

Black Rose

TONI V SWEENEY

Black Rose

LOVE
AMPIRE
STYLE

Love, Vampire Style
by Toni V. Sweeney

The Wild Rose Press

www.thewildrosepress.com

Copyright ©2008 by Toni V. Sweeney

NOTICE: This eBook is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution to any person via email, floppy disk, network, print out, or any other means is a violation of International copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines and/or imprisonment. This notice overrides the Adobe Reader permissions which are erroneous. This eBook cannot be legally lent or given to others.

This eBook is displayed using 100% recycled electrons.



Distributed by Fictionwise.com

Love, Vampire Style
by Toni V. Sweeney

CONTENTS

[Dedication](#)

* * * *

Love, Vampire Style
by Toni V. Sweeney

Love, Vampire Style

by

Toni V. Sweeney

Love, Vampire Style
by Toni V. Sweeney

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Love, Vampire Style

COPYRIGHT ©

2008 by Toni V. Sweeney

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or The Wild Rose Press except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Contact Information: info@thewildrosepress.com

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

The Wild Rose Press

PO Box 708

Adams Basin, NY 14410-0706

Visit us at www.thewildrosepress.com

Publishing History

First Black Rose Edition, 2008

Published in the United States of America

Dedication

For Blake Slack, Vampyre Afficionado

and Online Friend

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

The reason behind Valerius Andriescu's sudden desire to run away from home was very simple—it was a totally childish rebellion against his brother Marius.

He'd been summoned to his brother's office, told in no uncertain terms that the head of the Clan Andriescu—and the heir to the House—had fallen in love with a human, and, obeying the Laws of their species forbidding procreation with mortals, was relinquishing continuation of the bloodline to his youngest sibling.

"I'm not ready to get married!" Val protested.

"You're nearly three hundred and twelve," Marius answered calmly. "You should have all your wild oats out of your system by now."

"What about Timon?" Val demanded, gesturing at his cousin who was leaning negligently against the opposite wall. "He's older than I. Why don't you pick on him?"

"Timon represents his father's side of the family, not ours," came the answer. "Besides, it'll probably be another century or two before he's prepared to wed." He glanced at the languid figure, adding in a mutter, "—if ever!"

Timon buffed his nails against his sleeve and smirked.

Damn it, I'm not ready! Val wanted to argue, but he knew there was no use. The Head of the House had spoken. He had to obey.

Whatever happened to spoiling the youngest? How did Timon get to be the pampered one? He had no more answer to that than he did how to get himself out of this situation. Without another word, he turned and stalked from the office,

pointing himself at the stairs, taking them three at a time—and not stopping until he was safely inside his own room.

From the recesses of his memory came something his father had once told him, "When you're older, Valeri, you'll build your own *cetate*. You'll marry, have sons, and pledge yourself and them to follow your elder brother." As the younger son, he was expected to be Marius' vassal and follow his commands when the time came.

Val knew he would've done that without question. He had never resented Marius nor been jealous of the privilege he enjoyed as the heir, but this little bombshell angered him—made him feel like a prized stallion ordered to breed—though settling down was exactly what he wanted to do. His protestations to the contrary, Val was secretly getting tired of going from one woman to another, bored with the shallow, careless sex he'd once enjoyed so, and which Timon was going to continue to enjoy.

He refused to admit this, however, because it would be giving in to his brother's inconsiderate wishes—but it was true, he wanted to find some nice vampire female and start a family, but he knew he had to be very careful in doing so. When he'd been much younger and idealistic, he'd told Timon that when he *did* marry, he intended to be faithful to his mate, not simply use her to supply himself with heirs while looking to serving maids and whores for his pleasure—his cousin had rolled on the floor with laughter at that *naivete*—but Val meant it, and if he was going to practice fidelity, he had to make certain the woman he married was one he'd love forever.

Being tied to the wrong female for eternity could be harsh punishment indeed!

I want to go home. It was such a childish thought. He wanted to be back in Carpathius, with his parents alive, to be a child again in that brief time when he, Timon, and Marius were still small, when he could crawl into his mother's lap and be hugged and made to feel safe.

Val was startled by that thought. He had always believed himself satisfied wherever they were, and the gods knew they'd certainly been enough places in the past three hundred years since being expelled from their homeland! Wandering over Italy and Spain, finding haven in Austria, going to France, then taking refuge in England, then New York, and finally, New Orleans, where he'd supposed they'd stay, but now—

All he wanted to do was huddle somewhere in the dark, seek a pair of warm arms to hug him and tell him everything would be all right. *I've got to get out of here ...* and Home was the place he was going!

Wait, can't go now—it's night here so that means it's probably day time there. He'd have to wait until tomorrow. Okay, so he'd wait—but *come sun up, I'm out of here!*

* * * *

Promptly at seven a.m., Val dragged himself from his four-poster and forced his eyes open. The windows were tightly covered so there was no chance of sunlight coming in but he could still feel the heat leaking through. He began to get ready, forcing his mind onto more pleasant things than the

deadly rays of the sun lurking on the other side of the curtains.

Silently, he dressed in jeans, T-shirt, and jacket and picked up the backpack at the foot of the bed. He'd tucked a blanket inside, to hide under in case he had calculated wrong and it was still daylight in Carpathius. He could use it to shield himself while he ran for shelter. There was also a change of clothes, on the chance he materialized in someone's compost heap or a lake—which he hoped didn't happen since he couldn't swim!

