when he didn't run screaming from me after meeting my mom!*

"You're ok with this? You're not mad that I didn't tell you sooner?"

"Mad? What would I be mad about? After all, if you didn't keep your true identity a secret...well...who knows what kind of crazies would pester you night and...er...night."

"Dani, my true identity *is* Bram."

"Of course. You know what I mean...like...uh....superheroes have to protect what they really are..."

"I'm not a freak. Nor am I a figment of anyone's imagination. Think of Vampires as a different species. I'm human but not, if that makes any sense?"

"You know...I think I'm gonna go...um, check my email..." Even she heard the tremor of panic in her voice. Without waiting for his reaction, she bolted toward the door.

Somehow, even though she never even saw him get off the bed or take a single step forward, Bram was in front of her, blocking the door.

"Bram, why don't you let me out of the room? This'll be our little secret. I promise I won't tell anyone that you're a vampire," she told him in her most soothing voice, backing away from him.

"Damn it. I'm not crazy."

"You can read my mind?" she asked, alarmed.

*Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit! Think happy thoughts...bunnies hopping in a field...kittens playing with a ball of yarn...fluffy puppies...*

*Oh hell, I'm gonna die!*

"No. It's written all over your face. It's in your tone of voice."

"Bram, just let me out of the room, and then...we can discuss this. I'll make us...me...I'll make me a cup of tea and we can sit on the couch. Talk about this like two mature adults..."

"I can prove I'm Vampire," he informed her, still blocking the door.

"You're not going to let me go until you prove it, are you?" Fighting down a wave of panic, she gathered as much courage as she could. "Fine. I'm waiting. Prove it." She crossed her arms over her chest.

Looking down, her eyes widened. She had forgotten all about her nudity!

Bram took a step forward and she backed up, holding up her palm. "Wait! This isn't going to involve you...um...biting me is it? Cause if that's how you plan to prove it...think again, Buster!"

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Looking at her, Bram smiled wickedly. *She really is gorgeous when her feathers are ruffled.* He definitely preferred her anger to her fear. Allowing his desire for her to overwhelm his senses, he fantasized about how delightful it would be to taste her warm, sweet blood flowing into his mouth, how he would show her his appreciation for her gift if she ever gave him permission to drink from her.

Widening his smile, Bram allowed her to see his teeth lengthen, and grow sharper.

"For all I know you put fake teeth in your mouth and used your tongue to move them into place."

"I'm pleased you think my tongue so talented," he told her. "I hope I don't ever disappoint you." He enjoyed the slight blush that tinted her face pink but it was gone almost as quickly as it had appeared.

"Ok, fine. Yes. Pointy teeth. Very vampire-like. *Now* will you move? I've got to go to the bathroom."

"Fine. If that didn't convince you, what about this?"

Closing his eyes, he concentrated on the image of a bat. Typically he felt it was a bit too cliché but right now he wanted her to just stop looking at him as though he had lost his mind.

Holding that image in his mind's eye, he felt his body begin to shrink, the air moving beneath leathery wings as he flapped to keep himself from falling to the ground. After holding that shape for a moment or two, he decided that by now she should be convinced, and resumed his natural form.

Watching Dani closely, he saw her open her mouth, her eyes bulging and her face far too pale. Before any sound could leave her mouth, her beautiful blue-gray eyes rolled upwards, and she fainted, falling in a boneless heap to the floor.

"Ok...that wasn't *quite* the reaction I was hoping for..."

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Sitting up she looked around, relaxing when she recognized her bedroom. Looking down she recognized the familiar nightshirt. "Oh, thank God! Ok, no more writing through the night for me after eating only cherry Jell-o and drinking Dr. Peppers," she told the room. "At least I didn't make a fool out of myself in front of..."

"Good, you're awake!" Bram entered the bedroom wearing only his boxers. "I'm glad 'cause I was beginning to worry. Here...drink this and you'll feel better," he said, pushing a chilled cup into her hands.

"What is it?" she asked, never taking her eyes off him.

"Soda. I found it in your fridge. You'll feel better after you've had a few sips."

Instantly obeying, she took a few sips of the acidic drink and felt better as soon as her body recognized the caffeine-filled offering. When she was finished, she placed the cup carefully on her nightstand.

"Was I, by any slight chance, having some completely horrific dream all day?" she asked, lowering her eyes. *Please say yes! Then we can both pretend it never happened. Come on! Be a sport and let me just forget it ever happened! It was just a dream!*

"No."

"Then you..."

"Really am Vampire, yes."

"And you really changed..."

"Into a bat, yes."

"Why..." her voice cracked. Pausing to grab the cup and take another sip of the soda, she tried to gather her thoughts, to calm her racing heart. Stalling for time, she placed the cup on the nightstand once again before looking Bram in the eyes. "Why did you tell me?"

"I wanted you to know. I believe it is the only fair thing to do. You told me what you said to your family about me."

"Those were little white lies!" she yelled, her voice cracking.

"Actually, they were true."

"That doesn't matter! What I told my family were harmless words to keep them happy, and to stop them from meddling in my life. You just told me Vampires *exist!* Whatever I told them can be easily changed. With only a few words I could have told them we broke up

without them ever having met you! *You* changed into a freaking bat! I can't go back to believing Vampires are pure fiction! The two secrets are nothing alike!"

"Dani..."

"Why did you tell me? I want the truth!" she screamed, allowing panic to seep into her voice.

"I told you because I love you. I don't want to have any secrets from you."

"We just met! You can't..."

Bram shrugged. "I do."

"What? How..." Dani took several deep breaths in an attempt to calm down. "Can you read my mind?"

"No." She stared at him skeptically.

"I can only read your mind if I've drunk your blood. Which I have not done," he added quickly.

"I'd really like to wake up now," Dani said, leaning forward until her forehead was resting on the bed.

"You wish I never said anything."

Her head popped up. "I thought you said you couldn't read my mind!"

"I wasn't; I was reading your body language. I can't take the words, the knowledge, back." When he stood up, and began to pace back and forth in front of the foot of the bed, she stared in awe at the beautiful, detailed dragon tattoo that covered his back.

*If I'd seen that a few hours ago, I would have enjoyed tracing it with my tongue, learning every dip and curve in that beautiful artwork. I would have found which parts tickled, and which ones made him moan...*

"You have a beautiful tattoo," she told him, breaking the silence.

The colors blended perfectly, shades of green, browns, even hints of black. The claws had tips of red, as though the creature was hanging on for dear life, embedded in his skin. The image was so lifelike that she halfway expected to see flames shooting from its half open mouth, could practically hear it roar with rage.

If she were the kind of artist that drew or painted, she would have attempted to capture the image on paper, or canvas.

"Thank you."

"Why didn't I see it earlier?" She had to pry her eyes off of the tattoo in order to continue speaking.

"I don't show it off. It's part of my past, one that isn't too bright or happy."

Dani wanted desperately to ask him about his past. The writer in her expressed curiosity, while the woman in her thirsted for any knowledge of him.

"Maybe I'll tell you about it someday."

Dani nodded. "I'd like that," she replied gently.

"Are there any questions you'd like me to answer before I go?" Bram asked, sitting on the bed to pull his jeans on. With his back facing her she took pleasure in studying his tattoo, reaching out one finger to stop just short of tracing the ornate design.

Forcing herself to concentrate, her mind reeled at his generous offer. "The question isn't *do* I have questions...it's where do I begin? Are the Hollywood myths right? What about the

older ones? Do you really have 'super senses'? How do your teeth do that retracting thing? When were you made? Did you die? I could go on all night with questions."

Bram stood and pulled his jeans up over his hips. "Some of the Hollywood myths are right. We can't survive in sunlight. Fire, decapitation, stake through the heart, all of those will kill us. Garlic is more of a personal issue; every Vampire is different. The same applies to religion and crosses."

He shrugged. "There are more than a few Christian churches here in Oakdale that have Vampires as parishioners. Some even have positions of respect.

"The older myths are much the same way. Some of the details are accurate, however, most are just fabricated stories to help children sleep at night, or to attempt to straighten out a naughty child. Some were simply created by the church or various religions to keep their people on the 'straight and narrow'."

"Yes, I have 'super' senses." Bram closed his eyes. "You really should take a few deep breaths. It's not good for your heart to beat that quickly for prolonged periods. I did not die, nor was I 'made'. I have always been Vampire." Standing up, he pulled his shirt over his head. "I was born one."

Dani wanted to groan as he covered his dragon. She'd been staring at it the whole time he had gotten dressed. The only reason she had made herself *not* touch him, was the knowledge that if she touched him things would quickly escalate in a direction they didn't need to go right now. She knew she wouldn't have been satisfied until she was wrapped around his body, screaming with the pleasure.

Dani wanted to groan as the dragon was covered. She'd enjoyed staring at it, even if she did have to concentrate to keep herself from touching it. The only thing that was able to stop her was the knowledge that if she touched him, things would have quickly escalated.

She wouldn't have been satisfied until she was wrapped around his body, screaming with pleasure.

"My teeth are able to retract, it's a survival tool," Bram continued, looking for his shoes. "Not every generation has held such a fascination with our kind. The survival of my race has long relied on being able to blend in with Humans. They are very sensitive as well." He began to reach for her, but stopped. Clearing his throat he continued. "This allows us to pierce a vein without ripping it open, and doing irreparable damage. It allows us to drink, to feed off another creature, without endangering its life." Bram took a step away from her. "Goodbye, Dani."

As he walked out of the room, she could feel his sadness engulf her. Jumping off the bed, she ran to the door.

