

A romantic couple is shown from behind, embracing each other. The man has short blonde hair, and the woman has long brown hair. They are positioned in the foreground, with a city skyline at night in the background. One of the buildings in the skyline features a large, illuminated Christmas tree. The scene is decorated with a dense overlay of colorful, out-of-focus lights in blue, red, and gold, creating a festive, holiday atmosphere.

STEPHANI
HECHT

BLOOD AND
HOLLY

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Blood and Holly
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Published by eXtasy Books
Look for us online at:
www.extasybooks.com

Blood and Holly

By

Stephani Hecht

Dedication

*To Mom and Dad. You have always believed in
me.*

Dante was blood starved, edgy and horny. Not a good combo to begin with, yet when you added fear to the mix, it went from bad to you-gotta-be-kidding-me. Damn the nightmares and the memories they always brought with them. Fuuuuuuk...this was the last thing he needed. Whenever he got this bad, it usually ended with him strapped to a gurney screaming as their vampire clan doctor injected sedatives into him.

Not exactly the way he wanted to spend his Christmas Eve.

The vampire sat up in bed and ran shaking hands through his inky black hair. His breaths came out ragged and hard as a cold sweat broke out over his body. He inhaled deep, hoping to bring in the comforting smells of the vampire clan he and his brothers had taken refuge in two months ago. Instead all he smelled was dirt, fear, puss and death. The cloying scent of the paranormal prison he'd spent ten years of his life rotting away in.

You're not there anymore. You're free. He told himself as he tried to calm his racing heart. Damn it, he needed to get a grip. His brothers Kane and Rafe had been in that prison, too, yet neither one

of them had the same issues he did. *You're weak is why. A loser who has only his skills in battle and bed to offer.*

A growl rumbled deep in his chest as he felt the dark side of him fight for control. He fought it, knowing he couldn't afford to have yet another one of his *episodes* and not just because of the holidays. The leader of the clan, Eric had already told him one more trip to the rubber room and he would be grounded from his duties as a soldier. Dante needed to be able to go out on patrols. The only times he ever felt alive anymore was when he was fighting or fucking.

How sad was that?

Waving away a sigh of self-pity, he got out of bed because he knew he would find no more rest. Past history had told him when he had one nightmare, another always followed. Then another and another and another.

Since he didn't want to wake Rafe who was asleep in the next bed over and face unwanted questions, Dante used the thin light slipping in from the closed door to move around the room. He put on the first set of clothes he found, a pair of gray sweats and white t-shirt Rafe had worn the day before. Dante's nose wrinkled, usually he wouldn't be caught dead in something like this, but it wasn't like there would be anyone around to see him. The sun was still up so all the other

vampires in the clan were sound asleep.

That was fine by Dante. It would give him a chance to slip to the large kitchen, snag himself a bag of blood and get his shit together before anyone spotted him. He padded barefoot down the long hallway. Along the way, he passed several closed doors, many of which he'd spent time on the other side of enjoying the company of vampires of both sexes.

All of it, every second of every encounter, had meant nothing in the end. After the sex and blood high had worn down, he always found himself the same. Alone, lying awake in his bed night after night, with just his pillow and Rafe's snores to keep him company.

He could very easily knock on any one of them and find a willing answer to his primal needs. His body was screaming at him to do just that. But he was sick of it all. Sick of being the clan slut. Sick of hard fast encounters without an ounce of tenderness to them. Sick of not having something that actually meant something.

No, he would just go get his blood and for once be a good little vampire. It would be a new role for him, but he was pretty sure he could fake it. He let out a loud yawn as he entered the brightly light cafeteria.

It was deserted, just as he expected, save for the table closest to the double kitchen doors in which

a lone male vampire sat reading what looked like a crime novel. Despite his wish for solitude, Dante smiled. It was Markus, one of the few vampires who really truly knew Dante inside out and didn't judge him for it.

The vampire's head was bent over, deep into whatever the pages held and he didn't seem to notice he was no longer alone. He was dressed in the Drone clan soldier uniform of dark cargo pants, matching long sleeved top and heavy military boots. Even though Markus kept his dark blond hair almost regulation short, it was a bit longer in the front, allowing for a lock to fall over his brown eyes.

"Are you going to stand there all night checking me out or are you planning on saying something?" Markus asked, a smile playing on his full lips.

He didn't look up, but Dante could still detect the twinkle in his eyes. "You know I love checking you out. It's my favorite hobby," he teased back because he knew that was expected of him. An ache built in his chest as he wondered what his friend would say if he knew just how much time Dante did check him out on the sly. But Markus had never shown any interest in Dante in that way. That was if one didn't count those few times Markus's control had slipped and, for a brief moment, there had been desire in his eyes, too.

Unless Dante had just imagined those fleeting times because he wanted it so bad.

Markus finally glanced up from his book, the teasing smile sliding off his face to be replaced with concern. "You look like hell."

"I love you, too." Time to change subject, fast before Markus noticed how tweaked he was. "What are you doing up this time of day?"

"I had guard duty. What's your excuse?"

When Dante shrugged and displayed a very uncharacteristic silence, Markus kept up with the zingers.

"You had insomnia so you decided to cure it by parading around in Rafe's stinky clothes?"

Dante pulled up the front of the offending shirt and sniffed. While it didn't exactly stink, it didn't smell like roses either. "I was just hankering for a mid-day snack."

"Bullshit. You're having nightmares, aren't you?"

The glare Markus drilled in his direction was way too knowing for Dante's comfort. He'd die before he showed it though. Brief bouts of madness aside, he hid his emotions behind a carefully constructed brick wall of cocky arrogance and smartass remarks. "What makes you think I have nightmares?" Dante shrugged and went to shove his hands in his pockets only to realize that Rafe's sweats didn't have any.

"I don't think it, I know it." Markus shut his book, got up from the table and slowly walked over until they were inches apart.