Slipping his arms through the pack's straps, Val settled it on his back and stepped to the center of the room. Briefly, he was filled with a last moment of doubt. *What if this doesn't work? Suppose I can't transport that far? What'll happen? Will the force just die out and I'll materialize in the middle of the Atlantic or something? And drop like a stone into all that salt water?*

"Here goes nothing!" Taking a deep breath, he thought of the entrance to *Castel Andriescu....*

* * * *

The floor of the foyer to the Great Room was thick with soil and bits of rock fallen from the crumbling walls, vines and creepers crawling over them. The huge double doors had collapsed, their hinges rusted into dust. One lay in the dirt, the other propped against the wall which was half-gone, destroyed by decay and the elements.

Val walked through the open archway, stopped and looked up the great travertine stairs.

The last time I stood here, the stones of the floor were stained with blood and there were bodies everywhere....

They'd been attacked by men in priestly robes, wielding swords and crosses. Val and Timon had fought beside Marius, their brother's friend Cezar alongside them.

In his imagination, Val could see his little sister, the front of her gown stained with her nursemaid's blood as she cradled Elena's head in her lap, begging her to wake up. Val had pulled the child away, and in a few moments, she was dead also, killed as she darted in front of their elder brother to save him from the arrow fired by one of the priests. Marius turned on the man, tearing out his throat—and then vanished, swept from their presence by the Prince's command. In his absence, they carried the bodies of their faithful *vanjosi* to the Andresciu crypt, honoring their loyalty by placing them alongside their own family. Then Marius had returned, shaken from his interview with His Majesty, telling them they were exiled....

He'd never said why, probably over some woman, no doubt. The Prince was a notorious womanizer and Marius had cheated him of his prey several times. Apparently, His Majesty had been cheated once too often, choosing the moment when they were attacked and weakened to pronounce his sentence.

Val started toward the stairs, only to pause as he heard footsteps outside the arch. Dropping his pack, he stepped to the side of the door, waiting to see who was there.

The person came inside—a bright-haired girl in blue jeans and a long-sleeved sweater. She stopped, saw his pack and

walked over to it and Val stepped behind her, one hand going about her waist, the other over her mouth.

With a muffled squeak against his hand, she began to struggle. He gave her a vicious shake, placing his mouth close to her ear, saying in Romanian, "What are you doing here? This is private land."

The words felt harsh and foreign in his mouth.

The next thing he knew, he was sailing over her head to land with a dust-filled crash. As the soil settled around him, the foyer blurred, seeming to spin.

When he opened his eyes again, he looked up to see the girl hovering over him in some kind of karate-like crouch, one hand extended, the other clenched into a fist. He almost expected her to yell "Yee-hah!" or something.

Groaning, he put one hand to his head. "Oh, my God! I think every bone in my back's broken!"

"Oh! I-I'm so sorry! You startled me and I—well, I guess I just reacted instinctively. Are you all right?"

He rolled over, clambering to his hands and knees, "I'd hate to see what you'd do if you planned it," and staggered to his feet, gently shrugging off the hand on his arm.

"What are you doing here?" She turned his question back at him.

He laughed a little ruefully. "So we're both trespassers? Place looks deserted to me. The owners aren't around to have us arrested, are they?"

"I doubt it." Satisfied that he was all right, she gave him a brilliant smile. "I think the owners died a long time ago."

That shook Val slightly. *Everyone thinks we're dead?*

"...although their spirits may still be around," she went on. "It's rumored that they were..." she leaned forward, her voice dropping to a stage whisper, "...*vam-peers!*"

She drawled the words with an exaggerated accent. Her English was quite good, he noted off-handedly.

"Go on!" He managed to sound incredulous when he was actually appalled. "No one believes in vampires any more—do they?"

She looked knowing. "You'd be surprised what we believe around here!"

Val laughed and held out his hand. "Val Andrews." Abruptly, he was glad he'd put on his gloves so the clan markings on his knuckles were hidden.

She shook it. Her hand was soft but her grip remarkably strong. "Aneke." She released his hand. "You're American, aren't you?"

He nodded. It was true, enough. He and the others had come to America at a time when simply taking up residence made one a citizen.

"You speak very good Romanian."

"My grandparents came from here," he lied. "They taught me."

"So, what are you doing here, Val Andrews, besides raising the dust of the ages?"

"I'm a student—" Her brows went up at that. Thinking she was making a silent comment on his age, though he still looked twenty-four, he went on defensively, "—a *graduate* student. It's the end of the semester, so I thought I'd take a little trip and play tourist before the next one begins."

"Where are you a student ... a *graduate* student?" she emphasized the words just as he had.

"Tulane—that's in the States."

She nodded. "I know—New Orleans, isn't it?" and went on without waiting for an answer, "So—why is a student from Tulane poking around a dusty old castle?"

He shrugged. "I'm a history major—I was curious to see how the Old Country looked. How about you?"

"I live nearby," she gestured vaguely in the direction of the open archway. "I often come here when I want to think. It's so quiet..."

"Yeah—eerily so," he agreed, with a dramatic little shiver.

"...and soothing."

"So—why don't we explore together?" he suggested, and flushed slightly as his stomach gave a loud rumble. "Or maybe not?" He indicated the pack. "Are you thirsty? I've got a couple of *Cokes*.... "

"I love *Coca-Cola*!" She retrieved Val's pack for him.

Sitting on the dust-covered steps, they shared the two cans.

"Cheers!" He tapped the side of his own against hers.

"To your health!"

They fell silent, drinking the dark cola.

By the time they finished, Val was startled to see the sun rising over the remains of the foyer wall.

"Is it dawn all ready?" He looked at her apologetically. "I hope I haven't gotten you into trouble, keeping you out this late."