"Bram..." She stopped. *What can I say? I don't know what to think! What am I supposed to say to him when I can't even figure out how I feel myself?*

He paused in the open door. "You can always find me at Club Strigoi, Dani. If you ever need anything, ever want to talk, you know where I'll be." Without looking back, he walked out of her apartment.

Out of her life.

As the front door shut, Dani crumbled to the floor, quietly sobbing.

\*\*\*\*\*

He could hear her crying and it ripped his heart right out of his chest.

*That was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life,* Bram thought, turning a corner in the hallway to stand in front of the elevator doors.

*It needed to be done. You know what they say, 'if you love something you must set it free. If it comes back, it was always yours. If it doesn't, it never was.'*

"Shut, the fuck, up!" he growled, punching the wall in frustration. When he pulled his hand back, Bram saw a hole, slightly larger than his fist, just above the elevator call buttons. He pulled back his fist to hit the wall again but the elevator arrived before he could do any further damage.

Outside, he jumped into the first cab he saw and gave Club Strigoi's address, sitting back in silence, his thoughts racing. *Why did I have to tell her? I could have easily drunk her blood, and done it without her ever knowing. Then I would have been able to see how she was going to react. I'd have been able to feel my way through telling her, hinted at it, allowed her glimpses until she could handle knowing the truth.*

Arriving at the club, he practically threw his fare at the driver, restraining himself at the last moment. *Get a grip, Bram. It's not his fault you're in a pissy mood.* Stomping into the club, he looked around the room for anyone, anything he could take his aggression out on, any way to work out his frustration.

"What's your problem?" La asked, walking up to him. When he glowered at her, she chuckled. "I see someone's in a bad mood. Last night was the first night I can ever remember you not being here, and you come back in a bad mood. What happened? Wasn't it what you expected, all you hoped?"

"Nothing happened," he growled.

"That explains the bad mood. I'd be pissy too if I was sexually frustrated." Lalita joked. He knew she was only trying to lighten his mood, but it wasn't helping. "Bram, I can't help you if you don't tell me." She placed a hand on his arm.

Jerking away from La's touch, his temper flared. "Damn it, La! You can't help. No one can. Now just leave me the fuck alone. Go play with Gareth, or flirt with some other man. I don't give a damn what you do, just do it somewhere else."

"Fine." La started to walk away then stopped. Turning around, she said, "I don't know what happened, and if you don't want to talk about it fine. But you know, that doesn't mean you have the right to get bitchy with me." When he opened his mouth to apologize, she snarled, "Save it. Keep your apologies, and go fuck yourself," then stormed off.

*Damn it!* Bram growled. He strode through the club, ignoring the questioning looks that followed his dark countenance as he headed for his office. At the top of the stairs, he stuck his head into the Control Room. Seeing Duncan in front of the monitors, he walked in and wrote down Dani's address, brusquely ordering, "Send someone to this address. There's a hole in the wall on the eighth floor, right beside the elevators, that needs to be fixed. "

"Bram, things are just starting to get good down there, man," Duncan began. The other man turned and, seeing the look on Bram's face, closed his mouth. "Consider it done."

"Thank you. I'll be in my office if anything needs my attention."

"Sure thing, boss."

Leaving the room, Bram entered his office across the hall. Sitting on his desk were two discs, one of which was the disc he placed there himself just a few nights ago. He wasn't sure what would be on the other disc. Sighing, he popped them both into his computer and waited for them to load.

Fast forwarding through the first video, he stopped and pressed play when he saw him following Dani onto the dance floor. Maximizing it to cover the entire monitor screen, he stared in amazement as they began to dance together. It was just as Duncan had claimed it would be.

Even though he saw others dancing around them, everyone else seemed to fade away as they became focused on one another, to the exclusion of everyone, and everything, else. He sat there and watched them dance, amazed at Dani's aroused expression, her parted lips. He'd seen that expression on her face often enough, the last few nights, to know she'd been incredibly aroused, and he hadn't even realized it when they danced.

Closing the window with a sigh, he wondered, *do I even want to see what's on this disk?* Curiosity won the battle and he quickly pressed play. Watching the screen, as though hypnotized, his hands balled into fists as he saw them dance, bodies in sync. Dani motioned for him to lean down.

That was right before she had kissed him.

Bram closed the screen before he saw them kissing again, before he was tempted to watch any more scenes from that night...

Closing his eyes, and feeling more miserable than he'd ever believed possible, Bram sent out a silent, pain-filled scream.

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Knock. Knock. Knock.

"Go away," Dani called out, never moving off the floor. She figured that at least an hour had passed since Bram walked out, and she hadn't moved an inch. She wiped her nose on the corner of her nightshirt and cushioned her head back on her folded arms.

"Dani, it's La, open the door."

"I don't want to open the door. I want to stay huddled on the floor until I can convince myself that everything was just one gigantic twisted dream," she mumbled.

"I'm not going to let you do that, Dani. Now, open the door or you'll be searching for a new one tomorrow!"

Forcing herself to stand up, she mumbled uncomplimentary things as she slowly made her way to her front door.

"So you're one too?" she asked, looking at La.

"Gods, you look like hell! I'm one what, too?" La asked innocently.

"A...you know," she whispered.

"Ah, that explains a lot. I think it's best if we talk about this inside."

Growing suspicious, Dani narrowed her eyes when the other woman didn't push past her. "Don't you need an invitation to enter?" Crossing her arms over her chest, she stepped back further into her apartment, and away from the door. "Well...you're *not* getting one."

"I don't *need* an invitation, not really. But I was taught that it was polite to wait for one."

"And if I don't give it?"

La smiled sweetly. "Then I'll say fuck manners and walk inside anyway. Wouldn't be the first time."

"How do I know this isn't just some ploy, and you really do need an invitation?"

"I guess you're going to have to trust me."

"Fine. If it means you'll leave quicker then come on in." Dani walked over to the couch and sat down. "What exactly do you want?"

"I think you know what I'm here to talk about. Or should I say *whom*?"

Dani sighed. "I won't tell anyone that Vampires are real. I actually prefer my freedom, thank you very much. And I've heard those straight-jackets can get a tad uncomfortable. And you know, padded wall gray simply does nothing for my complexion."

"You're joking. That's good. It means you're getting past the shock. I can't imagine it was very easy for you to find out that we, so called 'mythical' creatures, were more reality than myth."

"Why exactly are you here?" Dani asked, growing angry that the woman hadn't gotten to her point yet.

"Good, good. You're progressing nicely, you've skipped over the denial and gone straight to anger."

"Tell me what you want or leave. I'm not in the mood for this shit, La."

"You know why I'm here. And I can see your mood is just as cheerful as Bram's."

"I want you to leave. Now!"

"Do you know why he told you, Dani?" La asked, ignoring the demand.

"He said he loves me. But he's insane. No one falls in love after a few days!"

"Who said he did? To the best of my knowledge you guys have been seen hanging out for at least a couple of weeks."

"And that makes a difference?" Dani asked sarcastically. She stood up and walked to her fridge to get a soda. "How much of a difference can a week or two make?" Lifting the bottle to her lips, she took a long drink and wished she had something a bit stronger on hand.

"You two have talked, right? You became friends, right?" La paused, waiting for a reaction.

Nodding, Dani never stopped drinking, it was something she did when she didn't know what else to do.

"Do you know his favorite color?"

"Black. But I think he looks better in dark green – it brings out his eyes." Catching La's knowing look, she quickly changed the subject. "But what does that have to do anything? So we got to know each other. What's the big deal that I found out about his favorite color?"

"You are about as clueless as he is." Shaking her head, La stood up. "It's getting late and I have a boyfriend to torture. I'm out of here." La walked over to Dani's desk, and, picking up a pen, wrote something down on one of the stray sheets of paper. "That is my phone number and email. Give me a call if you have any questions, or you just want to talk. I'm going to talk to Mel and see if she'll talk to you. She'd be better able to help you get over whatever it is you need to just get over." La headed for the door.

“Mel?”

“Melissa. She’s a Human as well.”

“And she knows...”

“I would hope so,” La chuckled. “Gareth is Mel’s brother.”

“How is that possible? Unless you ‘made’ him?”

“No, I didn’t change Gareth. Talk to her. Maybe you’ll feel better. I’m sure she can answer any questions that you have. I’ll call her and ask if she can meet you somewhere.” La quickly went back to the paper and wrote down something else. “She’ll be waiting for your call.”

## Chapter Eight

It took Bram a few days, but he finally managed to gain control of his erratic emotions. Keeping them tightly leashed, his expression rarely changed anymore.

"La," he said, stopping Lalita and Gareth as they entered the club. "I want to apologize. I had no right to take my anger out on you and I hope you'll forgive me."

Nodding to Gareth, she waited until he walked away before responding. "I'm listening."

"I was out of line. I can only hope that you'll forgive me."

"Bram, of all people, I think I am one of the few people that understand how it feels to be tangled up in knots because you don't know if the person you love feels the same way."

"I know..."

"You need to do something to get your mind off of her. Hey, isn't that Jake?" Bram turned around and saw a man walking toward the back room, alone.

"Yeah. I think Duncan called him. And no, I don't want to know what he's getting."

"That's fine, I'll ask him later. But for now, you are going to stand outside that room until Duncan comes out. Then you're going in."

"La, I don't want..."

"Yes, you do. It'll take your mind off of Dani and, if you don't like it, you can always take it out."

Almost an hour later, Bram sat on the table as Jake finished up.