Dante focused on a chair in the farthest corner so he didn't have to meet Markus's gaze. He thought about lying again, but then dismissed the idea. Markus would see right through it. "They're nothing to worry about, just brief flashbacks." Dante nearly jumped a mile when a warm, long finger caught him under the chin and urged him to look up. He couldn't believe Markus was touching him. What's more, he couldn't believe the emotions that were ripping through him at said touch. Suddenly he was glad his borrowed pants were loose in the front. The last thing either one of them needed was for his suddenly raging erection to become an issue.

"I have them every night, too," Markus confessed. "And I was only in that hellhole a year. I can only imagine how bad it must have been to have been in there ten years."

Dante wanted to respond, but found himself caught like a deer in headlights, locked into place by Markus's warm, caring gaze. The heat coming from Markus's body made Dante want to explore the hard muscles with his fingers and then his tongue. Gods knew Dante had dreamed of doing that more than once. A thrill went through him when Markus made no move to drop his hand. It

was all Dante could do not to lean more into his touch. "Don't tell my brothers about the nightmares," Dante finally said, breaking the moment. "They have enough to worry about without adding my troubles to it."

Markus caressed Dante's face with the pad of his thumb.

Damn it. He has no idea he's teasing a bulldog with a broken chain. Any second now, I'm going to lunge and attack him.

"You look pale," Markus observed. "You need to feed."

Instantly, Dante's gaze was drawn to his friend's jugular. The fluttering pulse there seemed to taunt him. Without meaning to, Dante leaned in closer and sniffed. A soft moan slipped out as the sweet scent of Markus's blood hit him like a ton of bricks. His fangs grew in response, just like his cock had earlier. So close. So tempting. All he had to do was move those last couple of inches and he could sink his fangs into the other vampire's soft flesh "Are you volunteering yourself up to be my donor?" The question came out slightly slurred because Dante's fangs were so huge now, he couldn't have shut his mouth if he'd wanted to. He closed his eyes and savored, no drank in, Markus's touch.

"Maybe I am."

Dante's cock jumped at that whispered

declaration. He opened his eyes, half expecting to see that familiar teasing glint in Markus's eyes, what he found instead were his lips just inches away from his mouth. They were both around the same height so it was a perfect fit. "You shouldn't tease and make offers you don't intend to keep. You have no idea what you could let loose."

"I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm helping out someone in need, someone I care about."

"Helping?" Dante echoed thoughtfully, cocking his head to the side. He reached out and *accidentally* brushed his hand against Markus's cock. Sweet fuck, it was hard. "Is that just what it will be to you?" He grazed the erection again with the back of his knuckles and Markus sucked in a breath. "You start toeing that line and there will be no going back. I don't do things halfway."

Dante knew he had him when Markus licked his lips. The other vampire's fangs were longer, too, showing he was close to full blood lust. After all these years of wondering, he would finally know what his friend's mouth tasted like, how it felt to touch him, the thrill of biting him in the neck and taking in his life force. He closed his eyes, leaned forward and —

Several large thumps, then a soft feminine gasp interrupted them. "Oh my, gosh!"

It scared the hell out of him so much that Dante jumped and crouched into a fighting position.

The clan physician, Dahlia had dropped several heavy files as she burst her way through the kitchen doors. Not even sparing the males a glance, she bent over at the waist to pick them up, but the doors came swinging back and hit her finely shaped ass, knocking her onto her face. She landed on the ground in a pile of long limbs, curses and papers.

Dante let out a curse of his own when Markus left him and ran over to help her. The tall female was usually the poster child for calm, cool and collective, but not today. Her white undershirt was untucked from her black cargo pants, a huge hunk of dark brown hair had escaped the clip at the nape of her neck and there was a smudge of something on her right jaw. Despite the fact she'd just shattered his chance with Markus, Dante couldn't help but chuckle. Her head whipped up as her gray eyes grew wide in shock. After a few moments they grew smoky with anger.

"What in the hell are you doing up?" she snapped, then turned on Markus. "Don't come any closer. I have everything under control. If you two hadn't scared me in the first place, I wouldn't have dropped my stuff in the first place."

Markus halted in his tracks and held his hands up in surrender. "Sorry, where I came from it was only polite to help a female in distress."

"Just because you're one of the oldest vampires

in this clan doesn't mean you have to be so old fashioned." Dahlia shot him a withering glare.

Dante bit back a smile when he saw the wounded look pass over the other male's face.

"It's not old fashioned to have manners, Doc." Markus shot Dante a shut-up glare. It was a shared secret between the two that Markus had always held a torch for the female.

Dante didn't blame his friend. Aside from the times she strapped him to a bed and shot him full of downers, Dante thought she was pretty damn hot, too. Especially when she got pissed, which she did a lot in their presence. Funny thing was, the more she acted like she was irritated by Dante and his smartass attitude, the more he was intrigued by her. Not quite as much as Markus, but close.

A file had landed at his feet. He scooped it up, carried it over to her and held it down to her as a peace offering. Tilting her head up, she met his eyes as the sexual tension in the room ratcheted back up. Dante continued to hold the file out, waiting to see if she would reach for it. He could hear Markus's breath quicken as he took in the whole scene. Finally she slowly reached a trembling hand out to take the file. Dante released it to her hold, but not before he let his finger slowly caress the back of her hand.

* * * *

Dahlia took in a sharp breath as soon as Dante touched her. His caress was everything she'd always dreamed of. Electric, hot and soft all at the same time. She looked over to where Markus stood and wondered what it would be like to be touched by him, too. She quickly tucked the file to her chest so they wouldn't see how shaky she was. "You look pale, Dante." She tried to make her tone sound brisk, like she was all physician and not screaming hormones. "You need blood."

"We were about to take care of that before you interrupted us."

Dante flashed her a devilish grin that left no doubt in her mind what she'd walked into. A warm flush came to her cheeks even as a strange thrill went through her at the thought of the two males together. "Oh?" Now that did not come off in any way with clinical detachment. Even she could hear the underlying arousal in her voice.