She shrugged. "No problem. I told my father where I was going, and if he asks, I'll just tell him I met an American student and we got to talking."

"And he'll believe that?"

"He trusts me," she answered simply.

Val stood up, shouldering his pack. "Guess you'd better go now, before you've been out all night." He was a little surprised to realize that he didn't want her to leave. As she stood up, he went on quickly, "We didn't get much exploring done. Aneke, would you meet me here tomorrow night?"

"Sure," she answered so quickly, he wondered if she'd even given it thought.

With that, she turned and ran through the archway and in a few moments, disappeared from view.

Val waited until he was certain she was gone before hurriedly willing himself back to the mansion in New Orleans before the sun's rays could pour over the wall to where he stood.

As the foyer dissolved into fiery stars, he thought, *Damn, she's a pretty girl!*

* * * *

Three days had passed and Val's mornings were falling into a routine—up at seven, ready to transport in half an hour. Bathed, dressed, and getting his knapsack, he made certain the Tulane T-shirt he'd purchased after his class the night before was carefully packed inside. He hoped he bought the right size. He'd never thought much about women's sizes, and

he felt like a fool unfolding various shirts and looking at them. Finally, he picked a *Small (8-10)* and prayed it would do.

Within seconds he was standing in the Great Room foyer. Minutes later, he heard Aneke's footsteps outside. *Not a minute too soon. Better time it a little earlier from now on. Wouldn't want to appear and find her already here. That might take some explaining!*

He'd gotten to the steps and was sitting there, the pack beside him when she came through the doorway.

"Hi!"

"Hello, yourself!"

He got to his feet, catching her hands and kissing her on the cheek. She'd allowed him to do that when they'd parted the night before, so he felt free to greet her the same way. She seemed to like it, if the smile she gave him was any indication, and Val felt a warm glow center itself in his chest.

"I brought you something."

"Oooh, goody!" She made her eyes round and childlike. "What?"

Digging into the pack, he brought out the shirt, presenting it to her with a flourish. She took it, shook it open, and studied it so intently, he began to fidget. Had he committed some social gaffe? *Oh, God, of course! Once, no man should give an unmarried young woman something so intimate as a piece of clothing! The custom must still exist here, but a T-shirt couldn't be considered intimate ... could it?*

She looked at him, not seeing his inner turmoil at all. "Thank you so much, Val! Shall I try it on?"

"I-if you'd like." Was she going to strip *right here*—in front of him? Not that he wouldn't like that, he'd enjoy it, as a matter of fact, but—When she slid the shirt over her head, on top of the sweater she was wearing, he was disappointed and relieved at the same time.

"How does it look?" She posed, throwing out her chest in an exaggerated gesture.

He liked that, too. Strange, he hadn't noticed until that moment how large her breasts were. Val felt his fingers jerk slightly as if they wanted to reach out and cup them. He forced his hands to relax.

"It looks better on you than it does on me." He indicated his own shirt.

She arched an eyebrow. "Surely this isn't one of yours!"

That made him laugh. "Actually, no. To tell the truth, I bought it just for this purpose."

She gave him a doubtful look, "To give to some girl—for services rendered?" Her manner became disdainful. "I warn you—I don't put out ... especially for a University T-shirt!"

Val's mouth fell open. For just a moment, he could only make slightly stuttering sounds. Then, as he recovered, "No—Aneke, I swear, that's not what I meant ... it's supposed to be a souvenir ... you know ... from the US to Transylvania ... I swear, I never—"

"Oh, hush!" She stopped his gabbling by placing fingers on his lips. "I was teasing."

"Oh. Well." He salvaged himself by adding, "It does look good on you."

"Thank you."

"Ready?" He caught her hand.

She hung back. "You know, it looks pretty dark up there."

He rummaged through the pack again, "Not to worry. I brought a torch," and pulled out a flashlight. Flicking it on, he started up the steps, Aneke keeping pace with his long-legged stride.

"Are you sure these old steps are safe?"

"Positive," came the answer. "It's only the Great Room steps which are damaged. The roof is still in place and the outer walls protect the stairs going into the upper floors. They should be as safe as when we—"

He broke off as he realized he'd nearly said *when we were living here*.

"—when this place was inhabited."

"Maybe it still is," she put in, edging closer, and looking around at the narrow corridor.

"What's that supposed to mean?" He looked down at her, turning the flashlight in her direction. It highlighted her cheekbones, making shadows of her eyes and mouth.

"Suppose the vampires are lurking up there!" she laughed.

"Stop that!" He laughed, too. "I told you there are no such things as vampires!"

"Sure, but did anyone tell the vampires?" she retorted.

"Come on!" He pulled her up the stairs. They opened into a wide hallway with a row of doors on either side.

Val shone the light on the doors, letting it travel down the hall.

"I did a little research, last night," he said. "In a *castel* like this, the family bedchambers were on this floor. The one

above was for their personal servants and the family physician. The *vanjosi* lived in a basement under the kitchen, and the *soldats* had barracks that were reached by an underground passageway in case of attack."

He moved the light again, selecting a door.

"Let's see what's in here."

He already knew—his room. *That had been so long ago, over three centuries.*

The flashlight's beam played over the furniture, the walls, the frayed and moth-eaten tapestries.

"It's still furnished!" Aneke sounded surprised.

"You *did* say they were exiled," he pointed out. "Guess they couldn't take furniture with them, could they?"

We took nothing except a change of clothing and two coffers of money. All we could put in one caravan pulled by our best draft horses.