"Given the rapid healing of the Vampire, I'd say you'll be back to normal in a few days. I'd say watch any form of fluid transfers until it's healed but for three things. First, your body isn't very susceptible to germs, and second, you have to eat. I suggest being a bit more careful for the next day or two, avoiding any more than necessary. Remember, your tongue may be a bit bruised, swollen and stiff while it tries to get used to the new piercing."

"And the other thing?" Bram asked with a slight lisp.

"Well, your saliva has healing properties. You can take that barbell out tomorrow or a hundred years from now, it's never going to fully heal; if you take it out your hole will close. As a best guess, I'd say if you ever want to change the jewelry, you have a window of maybe five minutes before you have to get repierced."

"Thanks for the warning." After paying Bram climbed off the table and left the room. As though she were waiting for him the entire time, La walked over to him a few seconds after he reentered the main portion of the club.

"So what did you get?" He stuck his tongue out and let her to inspect his piercing. "Very cool. You're going to love it!" she said, a wicked gleam in her eye.

"I hope you're right. It sure feels weird. I've already bitten down on it twice. Twice! And I just got the damn thing!"

"You'll get used to it. By this time next week, you won't even remember a time you didn't have it," she promised.

"A week!"

"Probably less time, but at least give it a week. I mean, what's the worst that could happen?"

"I could chip my fang?"

"Not likely. You know our teeth are stronger than that. Especially those teeth," La winked, flashing her own gleaming fangs. "I better get back to Gareth before he gets jealous. I wonder if I could talk him into getting his tongue done for me... I'll catch you later, Bram." Strutting away, La left him with his own thoughts.

Before he could stop himself, he wondered if Dani would like his new piercing.

Walking over to the bar, he sat down and ordered a glass of water. Lifting the goblet to his lips, he cursed as his new jewelry hit the glass, sending a wave of discomfort through his tongue.

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Dani sat in front of her computer, the ringer on her phone cut off.

The last conversation she'd had with her mother had not been pleasant, and she did not wish to repeat it. The other woman had insisted that she and Bram be present at Gina's graduation.

Her mother told her how much she wanted to show off what a great man Dani had, and hadn't wanted to hear any excuses.

With a sigh, she stared at the blank screen. Her cousin's graduation was the next day.

Standing up, she decided that since she seemed unable to concentrate enough on her writing to actually do any work, she would go shopping. She would send a gift even if she decided not to be there herself.

Going to her bedroom, she pulled on the snug black jeans that she'd bought while out with La, and one of her baggy shirts. She waited patiently for the elevator, her image mocking her as she stared into the shiny steel doors after pushing the button down to street level. "While I'm out, I'm definitely getting a few new clothes for myself," she told her reflection. Outside Dani looked around, noticing the setting sun leaving faint traces of pink highlighting the sky, and her thoughts turned to Bram.

*Dusk. Bram will be getting up soon. Maybe I should stop by the club and check on him?*

*No, a firmer voice answered back.*

*Why not? she whined. I miss him!*

*What would you tell him? What are you going to say 'oh, I just stopped by to see if you are as miserable as I am? Ok, bye.'*

*No. I'm sure I could find something to talk about, some excuse that would allow me to pop my head in and say hi...*

*You don't need to see him until you know what you want. To see him before that would just be unfair to both of you, the voice reasoned.*

"You know, one of these days I really am gonna get rid of your Jiminy Cricket ass," she mumbled to the voice as she stepped into the arriving taxi.

Twenty minutes later, as Dani walked around the mall, she knew her heart wasn't into buying a present for her cousin. She settled for a generic card and a glass figurine of a graduate, with the year engraved in gold across the bottom. Her obligatory purchase made, she walked down to her favorite clothing store.

Looking around at the baggy shirts taken her time checking out, the ones that were way too big for her, she sighed. *No. I'm not going to get back in the habit of buying big clothes. Damn it, I have nothing to be ashamed of!* As she began to leave the store her eyes caught sight of a dark green shirt. Giving in, she strolled over for a closer look, gasping at its beauty. She would have sworn that the green was the identical shade of Bram's eyes, or pretty damn close. And the picture on it...

It resembled the dragon tattoo that tempted her touch, the one covering his back. Not a perfect match, the image was still enough to make her mouth water at the image of his back that came to her mind.

*No. You aren't going to buy any more baggy clothes! No matter how beautiful...*

Ignoring the voice that reminded her of the promise made mere seconds earlier, she picked up the shirt. Taking it to the cashier, she determined that she had just found the perfect nightshirt.

\*\*\*\*\*

Entering her apartment, with her arms loaded with bags, Dani mapped out a plan for the next day. "I'll just send Gina's gift, and a small bouquet of flowers, with a messenger," she said, maneuvering the bag for her cousin onto her kitchen table. Heading straight for her bedroom, she dropped the bags to the floor and pulled item after item out of each one.

Placing her new lingerie carefully into its drawer, she tossed her older, more sensible undergarments on the floor. Moving to her closet, she threw her old clothes carelessly in a heap, smiling as she replaced them with her new ones.

Grabbing the one shirt she had purposely left on the bed, Dani left the discarded items to lay where they had fallen and headed for a hot shower. Half an hour later, she once again sat in front of the computer, wearing her green dragon shirt with a towel wrapped around her hair. Glancing through her email, she saw that her editor had written to her.

*Dani, love the story, enclosed is a contract for you to fill out and mail in. I have the perfect person lined up to do the cover; I'm sure you'll love her work!*

"Wow, that was quick! I wasn't expecting to hear back from you for at least another month. Cool." She filled out the contract then printed several copies and signed them. Placing the requisite two copies in a large yellow envelope, she addressed them and placed the sealed envelope in her 'out' box.

Ding.

*editorsrule: You there?*

Dani laughed.

*skye\_ryder: I'm here.*

*editorsrule: Did you get my email?*

*skye\_ryder: Yes ma'am. The contract has been read, printed, signed and is ready to mail. :-D*

*editorsrule: I'm sending you a file. I was thinking this would be perfect for your cover.*

Dani accepted the file transfer and waited while it downloaded. Looking over the cover, she was impressed. The person who had designed it was definitely talented.

But she prayed she could get a few minor changes made.

*skye\_ryder: It's very nice...*

*editorsrule: But?*

*skye\_ryder: That guy doesn't look a thing like my hero.*

*editorsrule: What would you change if you could?*

Staring at the picture she wondered, *Where do I even begin?* She thought for a moment then began to type.

*skye\_ryder: His chest should be a bit broader, just slightly less defined,*

*skye\_ryder: he has a six-pack, not an eight-pack. His hair is red--not brown with red highlights, and it should be just about collar length, not longer*

*skye\_ryder: His eyes should be slightly darker, his hands slightly calloused...*

*editorsrule: Uncle! ;-)*

*editorsrule: I thought it looked pretty good myself. Sounds like you have a rather good image of him set in your head, though that shouldn't surprise me after reading your manuscript! I'm surprised this novel of yours didn't set my hard drive on fire!*

Dani blushed as she read the message.

*skye\_ryder: Yes. I do. I can close my eyes and see him perfectly.*

*editorsrule: I wouldn't normally do this...but since you're one of our top authors...*

*editorsrule: why don't you contact Chalimar and see if the two of you can work on the details together.*

*skye\_ryder: Chalimar?*

*editorsrule: The wonderful lady that created the cover. I'm assuming the only problem you had was the guy?*

She looked at the picture again.

*skye\_ryder: Yes. Just a few changes on him.*

*editorsrule: brb.*

After a moment or two of silence, her editor IMed her again.

*editorsrule: ready to copy and paste?*

*skye\_ryder: Sure!*

Instead of copying the information, Dani grabbed the pad sitting next to the keyboard and wrote down the artist's name, as well her email address. After speaking with her editor for a few more minutes they said their goodbyes.

Dani brought up a blank email screen and, typing in the address, she put 'Book Cover' as the subject. She introduced herself to Chalimar, mentioning how impressed she had been with the cover that had been created for her manuscript. Then she asked if it would be possible for them to discuss a few possible changes. Ending the email with her return email address, and closing using her pen name and another compliment on the cover, Dani sent the letter and then closed her email program.

Two hours later, she was still staring at a blank page of a new Word document. Shaking her head, she closed the lid and put her laptop into standby.

"This is getting me no where fast. I'm going to bed."

Laying in her bed, her thoughts running in every direction, she got up and poured herself a glass of water. Seeing her shirt reflected in the mirror on her closet she stopped and stared at it, remembering the beauty of Bram's tattoo. The tip of one finger began to trace the dragon's outline before she forced herself to stop.