"Of course, if you want to help us out, we would love that." Dante's brown eyes grew even darker in desire.

Dahlia shivered in response. Again she glanced over at Markus, trying hard to gauge his reaction to all this. While Dahlia held a strong sexual attraction for Dante, with Markus there was that and then something more. The blond vampire was

gazing back at her with such burning intensity, she almost melted into a puddle.

"I know of the perfect place for you to get fresh blood, Dante," Markus suggested, never looking away from Dahlia. "There's a blood club right on the outskirts of Detroit."

Even though he tried to hide it, Dahlia could tell Dante was shocked at his suggestion. Blood Clubs are highly secretive places where vampires went to find both blood and sex. Erotic, dark and dangerous, the establishments were not for the timid. When both she and Dante continued with their shared silence, Markus came closer and delivered his next bombshell.

"Of course if Dahlia wants to meet us there, I wouldn't argue."

Her mouth dropped open before she remembered herself and clamped it shut. Darting her gaze back and forth between the males, she wondered, not for the first time, what it would be like to be with both of them at the same time they were with each other. "There's no way I could possibly get away tonight," she stammered. "I have so much paperwork and then there's patients to see."

Markus shoved his hands in his pockets with a regretful sigh. "I didn't think you had the guts, Doc." He walked out of the cafeteria before she could issue a snappy comeback.

Dante knelt, cupped the bottom of her chin and made her look back at him. "Now that sounds like a challenge to me. I must admit I'm a bit surprised."

"That he would even suggest going to such a place?" Even though they were both on their knees on the cold tile, she felt on fire inside. Sweet Mama, these boys could make a female wet on a frigid day inside a church.

"No." Dante leaned forward and brushed his lips against hers. "I'm surprised that he'd finally be willing to go after something he's wanted for a long time."

"What's that?" She swayed against Dante's strong chest, her breasts aching for his touch.

"Don't you know?" His tongue laved her throat, making all cohesive thoughts difficult. "Markus has been wanting you for almost as long as I've been wanting him."

"He's never shown any interest in me." The last word came out as a gasp because Dante's hand shot up the back of her shirt and he was now touching her flesh to flesh.

"I see the way he looks at you. It's the same way I look at him."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, Doc. He wants you so bad he can't even see straight." He took a bit of flesh from her neck in between his front teeth, but didn't pierce the

skin. "I don't blame him. It's all I can do not to taste you right now. I won't do that to Markus though, he deserves to be the first one to sample your blood. As soon as he does though, I'm going to fuck him as he fucks you. Would you like that?"

Heart hammering in her chest, she found it near impossible to form cohesive thought. "I don't know."

"Yes, you would." He put his lips close to her ear and whispered, "You know how I know that? I've seen how you've been shooting us hot looks right back. You want him and you want me, bad. I bet if I slipped my hand down your pants, I would find your pussy all slick and ready for us. Shit, female, you're so turned on you're about to come right now in the middle of the clan compound, just from me talking to you. So I'm going to ask one more time. Do you want us or not?"

"Yes, I do." A whimper tore from her throat. She clawed at his arms for a better hold as her legs grew weak at his words. What he suggested should have offended her, not made her wet like she was. His long fingers traveled up her spine before hooking under the back of her bra strap. She waited with anticipation, hoping he would relieve her of the garment. Damn it, she hoped he would relive her of all her garments.

"Forget the paperwork then and meet us at the club. It's Christmas, don't you think you deserve

to have a present, too? I'll even help you unwrap it."

He broke away contact with her and stood so abruptly she almost landed on her face for the second time that day. Recovering, she ran a shaking hand through her now tousled hair and listened to his receding footsteps. Putting a hand to her stomach, she tried to calm her racing heart as she recalled the first time she'd become intrigued by Dante and Markus.

It was days after they had recovered Dante from a dark witch and a gang of ghouls. He'd been injured badly. It had taken all of her skills to bring him back from the brink of death. Then the idiot had gone off on a mission days later despite her orders not to. So when they carried him back into her infirmary hurt, yet again, she hadn't been shocked.

The commotion could be heard all the way down the hall. Agonized screams that held the lingering edge of madness along with scuffles, grunts of pain and the sounds of bodies slamming into walls. A loud curse followed by a bellow of pain.

"Don't hurt him," a male voice snarled.

"Fucker just bit me and he wasn't exactly gentle about it."

There was another manic scream. The raw mad undertone lacing it made the hair on Dahlia's neck stand on end. She'd seen a lot of scary stuff since she'd become a doctor, even more since she'd turned vampire,

but the forlorn yell was worse than all of that. It was as if whoever was issuing it had taken all the agony this world had to offer and they were spewing it back up.

"I don't care if he goes for your jugular," the first male voice ordered icily. "You hit him again, you don't walk again. Understood?" There was a dead silence and Dahlia imagined the second male giving a timid nod. The first one yelled, "Doc! We need your help out here, ASAP!"

Even though the last thing she wanted to do was go toward the screams and mayhem, the caregiver in her wouldn't allow her to retreat. She threw on her lab coat and ran out of the infirmary into the sterile white halls of the compound. Not ten feet from the door, were three males holding down a wounded vampire, who was feral and bloodied. She looked past the blood and street mud covering the injured soul and saw it was the middle Toren brother, Dante.

"What the hell? I told you not to go out," she yelled at him. She pulled back a step and gasped when he looked up at her and laughed. Blood was coating his teeth and mouth and his eyes were bright with madness.

"We need to get him tied down," the first male ordered. Dahlia now saw it was Markus. That didn't surprise her, Dante never went anywhere without his friend. "Do you have any sedatives? It helps him get though his...spells." The pleading tone in Markus's question hit Dahlia like a slap in the face. The elder vampire was proud. For him to come, tail between the

legs, to another for help, showed how desperate he was. It also showed how much Dante meant to him.

"Of course, I have something really strong that should do the trick." She motioned with her hand. "Bring him in and we'll strap him down. I have some restraints on hand for when new vampires go through the transformation. They should hold him down."