"Guess not," she conceded. She moved away from him, wandering around the room, peering at the mantel, both she and the high carved wood shadowy in the gloom. Stopping at one of the bookcases, she pulled out one of the books. It began to crumble under the pressure of her fingers and she hastily pushed it back into place.

Unable to resist, Val ran to the bed, dropping onto it with a bound that sent billows of dust into the air. He bounced, making more dust clouds.

"Hey!" he coughed, "this feather bed's still pretty fluffy!"

"Unh-huh—with dust bunnies!" She came over to him, dropping down beside him and adding her own energy to the motion.

"Bet the little kid who slept here had a great time jumping up and down on this big bed!" *He had*, and more than once, his mother had ordered him to stop, saying he'd make the bedstead collapse. He dropped the flashlight on the bed, sending their shadows large and misshapen upon the wall as he looked at Aneke. "Of course, I can think of better things to do on a bed than jump around—"

She stopped bouncing. "Like what?"

He didn't mean to ... just couldn't help it ... he'd had no idea or intention, but as soon as she said that, the words came out and the action followed. "Like this!"

He kissed her.

In the next instant before he could pull away, begin an apology, dodge a slap, she put her arms around his neck and returned the kiss. Then they were falling full-length onto the bed, amid little puffs of dust, rolling over to clasp each other tightly. Aneke's lips parted to accept the invasion of his tongue, her own meeting it eagerly. He slid a hand under the sweater, fingers touching warm, soft flesh....

"No!" She turned away, blurting the word.

He raised his own head, leaning back.

"What?"

A moment's silence.

"I—" Aneke began, then stopped as if expecting him to interrupt. When he didn't, she went on, "I can't. I like you, Val, but don't. Please."

He pushed away, turning to sit with his back to her, heard her sit up also, brushing dust from her sweater.

"I suppose you're going to tell me you're saving yourself?" He tried to make the words derisive. They came out as despairing.

She nodded.

"Well, *I'm* not—as is very apparent!" It was glib but the truth and he looked away. "I'm sorry, Aneke. I really am. Please don't think I'm—"

"—a typical amoral American?" She touched his shoulder and when he turned, kissed him on the cheek, "I don't, honestly," and stood up. "Come on, let's get out of here and finish our exploring!"

Val allowed himself to be pulled from the room. "Okay—on one condition."

"What's that?" She snagged the flashlight as they moved away from the bed.

"We don't go into any rooms that have beds still in usable condition!"

* * * *

Laughing like two children, they explored the *castel* until Val's watch began its steady *beep ... beep ...* and he reluctantly sent Aneke on her way. As she walked through the doorway, she looked back. "Thank you, Val, for my shirt—and...."

She stopped.

"...and...?" he prompted, smiling slightly.

"—for showing remarkable moral fortitude."

He shook his head. "Believe me, Aneke, it was very difficult." He looked serious. "I like you, you know."

"I know." She kissed him gently and this time, Val put his arms around her, hugging her tightly before he forced himself to step away from her.

"You'd better get going ... right now!" He pushed her toward the doorway.

Nodding, she started down the path.

"I'll see you tomorrow night," he called, and she turned and waved and then was lost to his view as she went past the broken wall.

Walking back to where his pack lay in the dust, he picked it up and willed himself back to his room.

* * * *

For a long time, he just stood there, staring at nothing, playing over and over in his mind what had happened. At some point, the pack slid from his shoulder to his wrist and he looked down at it, then seized it and—in a fury of despair—slammed it against the floor.

"Damn it! Why? Why did it happen?"

He was in love with Aneke ... a *human* ... and now.... He hadn't meant for it to happen, thought it would be merely a fling ... a little distraction to go along with his revisiting his home again before he obeyed his brother's command in earnest, but after tonight ... he'd actually kept himself from seducing her when what he wanted to do was strip the T-shirt and that sweater and her jeans away and throw his own clothes onto the dusty floor and make love to her in his old room, in the bed where he'd slept when he'd been a son of the *castel*.

She's a human and it can't go anywhere and I refuse to dishonor her for my own pleasure. I love her ... but I have to marry one of my own species so the bloodline can continue. Damn it ... I love Aneke!

"Master Val!" The butler's ancient fist pounded on the door, making him jump. "Are you up, lad? Your meal is getting cold."

"Be—" He had to clear his throat before he could answer for he realized it was filled ... if not with tears, then with a very good imitation. "Be there in a few moments, Zoltan. Thank you for waking me."

What am I going to do?

* * * *

"You said you wanted to see me, Marius?" Why did this have a *déjà vu* feeling about it? The words were interrupted by a wide yawn as he leaned against the desk.

"You look tired," Marius stated the obvious. Val's face was drawn, circles under his eyes, his clothes giving the impression that he'd put them on in the dark. "I wonder if there's a problem. Frankly, you look as if you haven't closed your eyes in a week."

Close enough, Val thought, blinking. Between seeing Aneke during New Orleans' daylight hours, and going to night classes, he was slowly being worn to a frazzle.

"I—I've met this girl...."

"So you decided to be sensible and start looking for prospects," Marius made it a statement, a very satisfied statement.

"No." Inwardly, Val cringed as he said that one word, then forced himself to continue. "I—She's a human...."

Marius's reaction was a little unsettling because of its intensity.

"I might have known! So you're spending your free time shagging some totally unacceptable female!"

"It's not what you think," Val began, only to have his brother interrupt.

"What I think is that you'd better spend less time in *her* bed and more in your own."

"That's unfair!"

"Is it? You're certainly not using that time to *sleep*, are you?"

"She's a *nice* girl, Marius."