Lying back down, she closed her eyes, telling herself to go to sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Kneeling on the bed, Dani looked around the bedroom. "What am I doing alone in Bram's bed?" she wondered aloud.*

*"That's a very good question," he answered, stepping through the door. "A better one would be why aren't you naked yet?"*

*Dani shook her head. "I'm not getting undressed." Heat flooded her body when he climbed onto the bed. "Turn around," she commanded. With a smile, he did as he was told, sitting down on the bed with his bare back facing her. There in front of her was that gorgeous tattoo. She allowed her finger to trace the design of a single wing. Hearing his low hiss of pleasure, she grew bolder. Crawling closer to him, she stuck the tip of her tongue out and traced one claws, the one on his left shoulder blade. The skin beneath her tongue seemed to heat up.*

*Before she could trace anything else, he twisted and pulled her in his arms. "My turn," he growled. Ignoring her earlier comment, he pulled the shirt over her head and tossed it across the room. Turning her in his arms and standing her up between his legs, Bram began nibbling a path down her back.*

*"God, Bram," Dani moaned, arching her back. When he reached her ass, he bit down lightly on one cheek. She was so wrapped up in the sensations his mouth was causing that she didn't realize he had taken his hand off of her waist until she felt one of his long fingers sliding inside of her.*

*"You're already so wet," he murmured against her ass as his fingers moved in and out of her. "I could just eat you up, honey."*

*"Please," she began as his finger slid out of her to circle her clit.*

*"Please what?"*

*"Don't...fuck me..." Dani moaned as she felt his lips brush against the edge of her pussy.*

*"You don't want me to fuck you?" he asked, pulling back from her body.*

*"I don't want you to eat me up. I want you to fuck me. Please, Bram. I want to feel you inside me again," she admitted.*

*"Your wish is my command." Without allowing her to turn around, he pulled her down onto his lap, his cock sliding deep inside of her.*

*Her eyes closed with pleasure as he began to slowly thrust in and out of her body, his teeth still nibbling on her back.*

*"Gods, Dani, you don't know what you do to me!" Bram's hand slid over her stomach to rest between her legs. His fingers tugged on and circled her clit.*

*The orgasm built inside her, but she fought it as his thrusts began to speed up, keeping pace with his finger. She wasn't ready for them to be finished.*

*"Don't fight it, love. Come for me, Dani...come for me, honey."*

*She stopped fighting the feelings deep inside and allowed them to sweep her away. Screaming with pleasure, her entire body trembled with the force of her orgasm. She was still riding the waves of*

pleasure when she heard him call out her name as his warm come filled her. Her limbs protested when she tried to move. Instead of getting walking away from him, she fell against the soft bed.

Bram kissed her neck, and she was amazed that she didn't feel any fear. She wasn't concerned with the thought of him drinking her blood as he pressed his lips against her flesh. She heard him mumble "too bad it's just a dream" against her shoulder as he shifted his weight to the bed beside her.

"I miss you," she told him. If it is just a dream baring myself to him can't hurt me...

"Dani, you don't have to..." Whatever he was going to say was lost as he sighed. "I miss you too. More than I ever thought possible. I miss you like I'd miss my arm," he confessed.

"You scared me, Bram. One minute you're my nice normal boyfriend, the next you're a bat. Don't do that to me again."

"I won't change into a bat in front of you again," he promised, nibbling on her shoulder.

"No," she told him, pulling away. Turning to face him, she said, "Don't hide things from me."

His mouth lifted from her body. "Does this mean you're coming back to me?"

Dani felt tears in her eyes. "I want to. I really do. I wish I could just run to you now and feel safe in your arms. But there's something I have to do first..."

"How long will it take?"

"I wish I knew."

Tilting her head up, he looked into her eyes. "I'll wait for you, Dani. However long it takes, I'll wait for you."

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Just as he was about to kiss Dani, Bram heard his front door open, jerking him out of his dream.

"This better be very fucking important," he growled. Sitting up in the bed, he cursed as he looked down and saw the strands of come drying on his stomach. Grabbing his boxers, he wiped the sticky fluid off of his body, annoyed that he'd had yet another wet dream about Dani. Walking over to his dresser, he grabbed a shirt and pair of boxers. Jerking the shorts on, he made his way across the room as he pulled the shirt over his head.

*What are the odds that it's Dani, come to tell me how much she's missed me? That she's been miserable without me?*

*Keep dreaming,* a more sarcastic voice in his head said.

Opening the bedroom door, he could only stand there in total shock.

"What, no hug for your long lost brother?" the other man asked sarcastically, dropping the small bag he carried to the floor.

"Stoker, you bastard. You always did have the worst timing." Bram answered with a wide smile. "What the hell happened to your eyes?" he asked as he peered at his twin's eyes.

Stoker chuckled. "Seems a certain Sorcerer took exception to finding me in bed with his sister...and her best friend. Thankfully he was new at Magicks and simply caused my eyes to turn blue, rather than his intended body part."

Bram laughed. "Is he still in one piece?"

"Yes, I left the incompetent Human alone. Now, if his spell had succeeded..."

Bram didn't need to hear the rest of the statement to know that the Sorcerer would have paid dearly for cursing his brother. "What brings you to Oakdale?"

"You." Bram looked at his brother in confusion. "What, you didn't think I'd drop everything and come after you screamed like that? What the fuck happened? It sounded like you were being torn apart."

"I was," he said, turning away from his brother and heading for the kitchen. Getting himself a glass of water, he drank deeply.

"And? You look like you're still in one piece to me," Stoker said grumpily.

"You're not looking close enough."

"I'm tired and it's almost dawn. Why don't we quit playing guessing games and you just tell me what the hell is going on?"

"Dani."

"Who is he, and what did this Danny Bastard do to you? Did he steal your toy before you were finished with her?"

"No. Dani was my toy." Seeing the confused look on the man's face, Bram chuckled. "Dani is short for Danielle. She's more than a toy though. She owns my heart."

"Gods save me from the poet! Why would a woman want to go by a man's name? And if she's really 'your heart' then go get her! Chain her to your bed until she realizes she's gonna stay with you. There, problem solved."

"It's not that simple. I told her the truth. She needs space..."

"She's Human? What happened to you? Gods, I go off on my own for a century or two and when I come back you've turned into some kind of modern-day wimp. What happened to the Bram that would have grabbed this Dani woman by her hair and fucked her until she begged to be your woman for the rest of time?"

"He met Dani."

"She turned you into a pussy?"

"She won't be conquered. I respect her too much to try to force her to stay with me."

"So instead you're just gonna bitch and moan that she isn't with you? Yeah, that sounds much better. Much more fun than my plan, than convincing her she belongs with you."

"Damn it, Stoker, I don't want her if *she* doesn't want to be here. I don't want her with me because I forced her. I want *her* to *want* to be in my life!"

His brother shrugged. "Change her. After a century or two, she'll thank you."

"No," Bram said, shaking his head. "It doesn't work like that."

"Fine. Whatever. I'm going to sleep, it's been a long night trying to get to your ass."

Nodding, Bram watched his twin walk into the rarely used guest bedroom. As he headed back to bed himself, he hoped he would be able to fall back into that wonderful dream about Dani.

It had felt so real...

\*\*\*\*\*

As she returned home from the delivery service, Dani felt her cheeks grow warm, her pulse speed up, as she remembered her dream, and her thoughts focused on Bram.

He had been so forceful in her dream.

He had done whatever he wanted with her body, and made her love every second. She loved the way he had taken charge, the way he made her body hum like a finely tuned instrument. And the way he'd pulled away when he thought she wanted him to stop.

*But men don't act like that these days*, she thought with a sigh. Part of her secretly wished he would come to her apartment, push his way in, and spend the next few days 'convincing' her that she belonged with him.

Going straight to her computer, Dani decided to update her webpage, after she'd gone through her emails, that is. *Just because I can't seem to write anything doesn't mean I can't get any work done. Besides, anything, even such a tedious chore is better than going to Gina's graduation alone.* Reading her emails, her brow creased slightly as she saw an unfamiliar email address.

Pulling it up, she smiled as she read the email from Capricorn Productions.

*Ms. Ryder, I would be happy to schedule a time to discuss any changes necessary on your cover. I am free tomorrow night, after nine pm, if you would like to IM me. You can reach me at Capricorn\_Production01. Please let me know if this will not be a good time for you and we can reschedule.*

*-Chalimar*

*CEO, Capricorn Productions*

Hitting the reply button, Dani responded that she was free the following night, and looked forward to meeting her. After thanking Chalimar for her help, she sent the email.

Working on her webpage seemed to make time speed up. After what seemed like only a few hours of work, she glanced at the clock to discover it was after eight. Stretching as she stood up, Dani headed for the bathroom. A nice hot shower would ease the stiffness she felt in her back from being hunched over a computer more than half the day.

A knock on the door stopped her. *What the? Who...*

For a moment, she contemplated not answering it. Another glance at the clock reassured her there was no way it could be any of her family.

None of them would leave Gina's party simply to come check on her.

Walking over, she opened the door, her jaw dropping as she saw Bram casually standing there. He looked more delicious than she remembered in his black leather pants, black shirt, and dark sunglasses, and she was glad that she'd gone ahead and bought shirts that actually fit her.

"Aren't you going to invite me in?" he asked with a half smile.

## Chapter Nine

"Come in," she said, standing a little straighter. "What are you doing here, Bram? I thought you said you were going to give me some space?" She stepped aside to allow him to enter her apartment.

"Maybe I changed my mind. Maybe I decided to come help you change yours," he said huskily. "Has anyone told you how beautiful you are?"

Dani felt the blush tinting her face. It was as if Bram had known she had been thinking of him, as though he had been drawn to her by her lustful thoughts. "Yeah, I think I heard that once or twice today," she teased.

"Good, because it's true." He pulled her into his arms and tucked his face into her neck, inhaling deeply. "And you smell positively sinful."

Pushing against his chest, Dani stepped out of his arms. "What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing's wrong with me. What can I say? I see something I want, and I'm going after her."

She noticed that though he smiled, there was something predatory about it. Watching him skeptically, shrugged any weird feelings off, crediting them to her still conflicting opinion on what to do about their relationship. "What's with the sunglasses?"

"I've got a headache."

"I didn't know Vampires could *get* headaches. I can cut a few of the lights off if you'd like me to," she offered.