She gulped as they dragged him in and threw him down on the gurney. Dear Lord, she hoped the restraints held him. Even though she'd spent hours by Dante's bedside, she never noticed until how muscular he was despite his thin build. The veins popped out on his hard biceps as he fought the hold the other vampires had on him and Dahlia imagined how easy it would be for him to snap her neck.

"What happened?" she asked as she went over to her drug cabinet and pulled out her strongest stuff. It was synthetic drug manufactured specifically for vampires and their fast metabolism. "What set him off?"

The two vampire soldiers had finished strapping down Dante. They were panting and covered in sweat. Markus dismissed them with a curt jerk of his head and they obeyed, relief softening their faces. "He got injured and his body didn't react too well to the pain and blood loss." Markus didn't quite meet her gaze as he jacked the restraint across Dante's chest tighter. The vampire bared his fangs and hissed in response.

"Bullshit." She swabbed Dante's bicep with a cotton swab before she jabbed the needle into one of the budging veins and injected the sedative. "He was hurt a

lot worse last time and besides slapping my ass a couple of times, he was a perfect gentleman." Thankfully, the reaction to the drug was almost immediate as the vampire's eyelids fluttered before they grew heavy. Some of the insanity left his glazed eyes.

"Thank you, Dahlia," his voice was thick, but the hurt, agonized tone was gone.

"I'll make sure to send you a bill," she replied. "Bullheaded jerk, you just couldn't listen to my orders and stay out of trouble." Despite her harsh words, she just couldn't make any anger carry over into her voice. What could possibly have been so bad in his past to make him go that far into the deep end? "The prison." When Markus nodded, she realized she'd spoke the last part a loud.

"While on patrol tonight, we ran into one of our old prison guards. The asshole and a few of his friends managed to corner Dante and have a go at him before we were able to get to them and help him out."

"Was it really that bad?" All of the sudden feeling protective, she stroked Dante's dark hair back from his face. He mumbled something in his sleep before he turned his cheek more into her touch.

"What do you think?" Markus asked harshly. "I was only there a year and I still have nightmares about the place. It was ten times worse for Dante because of the length of time in there and some of the crap he went through."

"What did they do to him?" For some reason her stomach clenched at the thought of anyone hurting the

usually cocky vampire.

"Let's just say Dante has a habit of always helping out the downtrodden, even at his own detriment."

She looked over at him and clucked her tongue. "And you are different? I've seen how you've helped out the clan. We wouldn't have survived the ghoulish attack without your helping our civilians and young into the underground tunnels. Then you stood arm to arm with our soldiers and fought those monsters back."

He blushed. "It was no big deal."

"No big deal?" she echoed. "Do you have any idea of how big of a hero you are?" When he shrugged and shook his head, she chuckled. "You don't, do you?" The humble attitude of his made her look closely at him for the first time and she liked what she saw. Where Dante drew her in because of his dark and dangerous side, Markus appealed to her in a noble, knight in shining armor type.

Crap, she was a walking, talking, breathing romance novel shelf.

She shook away her ridiculous fantasies and cut away Dante's shirt. It wasn't easy, thanks to the leather straps, but she managed. She winced at the several shallow knife wounds that crisscrossed his chest and torso. As she examined the injuries closer, horror hammered through her. "They were toying with him, weren't they?"

"Yes." Markus sank heavily into a nearby chair. "They were having more fun fucking with his head by bringing up old prison memories and rubbing his face

in them. Even though he hid from them at the time, I think those wounds hurt a lot worse than the physical ones."

Dahlia shivered as she remembered the heartbreaking torment that had carried over into his screams. Yes, they had cut him deep all right, but it wasn't from the damn blades. "Did you kill them?" She started to clean the blood away from Dante, her hands trembling in fury.

"The guards attacking him tonight?"

"Yes," she hissed, anger bringing out the vampire in her.

"I showed them no mercy."

"Good."

"For a doctor, you sure are a bloodthirsty thing." He chuckled, then winced and put a hand to his side.

Dahlia breathed in deep as the scent of fresh blood hit her. Each vampire carried their own unique scent and this one was different than Dante's. "Lift your shirt," she commanded as she marched over to Markus. When he made no move to obey her, she took matters into her own hands and jerked his dark t-shirt up. She gasped in disbelief. One singular knife wound marked his right side. It was deep and should have made it impossible for him to even walk, let alone drag around a hurt friend. "How are you even standing? If you were still human, I would be rushing you into surgery."

He gently stilled her probing fingers and locked gazes with her. "But I'm not human so it's no big deal."

Dahlia found herself rooted in place as his earnest expression trapped her heart, body and soul.

"Please." He ran the pad of his thumb on the inside of her wrist, bringing a shiver of appreciation from her. "Help Dante first. I'll be fine."

She managed a dumb nod as she pulled away from him and returned to Dante's care. After she was done with him, she returned to Markus and cleaned and stitched him back up. The entire time she worked on him, she had been aware of his smoldering gaze and she prayed he didn't notice how her hands shook, how her breath quickened around him. Neither of them spoke until she had finished bandaging him up. He pressed a soft kiss to her brow.

"You smell like lemons and sugar," he observed in an awed voice. "I think that's my new favorite scent."

He walked out of the infirmary, leaving her behind slightly confused and highly aroused. After the days went into week and the weeks went into months, she waited for either Markus or Dante to even look at her twice, let alone acknowledge her, yet neither had.

Until now. Dahlia scooped up her files and got to her feet. What would they do if she did show up to the blood club? A surge of anger and hurt went through her. They probably thought she was some mousy nerd who would never be caught dead in a place like that. Wouldn't they be shocked if she actually walked in?

Did she dare?

Butterflies took over as she actually entertained the idea. If she did go through with her internal threat, there would be no going back. Although she'd taken a few lovers in the past, all of them had been reserved in bed. She knew Markus or Dante alone would give her a wild ride. Together, it would be mind-blowing. Was she ready?