"Come on, Valerius." That statement earned a scornful snort. "*A nice girl*? I know the kind of females who gravitate to you—lift their skirts if you just look at them, though as short as skirts are today, some don't even need to do that!"

Since when did you become such a prude? It was your beating the Prince out of one woman too many that got us expelled from our home, Val thought resentfully, but he knew better than to say it. "We haven't—"

"You expect me to believe that?"

A surprising flare of red swept across Val high cheekbones. "Damn it, Brother, I've only known her a few days."

"That's supposed to make a difference?" Marius allowed himself a short bark of a laugh. "You've had centuries to perfect your technique, and I've seen you in action. You can get a girl headed toward your bedroom within two minutes of

meeting her!" He stood up, tapping one finger against the desk in time with his words. "Less ... time ... with ... her...."

"You've got it wrong—"

"Have I?"

Damn it, will I never get to finish a sentence?

"I need a favor."

"What kind of favor?" came the wary question at this apparent change of subject. Where Val was concerned, Marius had learned to be careful of agreeing to anything before finding out all the particulars.

"I ... I need to skip classes for a couple of nights."

"To do what?"

For just an instant, the blue eyes avoided his. Val took a deep breath and forced himself to look at his brother.

"T-to see her ... find out where this is heading...."

"In that case, the answer's no." Marius made the refusal emphatic. "You know where it's heading. Do it on a night you don't have class. Are you *that* randy?"

"Damn it, Brother! I told you—it's not like that!"

"We had a deal, Val—you go to school four nights a week and I pay your tuition. You were the one who wanted to get a degree in this century. I'm not letting you off to see some female!" Marius was surprised that his younger brother continued to push the matter when it was obvious it was settled. "Not a *human* one, anyway."

"Look, she lives quite a way from here—" That was an understatement. "—and she drives down to see me. I don't like her going home in the dark—and I'm certain her father doesn't, either."

"This is a first." Seeing that he was genuinely serious, Marius decided to get in a few digs. "*You*—caring about someone other than yourself? Must be quite some young woman!"

"I think she is," he answered. "Like I said, I just meet her, but—I *like* her, Marius."

That one sentence was delivered in the most plaintive tone he'd had ever heard. "Then you can see her on your nights off. In fact, see her and break it off. If she's human, it can't go anywhere anyway."

As far as Marius was concerned, that ended the conversation. He was startled when he saw Val's mouth set itself into a stubborn line.

"All right—you leave me no choice." Lifting his right hand, he clenched it into a fist and brought it to his mouth—the gesture of a suppliant to his *ghidaj*. Val took a deep breath and closed his eyes briefly, as if steeling himself for something unpleasant. When he opened them, he moved his fist away from his mouth and held it out to his brother.

"Marius, I've never asked you for anything, but now, I'm begging you." His voice changed, becoming more formal, the words archaic and entreating but clipped with anger. "Master, I've pledged my loyalty and obedience to you ... forever ... I beg you, grant your vassal's plea. Give me these few days ... please."

Marius didn't answer. For a moment, he was shocked into silence to hear his brother lapse into the formal request of a *devotat* to his liege. *He's serious! What's going on?*

Expression stern, he got up, coming around the desk to stand before his brother. Though Val met his gaze, he looked as if he wanted to run away somewhere and hide. He was further startled to see the color slowly drain from his face.

"Just two nights, *Ghidaj* ... then I'll break it off ... s-she's *special* ... *I don't want to hurt her*. Please."

Marius didn't answer. Raising his own hand, he extended it toward Val's, stopping just before touching the outstretched fist. If he struck the hand aside, it meant the plea was refused. From Val's expression, he knew that was what he expected.

The boy bit his lip.

Marius placed his hand over Val's, giving it a quick squeeze. The color flooded back into his brother's narrow face so quickly, he thought he might faint but Val inhaled, almost a gasp, and remained upright.

"Two nights." Marius made his voice stern, no exceptions to the *Ghidaj's* granting.

Val brought his brother's hand to his mouth, kissing the tattooed knuckles. "Thank you, Master."

In that moment, Marius wanted to put his arms around his little brother, hug him tightly as he had when Val was a child. Instead, he said, curtly, "Get to class."

Nodding, Val disappeared through the doorway and Marius went back to his desk.

My God, this must really be some woman for Val to demean himself by begging like that. For his brother to do such a thing meant he actually felt something other than lust

for this girl whoever she was—even if she was human.
Perhaps, he thought, he's at last beginning to mature.

* * * *

It was eight a.m., and Val had delayed his departure for an hour.

Maybe I should just take the coward's way out and not show up. I can't do that. I've never chickened out of anything—didn't I fight beside Marius when the castle was attacked? Didn't I step in and take over when he was away in that ridiculous World War? I was ghidaj all the time he was fighting with the Underground in France. Damn it, I'm not going to turn tail and run now!

That little speech didn't help a bit. He didn't want to lose Aneke, but—Hell!—what the fuck was he supposed to do? *She's human and I can't marry her and that's all there is to it. It's up to me to keep our father's bloodline alive. Damn it!*

No matter what he thought, it always came back to that one thing.

I could lie, say I was just having fun at her expense ... that I have a girl back home ... No! I-I'll just say that my vacation's over and it's time for school to start. She'll probably want to write me but I'll suggest that wouldn't be such a good idea ... I'll come back, ask the Louisiana Sector Chief to introduce me to someone ... maybe his daughter—yeah, we got along okay....

Closing his eyes to blot out the starry pinwheels, he willed himself into the Great Room foyer....