"That would be wonderful," he told her, sitting down on the couch as Dani walked about cutting lights off. "And we don't like to advertise the weaknesses very much. Makes us less sexy."

She could almost imagine him winking beneath the dark glasses and couldn't help grinning in response. "How's this?"

"Do you mind cutting a few more off?"

"Ok." She couldn't help wondering why he wanted all the lights turned off. When she finally headed for the couch the only illumination left in the room was from the television, and her computer screen. "Would you like to watch a movie?"

"Sure," he said, sliding closer to her as he took the dark glasses off.

"What would you like to watch?"

"Doesn't matter, pick anything."

Flipping through the channels, Dani found her favorite pirate movie on cable. "I love this movie!" Beside her Bram made a noncommittal noise as she settled back against the couch, ready to enjoy the movie. When his arm wrapped around her shoulders, she gave in to her desire and snuggled against his side.

Confusion and desire battled for supremacy, both screaming at her to do a different thing, when she felt his lips against her neck. Shifting as he lightly bit her neck the battle swayed in favor for confusion. "Bram, what are you doing?" she asked, pushing against his chest.

"Shhh, I'm watching the movie," he whispered against her skin.

Turning her head to tell him to stop, she opened her mouth only to have him devour it. His tongue thrust deep into her mouth, demanding a response.

Jerking out of his grasp, Dani slapped his face as hard as she could and jumped off the couch, backing away from the stranger, the imposter who looked exactly like the man of her dreams.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Who do you think I am, Dani?"

"You look and sound like Bram but I *know* you aren't him!"

"If I look and sound like Bram, doesn't basic logic dictate that I must *be* Bram?"

"Get the fuck out of my house," she practically screamed, backing further away as he stood with a husky chuckle.

"Be reasonable, Dani. Come here. Sit back down on the couch and we can discuss this like mature, responsible adults."

"Show me your back," she insisted, never ceasing from backing up. *Stay calm, Dani. Get to the kitchen. You just sharpened that butcher knife. A few more steps...*

The imposter shrugged and lifted his shirt, turning on the lamp beside the couch so that she could inspect his back.

*It's the same tattoo! What are the odds that two men look, and sound, exactly alike, and have the exact same tattoo on their backs? Face it, it's got to be Bram, logic told her.*

But she took another step back as her heart screamed it was someone else.

Feeling behind her back, when she bumped into the counter, Dani almost sagged with relief when she felt the knife handles brushing against her skin. Taking a chance, and hoping she would pull the right one, she grabbed one and held it in front of her.

The imposter turned back around as he pulled his shirt down and laughed. "What are you going to do to me with that?"

Darting a glance downward, Dani saw she held the serrated bread knife in her hands. *Damn.*

"It's still a knife," she told him with false bravado. "Now, get out of my house!"

"Don't you think you're overreacting a bit?" he asked, walking toward her.

"Don't make me hurt you," she threatened.

A sarcastic smile lifted his lips. "My lady, you are welcome to try!" he told her giving a half bow.

Holding the knife in front of her like a sword, she swung it at him when he got within reach.

"Ow!" he yelled. With a growl, he ripped the knife from her hands as a thin line of blood appeared on one of his forearms. "You'll pay for that," he promised in a low voice. Grabbing both of her forearms, he pulled her close.

*Think, Dani, think!* As his mouth lowered toward hers she saw the gleam of two fangs.

*Fuck thinking!*

*Fight!*

Dani twisted her body and kicked at his legs as hard as she could.

She slammed her foot down on top of his, surprised when his grip tightened as he hissed in pain. Left with no other options, she twisted to the side and bit his forearm as hard

as she could, catching him by surprise. As soon as he released her, she ran back to the knife block and grabbed the butcher knife.

Whirling to face him, she held it in front of her, her knuckles white from her firm grip.

The imposter looked at her standing there then surprised her by throwing his head back and laughing.

She didn't want to ask, but her curiosity got the best of her. "Just what is so damn funny?"

"Bram said you wouldn't be forced. Seems he knows you very well indeed."

"Who are you?" she asked again, her voice filled with confusion.

"The name's Stoker," he said, giving that same half bow. "Bram's my brother. My twin brother."

"Bram and Stoker. Your parents had one twisted sense of humor."

"You can put the knife down, Dani. I won't hurt you."

"If it's all the same to you, I think I'll keep it."

"As you wish. You can't do any damage to me with it but, if it makes you feel better..."

As much as she hated to admit it, he was right. The cut on his arm had already stopped bleeding, and she could see it healing before her eyes. Forcing herself to put the knife down, she kept a wary eye on him. "What are you doing in my apartment?"

"I came to 'change' you," he shrugged.

Dani couldn't believe he had the nerve to state it so calmly, as though he were discussing the weather, instead of telling her he'd been planning on changing her life forever!

"To change me? You mean into a..."

"Vampire, yes." Dani's temper flared. Grabbing the first thing she could reach, she threw it across the room as hard as she could.

"*That* asshole! If he wanted me changed he damn well should have had the balls to come and do it himself! How dare he send you to do it for him?"

"He didn't," Stoker said. "Nice throw, by the way." She looked over his shoulder and saw the butcher knife buried in the wall.

Her eyes widened as she registered the fact that it was sticking in the picture she had hanging up of her mom and dad, buried in her mother's chest.

"As I was saying, Bram didn't send me. He doesn't know I'm here, actually. I just got tired of hearing him whine so I figured I'd do something about it. And, if you hated *me* for changing you, that would have been fine and dandy. At least Bram would have stopped his bitching." He took a step forward.

"If you had, by some miracle, managed to change me before I knew what was going on, I still wouldn't be with Bram," she told him, taking a step back, watching him carefully since she didn't doubt *this* one would do exactly as he pleased. "It won't matter that it wasn't him that turned me. Every time I look at him, I'll see you. And hate you for taking away my choice."

"You'll get over it in a century or two..."

"No. I won't. Now I'm only gonna say this one more time. Get out of my house!" At first she didn't think he was going to listen, but he surprised her again by complying with her wishes.

Stoker paused only a step or two away from the front door, turning to face her. "You know, if my brother had to fall for a Human, at least he fell for a decent one. I look forward to getting to know you better, Dani."

Before she could form a reply, he was gone.

Staring at the knife sticking out of her mother's chest, she cursed out loud.

Walking over to the picture, she pulled it out and wondered briefly how she would explain that particular hole to her parents the next time they came over.

\*\*\*\*\*

Bram paced in his office. When he woke up, Stoker was nowhere to be found.

He'd even tried locating him using their 'link' but his twin had put up a static barrier to keep him from locating him. He would have been worried about the fact that his twin didn't seem to want him intruding but knew Stoker often sent up such shields when he went hunting. Considering some of the monsters Stoker fed off of, Bram understood the barrier.

When his brother breezed into the office, and plopped down in one of the chairs, Bram was more than a little annoyed at his blasé attitude--and he already had a bad feeling he knew where Stoker had been.

"Where were you?" he asked in a deceptively calm voice.

"I paid a little visit to your girlfriend," Stoker replied casually, propping his feet on the edge of the desk. "She's nice. I like her. You should definitely keep her."

Bram's eyes narrowed. "What. Did. You. Do?"

"Nothing. Don't worry I was nice. And there was only the one kiss."

Without warning, Bram lunged at his brother, tipping the chair over and tackling him on the floor. As his back began to swelter from the Dragon on his back, he swung his fist and felt a brief moment of joy when it connected with the other man's stomach. He was about to throw another punch when he felt flames begin to kiss his flesh.

"*They* don't like it when we fight," Stoker said calmly.

"He doesn't like you touching my woman either!"

"Relax. Do you want to see the blisters? What choice did I have? You refused to see reason. I merely went over there to change her for you."

Bram felt the flames spreading through his body. "You did what?" he roared.

"Relax. As soon as we kissed, she knew it wasn't you. I like her. She's feisty. She pulled a knife on me. Twice," he grinned.

"Good," Bram growled, feeling the fires begin to cool.

"If you weren't already in love with her, she would be mine," Stoker said confidently.

Bram growled again as the fires once more surged across his skin.

"Calm down. You know I'm not going to touch her. And yes, she's still Human. She knows you had nothing to do with my visit."

Walking around his desk, Bram sat down in his chair, careful not to lean back.

"Would you calm down already?"

"You kissed Dani! You're lucky your sorry ass hasn't burst into flames!"

"I know, believe me, I've felt it. But if you don't calm down soon, I'm gonna have to go jump in a cold shower, and I detest being cold."

Bram took a few deep breaths. "What did she say?"

"Not much. Made some small talk, cuddled a bit while we began to watch a movie, I kissed her and she demanded to know who I was, made me show her my back... You never told me she saw him."

"You never asked. Go on."

"She pulled a knife on me, she cut me, I grabbed her, she kicked me, pulled another knife, we talked, it was a misunderstanding, I left."

"What are you leaving out?"

"Nothing."

"Stoker..."

"Fine, at first she blamed you, but I made sure I got that straightened out. She'll make you a worthy mate."

Bram shook his head. "If you weren't my brother, I would kill you right now."

"If I weren't your brother, I'd be in bed right now with a very beautiful brunette."

Flames kissed Bram's back.

"By the Gods, calm down already. I'm *here*, aren't I?"

"If you weren't, even the fact that you are my brother would not have saved you."

"You are so far gone...now, where can a guy find someone to snack on around here?"

\*\*\*\*\*

Dani cleaned her apartment.