A smile played at her lips. There was only one way to find out. She made her way to her friend Toni's room to borrow something a bit more appropriate for clubbing. After tonight, Dahlia wouldn't have to wonder what it would be like to be with Dante or Markus because she was going to have them both. She was not going to let her common sense scare her away. She was a rebel drone soldier for god's sake and she wasn't timid. She'd show them. With a tilt of her chin, she steeled her spine and smiled to herself. Markus and Dante would be sorry they challenged her.

* * * *

She was terrified.

Dahlia gripped the edge of the back lacquered tabletop as she gawked at her surroundings. All the rumors she'd ever heard about blood clubs hadn't even come close to describing how they really were.

Dark. Decadent. Sexual. Terrifying. Thrilling.

One place shouldn't have been able to fit all those words, yet this club did and then some. Dimly light with all black and red décor, the place and the vampires within were not shy about advertising what it really was. A place to feed all kinds of needs.

Scattered throughout, were deep red couches and beds with drapes that could be closed to shield the occupants. Vampires, some in pairs, other in groups, were lounging around on them, talking, kissing and, to Dahlia's shock, making out right in public. A dark hallway led past a row of red doors that could be rented by those whom wished privacy for their carnal activities.

She looked at a male and two females on the bed closest to her and felt her cheeks burn. Okay, they were doing more than just making out. Way more. The male was stretched out over the blonde female. At first it seemed like he was just rubbing against her until Dahlia looked closer. His black pants were lowered just enough to free himself and he was thrusting into the female's willing body. The second female, a redhead, ran her hands over his back before she sank her fangs into his neck.

He caught Dahlia looking and smiled at her. Shocked, she almost fell from her barstool as she tried hard to act nonchalant about the whole thing. That worked until he crooked his finger at

her, inviting her to come. Then her jaw dropped as she worked hard to think of a way to turn down his invite without revealing how dorky and inexperienced she truly was.

"Now that's just plain greedy." Dante said from her right.

Dahlia jumped in surprise. She hadn't even noticed him arriving.

"I agree," Markus stated from her left. "He already has two females, why does he think he needs a third?"

Dahlia let out a sigh of relief when the strange vampire quickly lost interest in her once she had two battle-hardened soldiers by her side.

"Besides," Dante ran the back of his fingers down, then up her bare arm, "this female is ours."

Markus gave her a heated look. "Yes, she sure as hell is and nobody is going to take her away."

Aware of the scrutiny of the two males, Dahlia looked down at the slinky red dress, with spaghetti straps and swooping back, she'd worn. Back at the compound, it had seemed perfect, paired with black stilettos and, with her long hair down, she had felt sexy and daring. Now as she looked at all the other females, she felt like the plain, dowdy doctor all over again. Markus cupped her chin and forced her gaze back up to him.

"You look beautiful," his voice was husky with

desire and his warm brown eyes smoldered with need.

"The most alluring female here," Dante agreed as he feathered a kiss on her shoulder.

Markus captured her lips in a scorching kiss, his tongue plundering inside to stoke her intimately. Waves of desire rippled through her as she finally got to experience what he tasted like. Dark spices and even darker passion. Tentatively, she darted out her tongue to meet his. When he moaned in approval, she grew bolder, meeting his kiss with the same aggressiveness.

As soon as Markus broke away, strong hands gripped her shoulders and spun her barstool around. Dante claimed her mouth with the same passion Markus had. The dark vampire tasted of spices and passion, too, but there was a subtle hint of wildness to him as well. Even as Dante continued to attack her mouth like a vampire starved, Markus rained soft kisses on the bare part of her back where her dress dipped down. By the time Dante pulled away, she was out breath and lightheaded. He gave her one last peck before shifting his gaze up to the other male.

"Markus?" He was panting, too, and his lips were slightly swollen. "Please?"

Dahlia watched, as if hypnotized, as the blond vampire stepped around her until he was standing in front of the other male. Dante cupped his chin

before he slowly leaned in and kissed him. A soft moan floated through the air and Dahlia was surprised to realize it came from her. The sight of the two males embracing was so arousing she couldn't help herself.

They licked, nipped and teased each other's mouths and she ran her tongue over her lips, savoring the lingering dual tastes of them. If their flavor affected her this strong already, she could only imagine how it would be once she drank their blood.

Never breaking off the kiss, Markus reached out blindly to her. She helped him, reaching out until their fingers laced. Thanks to her enhanced vampire senses, she could hear his heart skip a beat as soon as they made contact. Wanting to be even closer to his life force, she traced the pad of her thumb against his radial pulse. It hummed strong under her touch, an alluring siren call to her growing blood lust.

She still woke up nights remembering how his blood smelled that night in the infirmary. Many a restless hour had been spent, tangled in sweat-soaked sheets, her arousal not allowing for rest as she yearned to taste him. It was so close now, all she had to do was dip her head to his wrist and sink her teeth in. Her fangs even grew in anticipation.

"Sweet fuck, look at her," Dante exclaimed, his

heated gaze burned into her. "The way her eyes are glowing with passion, how red her lips are from us and the smell of arousal coming off her."

Normally, Dahlia would have blushed at such words, but the way he said them made her feel so sexy.

"I think we have the most beautiful girl here," Markus added in a husky voice.

She smiled, pleased with their words as she ran her tongue along his wrist. His pulse fluttered against her touch and she almost gave into temptation and bit, but held back. It was fun teasing him and, by the way his breath hitched, she was doing a good job of it.

Dante moaned approvingly as he ran a hand through her hair. "You keep that up, darling, and Markus isn't going to make it long enough to enjoy that private room he paid all that money for."

"You got one of the rooms in the back?"

"Of course he did," Dante said, that famous cocky grin playing at his mouth. "You really didn't think we'd expect you to do a public performance, did you? That's not until the second date. Unless you want to go out to the car. Markus has a thing about doing in it in the backseat. There was this one time—"

"She doesn't want to hear about that," Markus cut in, a blush slight blush appearing on his high

cheekbones.