* * * *

...and landed right in front of Aneke.

With a little scream, she staggered backward, caught herself and stared at him. "V-Val? W-what did you come from?"

"Damn it!" He made an angry gesture, stopping as she took another step away. "I'm sorry you saw that, Aneke, but maybe it's the best way. Now I won't have to tell you lies."

"Lies about what? I don't understand. D-didn't you just...." She was acting just as freaked out as he thought she should after seeing someone appear out of thin air.

Bracing himself, he blurted, "Aneke, I can't see you any more!"

"So you just planned to materialize, say, *Sorry, it's over*, and disappear? Well, thank you very much! You Americans certainly are lacking in manners!" Suddenly, she looked a little less upset. "You *did* materialize—didn't you?"

When he didn't answer, she went on, angrily, "You said something about a lie. If you've got something to say—say it!"

"*That* doesn't matter. What does—" He didn't stop to think, wasn't going to give himself time to back out, just stripped off his gloves, tossing them to the dusty floor.

"—is *this*, for one thing!"

He waved one hand in front of her. She caught it, staring at his knuckles.

"Y-you've got tattoos...." Her voice trailed away. She looked up at him, the color fading from her face.

"Pretty barbaric, huh? Well—that ain't the half of it! Remember the family who lived here—the Andriescu?" An emotion he couldn't name fluttered across her face. "How do I know their name? Because I'm one of them! Yeah—that's right, *I'm Valerius Andriescu!*"

She took a step backward, shaking her head, eyes huge. Thinking she was about to run away, he caught her arm, fingers biting into her skin and pulled her toward him. "Don't leave, Aneke, not yet. There's more ... Listen to all of it and then, you can run away screaming! That old tale about the Andriescu being vampires? It's true. I'm a vampire—how about that, huh? A vampire loves you!"

The last words were almost hissed as his emotional turmoil made his fangs drop, grazing his lower lip. Val felt blood drip down his chin. He reached up to touch it, dodging as Aneke pushed his hand away, her fingers smearing the bright drops.

"Oh, my God—if only I'd known!" Her eyes weren't filled with horror, as he'd expected. They were—Were they smiling? *What the Hell's going on?* She looks *happy!*

Suddenly, he was fed up with the whole thing, of having to tell this girl he loved who and what he was, being forced to give her up, to leave here and go back home and marry someone else, wanting to sleep with no one else, have sex with no one else, have children with no one else but Aneke....

"God damn it! I don't even know your last name!"

"It's Abruia ... Aneke Abruia!" She threw her arms around him and kissed him, barely giving him time to retract his fangs, felt them clip his own tongue as they slid upwards. He allowed himself to savor the pain—at least that was *real*—

then tried to pull away as she licked at his lip. That sent a lightning bolt of lust through his belly.

"Oh—to Hell with it!" All his good intentions went out the archway. He scooped her into his arms and dashed up the stairs, not stopping until he reached his old room. Kicking the door shut, he deposited her on the bed and threw himself beside her. It took all of two minutes for them to get out of their clothes.

"*Nurliu.*" He didn't realize he'd spoken in Romanian. *Dear one.* He pressed his mouth against hers, and the taste of his own blood on her lips added more fuel to the sudden desire in his belly.

Nuzzling her shoulder, he breathed in her sweet womanly fragrance, nibbling along her collar bone and up her throat to claim her lips again. She clung to him, seeming not to breathe as one hand lingered against her breast, then strayed lower, finger-walking across her belly, until it found its way to the golden curls, delving into the soft cleft.

Aneke moaned softly, all her former protestations forgotten, body rising to press against his hand. He teased gently. The moans increased to a long, soft murmur. Val's fingers sank deeper, then withdrew. *What the Hell am I doing?* He forced himself to make a last-ditch effort at sanity. Had to say he *tried*, anyway. "I can stop ... you said you were saving...."

"I am—for *you*!"

Winding her hands into his hair, she pulled his head down. Her mouth fastened on his, catching his tongue between her lips and sucking on it as her body moved slightly, thighs

parting to allow him to roll between them. He was startled at how quickly he became aroused, her touch making his flesh stiffen, sending lighting-throbs of pain through his entire body—*how much longer could he wait? Now, now!* Grunting with the effort, suddenly mindless except for the desire to possess this female ... *his female* ... he drove into her.

She turned her head, one hand pressed against her mouth.

He couldn't believe her body could receive him but somehow it had and now, he was entrapped in that tight dark tunnel of flesh, held prisoner while its heat inflamed him. Back arching, she drove her body upward against his, sending them both into a frenzy of mindless movement.

He wasn't prepared for the force with which his body overflowed into hers, startled as it spasmed, leaving him gasping for breath. Her body seemed to constrict, coiling about him, imprisoning him within her.

With a groan, Val collapsed against her as the last drop was wrung from him. He was drained, a dry husk, unable to move.

He was surprised when he felt her hands gently caress his shoulders, and a soft kiss pressed against his neck. He forced himself to roll away, lying beside her on the dusty, ancient down mattress.

She seized his hand, clutching it tightly against her breast, kissing his fingers.

"I suppose I should be repentant for what I just did, but I'm not ... if you aren't." He turned his head to look at her, seeing only a dim feminine outline in the shadow of the bed's dusty hangings. "Are you, Aneke?"

Suddenly, it was important that she have no regrets for what they'd done—especially if they never saw each other again.

Outside in the corridor, there was a sound like rushing wind and the clack of footsteps on the travertine.

Val sat up. "What's that?"

That sound—it was almost like ... the echo of a vampire's manifestation. Who—?