Not because it was messy but because she had to do something to get rid of the excess energy caused by the anger she still felt from the previous night's masquerade. She'd been so pissed the night before she tossed and turned all night, barely sleeping at all, and *definitely* not resting.

She didn't believe Stoker when he said Bram had no knowledge of him being there.

She couldn't believe that Bram would stoop to such levels to try to get her back.

On one hand, she was flattered. On the other, she wanted to rip his head off.

Instead, she settled on cleaning.

Keeping her ringer turned off, Dani was careful not to make any noise as she cleaned, since she had no intentions of answering her door, just in case her family tried to show up once again. By nine o'clock all she'd really managed to do was work herself into a worse mood. Turning on the computer, she took a few deep breaths to concentrate on her work.

*Deep breath in... This is about my cover.*

*Deep breath out...This is not about Bram.*

*In...I will be professional.*

*Out...I will not think about that jerk.*

She was beginning to feel slightly calmer when she received the ding that signaled the beginning of her online meeting. The two women discussed the cover for almost an hour and by the end of the meeting Chalimar had created the perfect image for her novel.

The only way it could possibly resemble Bram more would be if the woman had actually taken a picture of him!

*skye\_ryder: Thank you so much Chalimar. I appreciate your hard work. The cover is absolutely beautiful!*

*Capricorn\_Production01: Thank you. It was a pleasure working with you.*

*Capricorn\_Production01: And thank you for being so considerate in your emails.*

*skye\_ryder: It was my pleasure.*

*Capricorn\_Production01: Is there anything else I can help you with?*

Dani looked at the screen. She laughed and, before she could stop herself, her fingers were typing and quickly hit the send key.

*skye\_ryder: Not unless you have any advice on men.*

*Capricorn\_Production01: Boyfriend problems?*

*skye\_ryder: Yeah.*

*Capricorn\_Productions01: Maybe you'll feel better if you talk about it.*

*skye\_ryder: I don't want to bore you...*

*Capricorn\_Productions01: LOL. Trust me, if I wouldn't offer if I didn't want to help.*

Their conversation lasted well into the night, and the two women were well on the way to becoming fast friends. Dani told Chalimar her real name, and they were surprised to find out they both lived in Oakdale. She told the other woman about Bram, leaving out the twin disaster, and the Vampire thing, and Chalimar told her about her daughter, and Anime studio. The women exchanged their 'normal' IM names and promised to talk again soon.

Signing herself off the computer, Dani smiled. Even though she hadn't *really* talked about what was bothering her—about Bram, she did feel better having spoken to someone. Looking down at the numbers La had given her, what felt like an eternity ago, she wondered what she should do.

*Should I call this Melissa woman? Should I listen to whatever she might have to say?*

Shaking her head, she decided to put those thoughts out of her mind until she was no longer as angry with Bram—if she ever decided to forgive him. Heading for bed, she changed into her Dragon shirt before she cuddled under the blankets.

\*\*\*\*\*

A week later, found Dani stretched out on the couch.

*I could so get used to this, she thought with a smile. Her ringer and answering machine were still turned off, her editor loved the new cover, and she and Chalimar were talking every few nights. Life is good. The only thing that could make life better at this point is if I were writing my next novel. Well, that and if I could figure out what I want to do about Bram...*

*I still miss him so much, but I'm still so mad that his brother would come and try to 'change' me for him! Can I live with a Vampire? Can I deal with having a man sucking on my neck every night? One of her eyebrows cocked up. Um, why am I complaining again? she wondered as her body tingled at the memory of Bram's lips on her neck. Honestly, is giving him my blood too much to ask for, considering what he gives me in return? A slow smile spread across her face. I get a man that*

loves me, one that will yell at my family for me. One that will hold me in his arms, a man that respects my writing, one that makes me feel safe, and makes my body hum!

No, giving him a pint or so of my blood every few nights isn't too much for me to give him in return.

Ok, so, I guess it could work...but he would definitely have to agree to the no changing me until I'm ready, if I ever am ready issue. And as long as he doesn't ever take too much...

But is that all he would be getting? Would my blood be all he'd get from me?

No. He'll have my love. He'll get a woman who feels lost without him, and accepts him as he is.

Looking over at the clock, she groaned. It was almost three in the afternoon. "Plenty of time for me to get dressed really special like and hit the Club." *Maybe I'll even 'surprise' Bram...*

Climbing off the couch, she cursed under her breath at the demanding knock on her door. The only thing she could be sure of was it wouldn't be Bram...or Stoker! Opening the door, she groaned silently.

"Hi, Daddy."

"Hey, Pumpkin. Your mother sent me to pick you up for Gina's engagement party."

Dani's eyes went wide. She remembered going shopping but...

*Damn, I was so wrapped up in what was going on with me; I forgot to get the freaking engagement gift!* Groaning out loud, she told her father, "I forgot all about that! I didn't even have time to get her anything."

"We can stop on the way. Go get dressed and we'll be on our way."

Nodding her head, she walked to her bedroom. *So much for my plans. Damn it, you just had to send Daddy, didn't you, Mom?*

Opening her closet, she sighed. *So I guess this means I won't be able to wear what I wanted to...but hopefully Bram won't mind, especially if I promise to make it up to him.* Her smile returned as she pulled on a dark green camisole and a pair of her black jeans.

She'd prefer to wear a skirt for Bram.

A skirt would be much easier to get out of when they made up. But, knowing her family and their love for criticizing her, that would be a mistake.

Finally dressed, she opened the door, blushing when her dad whistled. "You look beautiful, Pumpkin. Does this new change in your wardrobe have anything to do with this Bram person your mother's been telling me all about?"

"Yes, Daddy," she admitted shyly.

"Good. It wasn't right you walking around in clothes that barely fit you. 'Course I could have handled you wearing something a little less revealing... No, don't go change, you look perfect," he said when she turned to go back into her bedroom.

A twinkle entered his eye as he nodded toward the picture hanging on the wall. "Doing a little bit of target practice?" She felt her face heat up in embarrassment and didn't have to look to know what he was talking about.

"I didn't think it was *that* noticeable..." she mumbled.

"I'm sorry, Pumpkin, what was that?" he asked, his voice teasing. One look at him told her that he'd heard exactly what she had said.

"Nothing. That was an accident. I was, um, well...suffice it to say that the picture was not my intended target." Her father raised an eyebrow. "No, Daddy, I'm not going to tell you

exactly what happened. But I will tell you that I have every intention of having it fixed. *Before Mom sees it.*"

He chuckled. "I never liked that picture of us anyway." She shook her head – only her Dad would be able to laugh about something like that. "Are you ready to go to the Lion's Den?" She nodded and followed him out of her apartment.

"I notice Mom sent you after me, this time," she mentioned casually as they walked down the hall. Luck was on their side, and the elevator doors opened the instant she pressed the button.

"You haven't been answering your phone. Your mother was worried," he said once the elevator doors closed behind them.

"Daddy..." she opened her mouth to explain, but he cut her off.

"No. Don't apologize to me. I heard all about it when your mother and Gina got home the other day. They had no business treating you like you were a child, barging in to your house like that. And I told your mother that, as well."

"I bet Mom didn't like that much."

"Hell! After hearing how she treated you I'm surprised that picture only had one hole in it. Though center of the chest was a very good shot. And, no, she didn't like hearing me tell her you're a grown woman. It's past time she stopped treating you like you were a child."

Ignoring the joking comment about the punctured picture, she smiled at her father. "You don't know how much it means to me to hear you say that."

"Danielle, you are a very smart woman. It's time you were happy. And if this Bram guy makes you happy, then he's ok by me. But that doesn't mean I still don't expect to meet him."

"I'll see what I can do, Daddy," she smiled.

"Nope, sorry, Pumpkin. You're going to have to do better than that." He looked at her and saw the sadness on her face. "Are you and your man having trouble?"

"We had a fight. I was going to go talk to him when you knocked."

"Then I'll just have to make sure they don't try to keep you there too long, won't I?" he winked.

## Chapter Ten

Dani sighed as her mother, Gina, at least five other women, and who knew how many men surrounded her.

"Where's Bram," Gina asked eagerly.

"What are you wearing?" her mother gasped.

"Are you still writing for a living?"

"Do you make much money at that?"

She forced a smile to her face. "Bram couldn't make it," she told them honestly as she looked around the sunny backyard. She tried her best to ignore the guys leering, their eyes practically glued to her cleavage.

Dani fought a wince as her Aunt Trudy joined the group.

"You know I used to have a body like that when I was your age," she laughed. "Of course my boobs were never quite that big. Have they stopped growing yet? They seem much larger than usual."

"How big are they anyway?" a guy asked.

"I bet the guys love those," a woman said in a bitchy voice.

"Since you write *those* stories, I bet you know a bunch more sexual positions than the average woman, don't you?" another guy piped in.

"Yeah, do you watch a lot of porn for 'research'?" The men's smiles grew larger and Dani felt the strong desire to take a shower.

"Really, Danielle. This is Gina's day. You shouldn't try to make yourself the center of attention like this. And surely you can afford some complete shirts. If not, you really do need to give up that hobby for a real job."

Her eyes closed as the conversation seemed to spin in circles about her body as her mother, cousin, and aunt tried to make her feel guilty about her body, her chosen career, and generally making her life miserable, as usual.

"Enough!" she finally screamed after more than ten minutes of non-stop insults. "I've had it. Your gift is on the table, Gina."