"Sure thing, buddy." Dante held his hands up in surrender. Behind Markus's back he mouthed, *Tell you later*, and gave a lazy wink.

Despite the banter going on, the air around them was still sexually charged. She pressed her thighs together as an ache built up inside her. They were really going to do this, the time for wondering was over. Within a matter of minutes, she would finally know what it was like to be with the men of her dreams

"Are you sure about this, Dahlia?" Markus asked, always the gentleman. "If you don't want to do this, we could leave now and there wouldn't be any hard feelings. It would stay just between the three of us."

In answer, she finally gave into her urges and struck fast, her fangs sinking into his wrist. Markus's blood was hot and powerful, the pure essence of him seeping into every inch of her at once. She gripped his arm with both hands as a whimper slipped from her. Even though she knew she shouldn't be greedy, she took in another drag. In all her years as a vampire, she'd never tasted blood like this.

"I think we can take that to mean she's sure," Dante quipped.

His voice sounded a million years away. After a few more swallows, she forced herself to sweep

her tongue over the puncture wounds to seal them shut. "Take me to the room. Now," she commanded, her voice harsh with need.

Markus smiled as held out a hand and helped her down from the barstool. He offered the other to Dante and then led them through the maze of beds and couches to the back hall of the club. He took them to the last door on the left and dropped their hands so he could pull out a card key.

Dante used that opportunity to snag one arm around her waist and pull her to his chest. Her breath left her in a swoosh as his hard cock pressed against the small of her back. He buried his nose in the crook of her neck and breathed in deep. "Lemon and sugar. I don't think I'll ever get enough of that smell." His fingers slipped under the hem of her dress and glided over her silk panties. "I wonder if you'll taste sweet here." He teased her clit through the fabric.

The friction of silk against her aching flesh had her biting back a shriek of pleasure. Dahlia let out a moan as she spread her legs out further so he could have better access, just as his expert fingers were slipping in for some skin-on-skin action, the door clicked open. Dante gave her a gentle shove into Markus's waiting arms.

"Get in and bite her, now," he ordered harshly. "I promised you first taste of her blood and I can't hold back much longer."

Markus wrapped his arms around her waist and spun them to the side so they were inside the confines of the room. Dahlia heard the door slam shut the same instant Markus buried his hands in her hair. She tilted her neck to the side in way of offering and he ran his tongue up the column of her throat, leaving behind a path of fire. Just when she thought he'd never do it, he hissed and sank his fangs into her.

She screamed as an orgasm rocked through her body. In that instant she felt her soul merge with Markus and she knew she'd never be complete without him again and it was more than just because they'd completed a blood exchange. It was something more, something that both thrilled and scared her to death.

There was a tug on her dress from behind as Dante pulled the zipper down before he slipped his warm, calloused fingers under the thin straps and dragged them off her shoulders. The garment slid to floor, leaving her wearing just her undergarments, stockings and heels. Dante took care of her black bra and panties at a speed that amazed and impressed her. Markus finished feeding off her and looked up, his eyes almost black with blood lust.

"Leave her stocking and heels on," he ordered. "It makes her legs look even more incredible. Damn, they seem to go on for miles."

"They are hot. I can't wait to have them wrapped around my waist." Dante gave an appreciative nod as he traced one finger up the crack of her ass.

"I'll leave them on one condition," Dahlia said before she ran one hand down either of their chests until she cupped their cocks. Courage suddenly came to her when she realized how much power she had. Dante and Markus were two of the most powerful males she knew, yet the looks they were both giving her told her they were putty in her hands. She gave their cocks a gentle squeeze and was thrilled when they each sucked in a breath. Oh yeah, she had power all right. "You need to lose your clothes, too, boys. I'm getting lonely being the only naked one here."

Markus licked the remaining blood off his lips. "Well, we can't have that."

She stepped back so they could take each other's shirts off. Next came the pants, their hands traveling over each other's hard pecs, taunt abdomens, nipples, tweaking and caressing. Dahlia had never thought the sight of two males together could be so pleasing. Their bodies were thin, muscular and all warrior. Dante had scars on his back, left behind from the ghoul attack months ago. Dahlia's heart ached for the dark-haired vampire. He'd gone through so much pain in his immortal lifetime, it was no wonder he held on to

his sanity by a thin thread.

Wanting to make his boo-boos feel better, if just for tonight, she went over to him and kissed each scar ever so softly and lovingly. He jumped like she'd burned him before shooting her a look over his shoulder that was almost perplexed.

"It doesn't always have to be fast and hard," Markus said as he dropped to his knees in front of him.

Again, confusion passed over Dante's face and Dahlia felt tears well up in her eyes. Had he ever truly made love with anyone before? Was it possible that all the times he had sex before, all the partners he had and he'd never shared a tender moment with any of them?

Markus took Dante's huge cock into his mouth and sucked deeply, his cheeks hollowing out.

Dante let out a long moan as his eyelids fluttered shut. "Damn, you're good at this."

Markus pulled his mouth away from Dante's cock. "Do you think this is the first time I've been with another male? I've had some experience. Granted, not as much as you have, but some."

"Slut."

A teasing smile spread out on Dante's face, showing off a set of dimples Dahlia never realized were there before. *That's because I've never seen him truly smile before today. For all his joking and smartass comments, he is one of the saddest vampires I know.*

Markus wrapped his lips around Dante's cock again and Dahlia couldn't resist running a hand through his blond hair. He gazed up at her under his long lashes as he continued to lick, suck and tease Dante. Dante wrapped an arm around her waist, pulled her to his side and nuzzled the side of her neck, paying special attention to the spot Markus had fed from.

"Drink from me," she urged as she pulled her hair out of the way. "Let me heal your soul this time."

With a soft groan, he did as she asked, his large fangs sinking into her jugular almost tenderly. As soon as he began to drink, a soft gasp escaped her parted lips. The knowledge that he was sucking on her as Markus was sucking on him was such a turn on, she almost came on the spot. Her knees buckled and she placed her hand on Markus's shoulder for support, making it so she was touching both of the males at the same time.