Pulling his hand from Aneke's, he slid off the bed, groping for his jeans. "Get dressed, *Nurliu*," it was whispered to her.

As he pulled up the denims, snapping and zipping them, he heard movement behind him, knew she was wriggling into her own jeans and sweater. In a moment he heard her step from the bed.

The footsteps were coming nearer, the tap of heels on the stone floor. Still barefoot, Val tiptoed toward the door, Aneke following silently behind him. He put out a hand to keep her back. She seized it and squeezed it tightly.

Holding a finger to his lips, he reached out and seized the ruined brass handle, and was nearly knocked down as the man on the other side pushed on the door with all his strength. Val stumbled backward, nearly falling over Aneke in his attempt to keep his balance.

"Care to tell me what's going on here?" The question was delivered in a voice that held the *Sound of Doom* ... but was uncomfortably *familiar*....

Placing himself protectively in front of Aneke, Val stared at the tall, blond man standing in the doorway. He blinked, certain the dim light was playing tricks with his eyes.

"Cezar?" *It is!* He stared at his brother's best friend.

"Val? Or is it Timon ... I never could tell you two apart!"

"I'm Val!" The words were snapped at him, his composure suddenly shot to Hell by this new turn of events.

"What are you doing here?" Cezar demanded.

"I might ask you the same thing!" He turned to look at Aneke whose expression was alternating between shock and guilt, "Aneke ... Aneke ... Abruia," and back at Cezar. "She's your daughter, isn't she?"

"Yes, and I don't think I like what I believe just happened." Apparently Cezar the womanizer had turned into a concerned father somewhere in the last three hundred years. "This isn't the kind of behavior I'll allow anyone to take with my daughter—not even the brother of my closest friend." He fixed Aneke with a stern gaze. "I thought you were coming here to say goodbye to that boy you've been meeting."

She didn't answer.

"Perhaps you'd better explain yourself, Val!" The hazel eyes turned to stab into him. "Perhaps you'd better find the rest of your clothing. *Right now!*"

Scurrying to the bed, Val picked up his sweatshirt and slid it over his head. As he straightened, he began to laugh.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing! Not a damned thing! Everything's all right, Cezar—more than all right! Oh God, it can't get any better!" He knew he wasn't making any sense but the words seemed to come spilling out.

"What the Hell are you babbling about?" Cezar seized him, shaking him slightly. "Aneke, is this young libertine the American student you told me about?"

She nodded. "Yes, Papa," and burst into tears. Cezar looked back at Val, who was now laughing uncontrollably.

"Has the world gone mad? Young man, this is no laughing matter! Someone give me a straight answer!"

Taking a deep breath, he forced himself to stop laughing. He stepped away from Cezar, cleared his throat and made a sweeping, very old-fashioned and very formal bow, brought his fist to his mouth and held it out before him.

"Cezar Abruia, since you almost caught us in a compromising position, I have no choice but to formally state that I, Valerius Andriescu—" Aneke had stopped crying, was staring at him in total confusion. "—I love your daughter, and wish to marry her. Further, I won't take her away but will petition the Prince to allow me to return to Carpathius. I'll reopen the *castel*, rebuild it...."

"I don't think that's such a good idea," Cezar interrupted. "I doubt he'll let you. He especially doesn't want Marius coming back here. He's been doing pretty well with the females since your brother was exiled!"

"If his argument is with Marius, there shouldn't be any problem." The rest of the betrothal speech was forgotten. "I mean—I was condemned by association. Surely, if he sees that I intend to adhere to the *Law* and—"

"Who am I to question our Prince?" Cezar shook his head. "No, Val, you can't live here. You'll take my daughter to the States. You'll be wed and live there."

Val nodded, deciding it was time to start agreeing with—and not annoying—his future father-in-law.

He gestured impatiently, and Cezar looked at the outstretched fist.

"Oh, right...." He placed his hand over it, saying quickly, "Permission to marry my daughter granted," then added, "if Marius agrees."

"Why shouldn't he? You're his best friend. Why wouldn't he want our houses joined?"

"Marius's been in America for over two hundred years. How do I know what his thinking is now? They're a bunch of rabid reactionaries over there. If he does agree, I'll come to New Orleans for the ritual. I'll—" He paused as he thought of something. "Aneke said she's been seeing you every night. Where have you been staying? The closest inn is in Transylvania, almost a hundred miles from here. That's quite far to transport twice a night."

Val took a deep breath. "I've been transporting farther than a hundred miles...."

* * * *

He returned to New Orleans just as the sun was directly overhead, beating down on the mansion with noontime splendor, heat radiating from the roof and gleaming off the white stones of the driveway.

Strange, this was the first time he hadn't felt exhausted. Instead, it was almost as if he were awakening from a full day's sleep, the settling of his anxiety over Aneke somehow renewing his energy, giving him a surprising vitality.

Unlocking his door, he threw it open with such force that it rebounded against the wall. He ran down the hallway, pounding first on Marius's door, then on Timon's.

"Timon! Marius! Get up! I need to talk to you!"

Timon was the first to appear, barefoot and clad only in a hastily-thrown on pair of jeans, his belly pale and flat above the unbelted and halfway-unzipped denim. It took Marius a little longer to wake. His door was jerked open with controlled violence to reveal him standing, tousle-haired and blinking, hastily wrapping his robe around his bare body.

"What is it that can't wait until tonight?"

"The fact that I want your permission to marry that girl I met!"

That woke him completely. "I thought you were breaking up with her. Isn't she human?"