"Mom, you want to know why I don't answer my phone? Why I never come to any of the family gatherings? Take a good look around you! I didn't ask to be mobbed by people asking me how big my boobs are, or if I can recommend sexual positions! I didn't ask you to criticize my outfit, and I don't appreciate you, any of you, trying to embarrass me. And I certainly don't enjoy being leered at by a bunch of men that I wouldn't touch if you paid me!" Forcing herself to hold her head high, she walked over to her father and asked loud enough for all to hear, "Daddy, will you please take me home?" Preceding her father away from the party, she heard the murmurs about how rude she'd been and how uncalled for such a scene was.

Climbing into her father's truck, she sat there and stared out the window. "I'm impressed, you lasted fifteen whole minutes," he teased.

"Please just take me home, Daddy."

"Don't worry, sweetheart, things will die down soon."

"I don't want things to die down. I'm tired of being the family 'spanking girl'. I'm tired of being made to feel ashamed of who I am and how I look. I didn't ask for any of it! And if Mom can't learn to accept me then that's something I'm going to learn to live with, but I won't be coming back to anymore of family gatherings anytime soon. I won't be made to feel like this again."

"I understand. Just give us a call now and then—let us know everything is going o.k. Don't shut us completely out, baby girl. Someday your mother might want a way back into your life."

"I'll never shut you out, Daddy. And Mom is welcome in my life, in my home, anytime, as long as she agrees to treat me like an adult."

"That's fair enough," he nodded, pulling away from the house. "Are you sure you want me to take you home instead of to your man's house?"

"Take me home, Daddy. I need to calm down before I talk to Bram. Maybe even take a shower." Dani shuddered as she remembered the leers on the men's faces as they stared at her. They rode silently to her apartment. Her dad, sensing her mood, promised to call her soon and gave her a hug and kiss beside the truck.

She always could count on her father to know when she needed to simply be alone.

The moment she entered her apartment, Dani began to rip the clothes from her body, immediately heading for the shower. She refused to see Bram until she had mentally washed away the lecherous stares she had received at the party.

Turning the water on as hot as her body could stand, she did her best to let the comments and stares run off her body, along with the soap as it headed down the drain. When she finished scrubbing her body until it was pink, her thoughts turned to more pleasant things as she dried herself off.

Standing in front of her closet, wearing nothing but a towel, she thought of Bram. *Hmmm, she wondered as she looked at each item of clothing. Do I want to go for the "we need to talk before we jump in bed" look or "I want you to forget about everything but how much you want to have sex with me" look?*

Spying a white top, very similar to the one she had worn to her cousin's party, she knew she would wear that. *It'll show just enough skin to tease him if he still wants to be with me but, if he's changed his mind, it won't make me look desperate.* Satisfied with her decision, she began to dress, her thoughts much more pleasant than they had been when she first entered her apartment.

Walking out the door, she completely ignored the trail of clothing leading to her bathroom.

*Maybe when I get home, I'll burn them...*

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It was voices raised in an heated argument which woke Bram. All he wanted to do was roll over and go back to sleep. He felt like hell and wanted a few more hours before he was forced to be sociable.

"If you don't get your hands off of me..." Dani's voice broke through the haze and he sat upright.

"You need to leave. I've been given very specific instructions that Bram isn't to be disturbed today."

*Stoker... Bram growled.*

*What? You needed some rest. I never told the bouncers I was you. I just failed to mention to them that I wasn't.*

"I don't care what he told you. I'm not leaving until I see him! I've had to put up with more than enough pompous asses today, and my patience is running thin." He quickly climbed out of bed and pulled on a pair of boxers before heading for the door.

Opening it, he asked, "What's going on here?"

Looking around the room, he saw Stoker standing to the side, deep in the shadows, chuckling as he watched the man struggle to take Dani back upstairs.

*What's going on? Why are you just standing around watching? Why didn't you wake me up?* he asked Stoker, his tone filled with annoyance.

*What and miss the show? That woman of yours is quite amusing to watch. Poor man doesn't stand a chance if she truly loses her temper.*

"What's going on here?" Bram asked, finally capturing the attention of Dani and the man she was arguing with as he stepped forward.

"If you don't want me here, tell me to my face. Don't have of your lackeys do it. And tell your brother to get that smirk off his face before I throw another knife at him."

"Well, if you were aiming for me, and hit the wall, I don't really have anything to be afraid of, now do I?"

Bram was impressed. He'd never have guessed that either Human had seen Stoker standing in the shadows. From the look of confusion and embarrassment on the man's face, he clearly had not known anyone else was in the room.

"Keep smirking, ass wipe, and we'll find out how good my aim really is."

Turning to look at his brother, he was surprised to see him trying to contain his laughter.

Looking back at Dani, he thought, *Gods, she's beautiful when she's angry.* His appreciative gaze lingered at the skimpy white top she wore and grew jealous of the way her jeans hugged her curves like a second skin.

*Yes, she is, brother. You shall make a wonderful match.* Bram did not need to turn around to know Stoker had reentered the guest bedroom, leaving them alone.

"It's alright. Let her go."

"Yes, sir." The guy released Dani and hurriedly left the apartment.

"First you send your brother to 'change' me...then you tell your flunkies not to let me in? You know, if you didn't want to see me again, all you had to do was tell me. I can take a hint."

"I never told him that. I'll get it straightened out. So, you wanted to see me?" he asked lamely.

"Yes, you said before that you would answer any questions I had. Is the offer still good?"

*Oh. Damn, she doesn't want me; she wants my knowledge.*

"Sure," he said out loud. "Let me just go put some clothes on..."

"Actually it won't take that long."

Shrugging, he motioned for her to join him on the couch. *I dreamt of having her on my couch – but not this way...*

Dani sat down at the far end, as far as possible from him and, after a few minutes of silence, Bram asked, "So you wanted to ask me some questions?"

"Sorry, just wondering where to begin. How old are you?"

"A little over six hundred years old. Six hundred and thirty nine to be precise."

"Wow." Dani sat there and stared at him for a moment. "Um, ok, what powers do you have?"

"I can shape shift, as you saw. If there's a blood-link, I can read someone's mind and converse with them through telepathy. I have accelerated healing and can move faster than the Human eye can see...what exactly do you want to know about?"

"Just curious...I want to make sure I get everything right. Is that all you can do? I thought Vampires had more powers than that."

"No," Bram chuckled. "Those aren't all my 'powers', as you put it, but they are the ones people seem most interested in. We have almost limitless potential. The older we are the more abilities we can control."

"How do you 'change' a Human?"

"Blood transfer. Technically, we don't have to drink your blood to change you but Humans do have to have ours. Ingesting it works. I'm not sure of the specifics. But so does a blood transfusion."

"So if I were to drink your blood then boom, I'd be a Vampire? That's it?"

"No. It's not always that simple. Some Humans can be changed in one transfer. Others need a few transfers. You never know how much it's going to take to 'change' someone."

Dani nodded. "Would you ever change someone without their permission?"

"Yes." Her eyes looked as though they would bulge from her head at his admission. "I'm not a monster, Dani. If I see someone who needs help and the only way to save them would be to give them my blood, and risk changing them, then yes, I would do it."

She nodded again. "What about in a situation that wasn't quite so...drastic?"

"No. I believe in free will." He looked at her closely and saw the tension in every muscle. "I had no idea my brother went to your apartment. I would never have done that. Never agreed to it." Bram prayed she would believe him, and knew he and Stoker would be fighting again – Dragons be damned – if she didn't.

"He told you he came over to my apartment, huh?" she asked. "What else did he, uh, mention?"

"Yes, he told me. He told me everything. At least, I hope it was everything. And yes, he told me that he kissed you, and that you slapped him for it."

"Good, good... Yeah, that about covers what happened..."

After a few more minutes of silence, he asked, "Was there anything else you wanted to know?"

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Staring at him, she couldn't believe she had allowed herself to chicken out this far.

She had intended on stomping in, telling him he better not ever play games with her again and, even though they were together, she would be changed only when or if she was ready! But the incident with the guard had pissed her off.

After fighting with him, she had decided to torture Bram a bit before letting him know she wanted to get back together. Now, seeing him sitting only a few feet away, she couldn't make the words come out. *Hell, I have to sit as far away from him as possible just to make sure we have a conversation. Ok, this is it, Dani-girl. Time to spill the beans. Now... tell him now...*

She sat there, watching him.

"Was there anything else you wanted to know?" he asked.

*Really, any time now would be perfect. Just open your mouth and let the words come out.*

"I don't share," came out instead.

"You don't share what?"

"Anything. I hog the covers. No one but the repair guy is allowed to touch my computer and I don't like other people hanging all over my boyfriends," she quickly told him.

"O-k," Bram said, clearly confused.

"And I won't be shared either. I don't care if you are twins. I'm not into that kind of thing."

"I would never share the woman I love with Stoker. Not in that way."

"In what way would you share her with him?"

"We're twins. Identical. Any woman who links with me, who bonds with me, will be bonded with him. But that doesn't mean I'd share her body with him. I'm selfish, too, Dani."

Dani quickly shifted gears and switched the conversation to safer territory. "Are Bram and Stoker your real names? Your birth names, that is...I mean, come on, how hokie is that? Especially considering one of the best known authors of Vampire Fiction is Bram Stoker..."

"We were named first. Stoker is actually a fairly common name in the village we grew up in, or it was five hundred years ago. The fact that an author has the same name is purely coincidence. And, personally, I believe his novel is overrated."

"What if I never wanted to be 'changed'? Could you accept that?" she asked in a softer voice, bouncing to another subject.

"It would be hard. You'd be asking me to watch the woman I love grow old and die. But I would never force it on you."