Dante slipped one hand between her and him and made lazy circles on her inner thigh. Her pussy ached for him to touch her there so she spread her legs in invitation. Thankfully he got the message and started to caress her slippery folds, all the while still drinking from her. When he slid one finger inside her, she was already so close to the edge, she shattered into a blinding orgasm. As she screamed Dante's name, she heard him roar as

he found his own release. Markus continued to work Dante with his mouth, taking in what the other male had to offer, his throat working as he swallowed.

"It's better than I ever dreamed of, being with you two," Dante groaned. "Markus get up here and help me show, Doc how much we treasure her tight body."

Dahlia threw back her head as Dante continued to pump his finger in and out of her. Markus wiped his glistening lips and stood to join them, his hands finding their way to her breasts. Dahlia shrieked in pleasure as hands, fingers and lips seemed to be caressing her everywhere at once. It was too much and yet she never wanted it to end. Her knees buckled for a second time and Markus reached out to steady her.

He chuckled softly. "I better get you in bed before you fall and hurt yourself, " he said as he took her hand and led her to the large bed occupying the center of the room. Of course, the cover was red, just like everything else in the club. "You coming, Dante?"

"Several times, I hope." He grinned at his own lame joke.

Dahlia lay on her back against the cold, satin comforter and the males stretched out on either side of her. They slowly ran their hands around every inch of her body, like they were worshiping

her. She writhed under their attention, a fine sheen of sweat breaking out over her body despite the fact it was the dead of winter outside.

Markus leaned over her to take one of her nipples in his mouth and his erection bumped into her hip. She realized he was the only one that hadn't found satisfaction tonight. She wrapped her hands around his cock as her mouth watered. She had to taste him, now. If for no other reason, to let him know that she enjoyed touching him as much as he enjoyed touching her.

She twisted her body so she was on top of him and she slowly started to kiss her way down his chest, stomach and pubic bone before finally getting to his erection. Dahlia licked her lips like an eager kitten before she wrapped her mouth around him and took him in deep. He jacked his hips up as he yelled and buried his hands in her hair. Urged on by his eager response, she began to use her lips, tongue and fangs on him much like he had Dante earlier.

With a hiss of approval, Dante leaned close and started to caress her back and thighs. "That's it, baby. Suck him hard."

She obeyed, taking Markus in so deep his cock touched the back of her throat. Dante got behind her and lifted her up by the hips so she was on her knees and her backside was tilted up to him. She moaned as he ran a finger over her clit before

dipping briefly into her vagina.

"You're so beautiful, Doc. Do you realize that?"

He didn't give her a chance to answer before he thrust deep inside of her, his cock stretching her to the point of almost pain. Her scream of pleasure was muffled because she was still sucking Markus. She dug her nails into Markus's thighs as Dante started to move in and out of her slowly.

"What does she feel like?" Markus asked, a strained voice.

"She's tight, damn tight."

Dahlia blushed. She hadn't had that many other lovers and she was just shy of being a virgin.

Dante continued, "She's perfect, wait until you get inside her. It's like heaven."

Embarrassment gave way to self-satisfaction at his declaration. She tilted her hips up even more so he went deeper into her as she pumped Markus's cock with one hand and licked the tender underside. His erection jerked under her attention and a drop of pre-cum leaked out from the tip. She eagerly lapped it up.

"I think Markus will like this better if he were to come inside you," Dante rumbled in her ear. "Is it okay if we switch things around a bit?"

Unable to speak, she nodded her head and gave Markus one last lingering lick. Dante slid out of her and settled back on his knees. "Dahlia get on

your back and spread those pretty thighs of yours for our boy here."

"And what will you be doing?" she asked, finally finding her voice.

He gave her a wicked smile that was all fangs and taboo pleasures. "What do you think? Remember what I told you back at the clan kitchen?"

"You said that he was going to fuck me while you fucked him," her voice trembled ever so slightly, but Markus caught it. He sat up and gently stroked her cheek.

"Don't be scared. If you want, I can take care of your needs and then you can leave the room while I take care of Dante after."

She only hesitated a second before she gave a shake of her head. "I'll be damned if I'm going to leave just when things are getting good. I like seeing you two kiss and touch each other." To prove her point, she reached out and gently pushed their heads together.

They got the message and came together in a scorching kiss. Markus grabbed Dante by the shoulders to plunder his mouth with the same passion Dahlia felt racing through her body. She ran her hands over her aching breasts as she watched the males, her fingers stopping to toy with her nipples.

Markus let out a feral growl before he broke

away from Dante and was on her with vampire speed and strength. The breath didn't even have time to leave her body before he had her pinned on her back and was buried to the hilt in her core. She clawed at his back, thrusting up to meet him with the same ferocity. The smell of fresh blood hit the air as her nails dug into his flesh and she let out a hiss as her fangs grew.

"What happened to slow and easy?" Dante drawled as he tilted his head to get a better view.

"Just get over here and fuck me," Markus snarled, lust edging his voice.

"This is something I've waited years to see." He crawled over the bed until he was on his knees between Dahlia's legs, but behind Markus. "You, Markus, the perfect gentleman, losing control."

He bit Markus savagely on the shoulder, his fangs making a loud popping sound as they pieced the flesh. Markus hissed, but never stopped in his thrusts. Dante didn't take much blood, lifting his head after a second, his burning eyes peering at her over Markus's shoulder. Dante grabbed one of her legs and held it in a firm grip. She felt his muscles tense a second before he thrust forward into Markus.

A look of pain crossed the blond vampire's face so Dahlia bit him on the arm since a blood exchange always brought pleasure to both vampires. It worked, his features softened and a

groan of pleasure slipped past his full lips. She lifted her hips up, eagerly and he got the message. At first he moved in her slowly as they all got adjusted to the new position.