"She's one of us, Marius—she's Aneke Abruia, Cezar's daughter, and I want to marry her—as soon as possible!"

"Since when has Cezar allowed his only daughter to come to the States?"

"He didn't. I transported to Carpathius—I know it was childish but I just had to get away from you for a while!"

He was fairly dancing in the corridor now, fidgeting with impatience as he looked at his brother.

Marius shook his head. "I must still be asleep. It sounded like you said—"

"He did," Timon broke in, his words interrupted by a wide yawn. "For God's sake, Marius, tell him he can marry Cezar's daughter so we can get back to sleep! You can argue with him about transporting or anything else you want later!"

He turned and staggered back into his room, sliding down his jeans. "Damn younger cousins, anyway! Always in a sweat over some female or other!"

The last Val saw of his cousin was a pale backside disappearing into the gloom before the door swung shut.

"He's right," Marius said. "We'll talk about this later, after the sun goes down."

"But—"

He leaned forward, peering at Val's lower lip. "Is that blood?"

Hastily, Val touched his mouth. *Damn it, that looks so guilty!* "Yes," he made the one word as defiant as possible. "It is. So?"

"Did she bite you?" Was that a sudden leer in his brother's eye?

"No." Val refused to be baited. "I bit myself."

The look Marius gave him did everything but accuse him of telling such an insolent lie. It also shook his brother out of his sleepiness momentarily. "Cezar isn't going to come after you with his blunderbuss, is he?"

"He'd probably use a Walther PPK with a silencer," Val said dryly. The lateness of the hour and his lack of sleep was making him into a smart ass, but—damn it—at this point, he didn't care.

Marius sighed. "Okay, that's it! I'm going back to bed. We'll continue this conversation tonight." He turned and walked back into his room, reaching for the door handle. "Perhaps by then, you'll remember to be civil!"

He shut the door.

Val stood there for a total of one second before smacking the oak surface with his fist. "Marius!"

"The master of the house isn't in!" came muffled through the thick wood. "Please leave a message after the beep!"

"Marius! Damn it, I want this settled right now. I can't wait until tonight!"

"Yes ... you ... can!"

Val hit the door one more time. There was no answer. He stood there a moment longer, then stalked back to his own room, stamping as loud as he could.

Slamming the door, he kicked off his Reeboks, "Damn it ... just because he's *ghidaj*..." ripped off the T-shirt, slinging it to the floor, "...thinks he can be so damned casual about my feelings..." and unzipped his jeans, "...better be nicer to the person perpetuating the family line...." and tossed them at a chair.

They missed, falling near the hearth, which was, miraculously, cold at that particular moment, not that Val would've minded if they'd gone up in flames.

He aimed himself at the bed, landing in its center, arms and legs spread, face down, slowly sinking into its softness, "...Aneke...." and dissolved into unconsciousness.

* * * *

The wedding took place two weeks later, a formal affair, filled with the rituals of their species. Afterward, as the newlyweds performed their first dance together, the two old friends, now in-laws, lingered near the punch table, nursing dark wine in beautifully-cut lead crystal goblets.

"He makes a handsome groom," Cezar noted.

"And Aneke makes a beautiful bride," Marius agreed.

They fell silent, both sipping the crimson liquid.

At last, Cezar said, "It was a very desperate scheme, old friend."

Marius nodded.

"Good thing you contacted me when you did, that's all I've got to say. I really wasn't certain the young man Aneke said she was meeting was Val, even told her to send him away."

"Still, it worked, didn't it?" Marius looked satisfied. "My giving Val an ultimatum made him do just what I expected. The boy's so predictable it's pitiful! Actually, your mentioning to me last time we talked, that Aneke had taken to exploring the ruins of our *castel* put the idea into my head...."

"How did you know he'd come back to Carpathius?"

"Every time we have an argument, he threatens to do just that. I was certain that something this important would be the thing to make him finally do it."

"But if he hadn't...?" Cezar persisted.

"Then, I would've ask you to send Aneke here and arranged a meeting somehow."

"I don't suppose it ever occurred to you to just tell him, 'Val, Father wanted you and Aneke Abruia to wed?'"

"My younger brother has never been one to do anything if just *told* to, Cezar. He always does the opposite."

"So we both took a chance, and as Fate would allow, things worked out just as we hoped—and your father's wish that our two houses be united through marriage has been granted."

"Strange, when he told us, I'd always assumed he meant either you or I were to be the ones."

"Pity your little sister was killed. I'd gladly have married her. I remember she was a pleasant little lady."

"And it's a further pity you had Aneke so late in life, else . . . might have become your son-in-law instead of Val!"

"Perish the thought!" Cezar shuddered dramatically.

"Here's to schemes and happy endings!" Marius held out his goblet.

"Hear, hear!" Cezar tapped his own against it and they began to laugh as they looked once more at the two youngsters dancing in the center of the ballroom.

"What do you suppose they're laughing about?" Aneke wondered as her bridegroom whirled her around.

"Who knows?" Val wasn't the least interested in his brother or his father-in-law at the moment. "Those two are always planning something.... or reliving Old Times. You know how they get when they're in their cups ... practically maudlin! We'll probably hear all about it ... some day!"

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Love, Vampire Style
by Toni V. Sweeney

Thank you for purchasing this Wild Rose Press publication.
For other wonderful stories of romance, please visit our on-line bookstore at www.thewildrosepress.com.

For questions or more information contact us at
info@thewildrosepress.com.

The Wild Rose Press

www.TheWildRosePress.com

If you are connected to the Internet, take a moment to rate this eBook by going back to your bookshelf at www.fictionwise.com.