She looked at him trying to judge his sincerity. "Does it hurt? When you drink from someone, I mean?"

"It can. But most of us try to make it as pleasurable as possible. Why?"

"Curiosity. How do you make it pleasurable?"

Bram sighed. "It helps if the person has given their consent, allowing us take our time. Distraction," Bram shrugged. "There are as many different ways as there are Vampires, maybe more."

"What would you do? On me, I mean."

Bram cocked his eyebrow questioningly, but answered her. "I would start by kissing you..."

"Show me?"

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“Dani...” Bram didn’t know what to say. *Is she deliberately trying to kill me?*

“I need to feel it if I’m going to describe it, Bram. Just think of it as research. Wait, is the link permanent?”

“No. If not used, the link will fade in a few weeks, provided I don’t drink from you again.”

“Show me,” she said, pushing her hair back and tilting her neck enticingly.

Bram slid across the couch until he sat next to her and with gentle fingers straightened her head. “Are you sure?” She nodded and his fangs lengthened at the thought of finally knowing exactly how she tasted. Closing his eyes, he prayed for the strength to survive this little game of show and tell.

He leaned forward and caressed her lips with his own, thrilling in the slight spark that coursed through his body as their lips touched. He took his time, coaxing her lips to part for him, taking care not to hurt her with his fangs, teasing her tongue with the tip of his before sliding it into her mouth.

Her tongue slid across the small ball resting on top of his tongue and she pulled back. “You got your tongue pierced?” she asked, her voice husky.

“Yeah. I wasn’t sure I’d like it at first, but now, I can’t imagine *not* having it.”

Dani nodded her head. “I like it. I’ve always wondered how it would feel to kiss someone with a tongue ring.” Before he could respond, she leaned in and kissed him again. Her tongue stroked the sharp tip of one of his elongated teeth, coaxing a moan from him. “Did I hurt you?” she asked pulling away again.

“No, quite the opposite. That felt really good. I told you, our fangs are very sensitive.”

“So, that’s, what, like another form of foreplay?” Nodding, he groaned when she got a wicked look in her eye and started kissing him again.

He wasn’t sure how but they managed to shift positions until Dani was straddling his lap, kissing him and stroking his fangs. Pulling away from the kiss, he was more than ready to bury himself deep within her. Kissing and nibbling a path from her cheek, down to her neck, he suckled the spot directly above her pulse.

His hands pulled the shirt up, exposing her body, and quickly moved behind her to unfasten her bra. Without bothering to completely remove the offending garment, he shifted it enough that he could cup her breasts in both of his hands. Teasing her nipples with his thumbs until they formed hard peaks, he began to enjoy whatever game she was playing. Unable to deny his thirst for her any longer, he sucked on her neck more forcefully, allowing his teeth to pierce her flesh.

She tasted as delicious as he’d dreamed.

Moaning, Dani arched into his erection as he drank from her. Her hands pulled him closer rather than trying to push him away.

Unbidden fragments of her thoughts came to him with her blood. He watched her pull away from Stoker, slapping his face as hard as she could. He saw his tattoo through her eyes, felt an almost irresistible urge to touch it, to trace it. Bram tried to shut the thoughts out.

He didn’t want to invade her privacy, but he couldn’t stop them. His hands paused in their teasing when he heard her saying what sounded like *‘I love you’*. Though he wasn’t finished, and far from sated, he pulled out of her and healed the wound on her neck.

"What?" he asked.

"You didn't hear me?" she asked, her eyes glazed with passion.

"What did you say?" Dani didn't answer him, but she closed her eyes, and Bram was startled when he heard her voice clearly, inside his head.

*I said 'I love you'. But if you ever play games with me again, Bram...whatever your last name is, I'll make you sorry you ever met me!*

"Drake," he told her with a smile.

"What?"

"Bram Drake, that's my full name."

"Danielle Summers," she said, introducing herself. "Now, can we go to the bedroom? I want to find out how much you missed me," she said with a wink.

Bram stopped her when she attempted to climb off of his lap. Instead he cupped her ass and stood up.

Wrapping her legs around his waist, she gave a little squeal, tightening her arms around his neck as he moved forward.

Without any hesitation, he headed for the bedroom. Taking his hand from her body only long enough to open the door, he made a beeline for the bed and set her down as gently as he could. He took off her shoes and socks, while she laid back and unfastened her jeans. Lifting her hips from the bed, he helped pull them off of her. Staring at her pussy, he licked his lips. "You know, I've been meaning to break this thing in," he said with a wink before leaning down and nibbling on her pussy.

Dani's hips rose from the bed as she gasped his name.

Slowly he spread her lips apart and circled her clit with the tip of his tongue. Sliding a finger deep inside of her pussy, he began to slowly stroke in and out of her body as he sucked her clit into his mouth. Releasing it, he said, "You make sure to tell me if it feels any different. I've heard tongue rings can be quite pleasurable."

As his mouth lowered back to her body, she screamed with pleasure, both vocally and inside his head. "Bram!" she panted. "I'm going to die if you don't fuck me!"

"I have no intentions of fucking you, honey," he told her, allowing his breath to blow across her sex. "But I will make love to you."

"Bram!"

Chuckling, he pulled his boxers off as Dani lifted her body just enough to rip her shirt and bra off. As he climbed onto the bed, her hands pulled him into her hungry embrace, her legs wrapping eagerly around his waist and guiding him closer to her dripping pussy. Sliding deep inside of her with a single thrust, he dropped his head for a kiss. Their tongues tangled as he began to move, keeping his pace slow. Making a path down to her neck, Bram once again allowed his teeth to bury themselves into her willing flesh.

His mind linked with hers and he became almost overwhelmed with the sensations created in her body. The combination of his bite, mixing with the feeling of him plunging into her, had her body already tensing with pleasure, ready to shatter into a million tiny pieces. His thrusts grew faster until they were in harmony with his mouth as he drank from her.

As her orgasm smashed through both of them, Bram felt his own body tense as his own release was ripped from his body. Feelings of pleasure and contentment merged within him until he wasn't sure who was feeling what.

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Dani lay beneath him, trembling.

"What do we do now?" she asked, not bothering to open her eyes.

"You give me a few minutes and then I'm going to continue showing you how much I missed you?"

She laughed until her sides hurt.

"You scoff at my ability to satisfy you?" he asked in a mock serious tone. "That's it, this time I'll show no mercy." Growling, he nibbled on her neck.

"No, I mean, what's in store for our Vampire hero, and the Human who loves him?"

"Simple," he said, looking into her eyes. "They ride off into the moon rise. Stopping in the first town they find, they get married and live happily ever after for the rest of their days."

"And if she decides to remain Human?"

"Then he will still love her, still desire her when she has wrinkles and her boobs are hanging around her knees."

"Promise?" Dani asked, feeling the tears in her eyes.

"I promise." Bram kissed her tears away before claiming her mouth tenderly. Lifting his head, he asked, "So, will you marry me?"

"You can read my mind, what do you think?" she teased as his hands lazily stroked her breasts.

"I'd rather hear you say it."

"Then you're going to have to continue convincing me," she said with a gasp as his mouth closed over her nipple.

"My pleasure."

## Epilogue

Dani paced inside the bedroom as she heard Bram's laughter coming from the living room. She nervously twisted both of the rings on her left ring finger as she waited to find out just what he thought of her story. She grew more nervous when the laughter ended and all she could hear was silence.

Walking toward the door, she was about to open it and demand he give her his opinion right that moment when he appeared in the doorway. "God, I don't want to know what you thought, don't tell me." She put her hands over her ears and turned away from him. "I changed my mind," she practically shouted.

Pulling her hands away from her ears, he kissed her neck. "So, this Stephen guy, I get the feeling I've seen him somewhere before," he teased her.

"See, I knew I shouldn't have agreed to let you read it! As if your ego wasn't already big enough..."

"You were totally lusting after me," he teased, nipping her lightly with his teeth.

"Bram." She tried to walk away from him but his arms were wrapped around her waist.

"Admit it, that book is just one gigantic fantasy you had about me," he whispered in her ear. "At least now I get to find out what was going on inside that beautiful head of yours all those times you looked at me and blushed."

"Fine. I admit it. Are you happy?"

"Honey, you make me happier than I've ever been." He nibbled on her shoulder just the way she liked. "Now, if I'm going to help you with inspiration for your next book, I think we need to get to work."

"Work?"

"Yep, I think it's going to take many, many hours of research for you to find a couple of fantasies that are able to top those.

Dani giggled. "Only if you promise to let me tickle your Dragon..." Bram growled in that sexy way she loved. Turning around, she began to rip off his shirt before their lips met in a torrid kiss.

"On second thought," he said, pulling away from her lips.

"Yes," she asked huskily, her hands already beginning to work their way up his back.

"On second thought, we can do research later. Right now I'd like to act out one of those fantasies with you."

"Which one?"

"The one that starts on page sixty-three."

As Bram wiggled his eyebrows, Dani's smile turned into giggles.

"You're going to have to remind me exactly which fantasy that was," she said with a wink as her hand shifted to stroke his jean covered erection.

"I thought you'd never ask."

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Upstairs, just outside of Club Strigoi, Stoker smiled as he felt the love and happiness surrounding his brother. He was happy that Bram had found a woman to love—sure that no one deserved contentment more than his twin.

His senses stirred and fire ignited in his blood as he saw a man drag a Human female around to the alley behind the club.

*No sense interrupting the newlyweds, Stoker thought with a smile as his fangs lengthened. Looks like someone just rang the supper bell.*