As the passion built in all of them, he moved faster and faster, Dante matching his pace. Dahlia blindly reached out, not knowing or caring who she was clutching onto. Gasps mixed in with groans and moans as she felt herself getting closer and closer to the edge. She ran her tongue over the puncture wounds on Markus's arm. She could feel his blood racing through her, his life force mixing with hers. She closed her eyes and allowed the sensation to overcome her as she had the most intense orgasm of her life. Bright lights danced behind her eyelids as she screamed both of their names.

Markus let out a horse cry as hot shots of semen shot up her pussy. After a few more thrusts, Dante joined them, his moans of satisfaction joining theirs. Dahlia kept her eyes closed and let the after-sex, after-feeding high wash over her. When she opened them, she found that Dante and Markus were lying on either side of her. Dante was already asleep, but Markus was awake, one hand softly stroking her hip.

"You, okay?" he asked softly, his eyes the soft, warm brown she loved so much again.

"Better than, okay," she replied drowsily as she

stretched, wincing at a few pleasantly sore spots. "I don't know how I'll be able to go back to my boring life as clan doctor after tonight."

"Dahlia, I thought you knew." His grip on her hip grew stronger. "Things aren't going to be the same again, ever."

Her heart hammered. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I love you. I have from the first day I saw you when I came to live with the clan. Now that I have you, I'm not letting you go. You're mine."

The way he said *mine* spoke volumes. When a male vampire found his life mate, he claimed her heart, body and soul and that was what Markus has done to her tonight from the moment she first took his blood. Still, she shook her head. "This is crazy."

"Bullshit." He pinned her with a kiss that left her breathless. "Tell me you don't feel it. Deny this is happening to us. I dare you."

She opened and closed her mouth several times to do just that, but couldn't. Her heart wouldn't let her. In the end, she admitted, "I can't."

"Of course you can't, because you're mine. Admit it," he commanded fiercely.

"I'm yours." A tear of happiness slipped out of the corner of her eye. "I was yours from day one and I'll be yours till the end of my days." The relief on his face made her love him all the more.

“And I will be yours to the end of my days.”

“I love you, Markus.”

“I love you, Dahlia.”

They shared a binding kiss before he tucked her to his chest and she allowed herself to fall asleep in the protection of his arms.

* * * *

Dante finished lacing up his shoes before going to the adjoining bathroom to take care of business and splash some cold water on his face. Markus and Dahlia were both still asleep on the bed, tangled up together, looking as cute as two bugs in a rug.

He was happy for them, he really was, but he knew there was no place for him in their new lives. While that thought should have upset him, it didn't. In fact, the way he saw them look at each gave him hope for the first time since before he went to prison. If Markus could find a female as good as Dahlia to love him, then maybe, just maybe there was someone out there for him, too.

That still didn't change the decision he'd made right before he drifted off to sleep. Dante knew that things couldn't keep going the way they had been. He was a ticking time bomb and if he went off, he was going to hurt those around him, Dahlia, Markus, his brothers, shit the entire damn

clan for that matter.

He needed to get away, far away. Some place with no humans, vampires or anythings. Then he might be able to get his crap in a pile and beat the demons that haunted him. He was no good to anyone the way he was now.

He turned off the light and slipped out of the bathroom. His plan was to leave the room before Markus and Dahlia woke up, that way there wouldn't be any drama. That plan was spoiled as soon as he saw Dahlia sitting in a chair by the door, waiting for him.

She looked so beautiful, sitting in that red nightmare of a settee, just the sheet covering her glorious body. Her dark hair was messed in a sexy way and her lips still swollen from their encounter. The eyes were the only thing not sensual about her, they were narrowed in a knowing speculative way. Just like they always were when he was on the edge and, as the clan doctor, she recognized the signs.

"You're leaving aren't you," she accused.

"Yes, I thought you and Markus might want some privacy. I'll catch you later," he lied.

"You know what I mean so don't be coy. How could you do this to Markus? To your brothers?"

He paused, hand on the door, gaze locked on his shoes. He knew if he met her eyes, he would lose it and do something stupid like cry. "Don't

start on me, Doc.”

She shot to her feet, one hand clutching the sheet in place. “You do this and you’ll break their hearts. My God, Dante. It’s Christmas. For once think of someone else besides yourself.”

If anyone else had said those words to him, he would have turned on them, but not Dahlia. She was too precious to him. He went over and gently grabbed her by the shoulders. Then he gazed down at her so she could see the despair in his face.

She took in a deep breath and her eyes grew wet with tears. “What did those monsters do to you in that prison?” she asked, her voice cracking.

So not a subject he was going to talk about with her. He gave her a soft kiss of the brow. “Take care of Markus and watch out for my brothers. Kane has Toni, but Rafe doesn’t have anyone so this is going to hit him hard. Will you make sure to let him know how much I love him?”

Tears slipped, unchecked down her rounded cheeks. “Who will watch out for you?”

He dried her face with the pads of his thumbs. “I can take care of myself.”

“No, you can’t. Come back to bed with Markus and me, please.” She let out a sob.

“Hey, no tears allowed, Doc. This is a good thing. Before I saw the love you and Markus had for each other, I was ready to give up. But when I

see the way he looks at you and how happy you make him, that makes me want to fight so I can have that some day. You guys gave me the strength to go on. I need to do this though or else I won't be any good to anyone. I can't live through another episode and have to be strapped down to that damn table while those drugs are pumped into me. I need to get better and the only one who can do that is me."

Silence weighed heavily in the room before she finally gave a slight nod.

He placed another chaste kiss on her head before he stole from the room, shutting the door softly behind him. It was snowing outside, but for once, Dante didn't mind. In fact, he actually found himself humming a Christmas song under his breath as he made his way to his car. The holiday season was a time for hope after all and he finally had that after a long void of despair. He smiled as he lifted his face to the sky, the flakes hitting him in the eyes. It was as if a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He laughed his first true laugh in years as he stepped into an unknown future.

About the Author

Stephani Hecht is a happily married mother of two. You can usually find her snuggled up to her laptop, creating her next book.