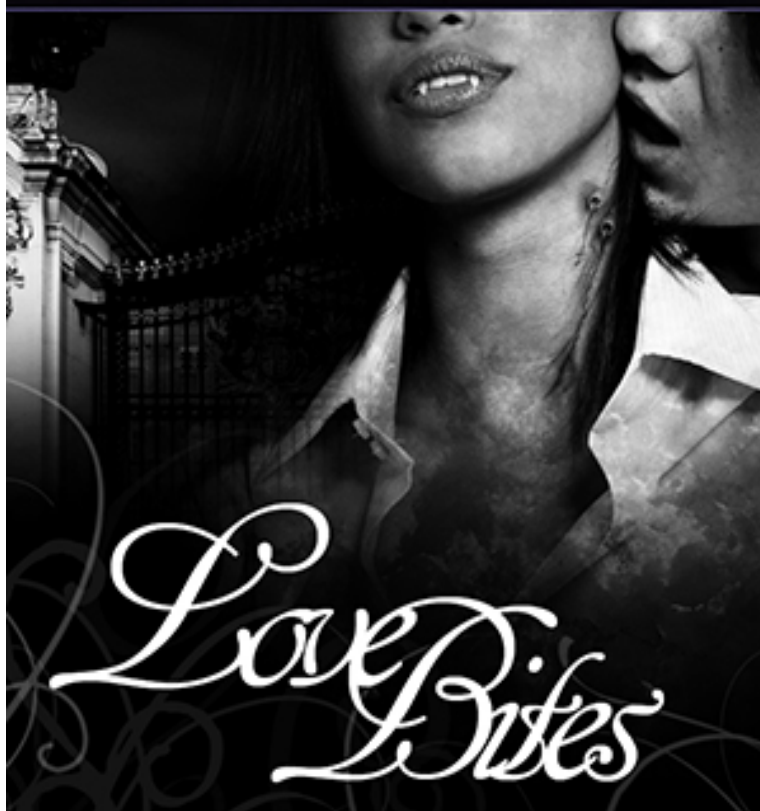


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WICKED

R.W. Shannon



Love Bites

by

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Dedication

To all of my friends and family for their continued support, thank you.

Chapter One

"Do you have plans for Halloween?" Padma asked her as they hung holiday decorations throughout the Vladmir Government Resources, or VGR, building. Aria shrugged as she took the cartoon paper vampire, which her co-worker and best friend held for her to hang in the reception area over the desk.

"No. I might just stay home."

"Right. I'm sure you have a hot date that you're not telling me about."

"If by hot date you mean a pile of laundry, then that is exactly the case," she quipped as she climbed down from the step ladder and slipped her feet back into her black stiletto pumps. Padma laughed as they put away the orange and black bin that was full of leftover decorations and the stepladder before heading back to their desks in the call center. The chatter of the agents greeted them as they turned the corner. There were no calls coming into the center at this time of night, 9:30 p.m. The chatter was from the agents discussing their plans for the holiday that was only a week away.

Aria was in no mood to discuss her lack of a social life on the biggest vampire holiday of the year. Being a single, first generation vampire on Halloween was equivalent to a dateless human on Valentine's Day.

"Why don't you come out with us?"

"Who?"

"Me and a few girls from here."

"I don't know...." While she liked her other co-workers, she really didn't want to hang out with any of them socially other than Padma. But who knows, she thought. Maybe I'll run into my tall, handsome soul mate—something she had fantasized about lately.

"Oh, c'mon," Padma said as they reached their neighboring cubicles. "It's better than staying at home all night."

"I'll think about it."

Aria sat in the standard black cloth chair with the squeaky wheels and stared at her dark terminal. Not in the mood to log back onto the silent phones, she decided to calm her growling stomach with a drink from the break room. She picked up her Hello Kitty mug from her desk and walked away before Padma could join her.

Located in New Orleans, VGR was a call center that fielded questions from humans about their Medicare benefits. Created by the Vampire Council to give single female vampires a way to earn a living without having to resort to criminal activity to support their lifestyle, the company hired Aria more than fifty years ago. She hadn't planned on working at VGR for as long as she had and was burned out.

The vampire that was the Head of Vampire Resources got smoked by a slayer last week. His position was up for grabs. She applied for the vacancy with a hope that she would get it but suspected it was a long shot. She'd applied for other management positions over the years and had been passed over each time.

All positions of power, even within the company, went to men. Females were only given positions on the phones. She hoped that the council would change their minds and grant an exception in her case. This time, Lorne, her boss assured her that the job was hers for the taking. She had the experience and the skill to run the VR department or any department for that matter, but, there were always two things that kept holding her back; she was female, and she refused to sleep with Scorpio Stansakopolis, the North American Master Vampire.

"Damn it," she exclaimed as she came to a halt in front of the blood machine. A handwritten, out of order sign was taped over the coin return.

She inhaled the metallic scent that lingered in the air. Running late, she had forgotten to eat or bring her thermos of standard issue. Her fangs lengthened at just the thought of the warm elixir flowing over her taste buds. She'd have to go out for dinner. Soon.

Everyone, please gather around. Lorne, the president of the company, telepathically summoned the representatives to the center of the main floor.

In the blink of an eye, she leaned against the back wall behind the other customer service representatives, still holding her empty cup. She fixed a strand of ebony hair that had escaped her ponytail. Lorne stood in the center of the group. He was a tall, silver haired, old world vampire that had been president of the company for the last five years.

"As you know, the position of Head of Vampire Resources was made vacant by Chaunrae's untimely death. We have received applications from numerous extraordinary candidates, and I am pleased to announce that we have reached a decision."

Aria bit her lip to stop herself from smiling. She could hardly contain her excitement. No more answering phones. No more base hourly salary. No more cubicle. She was so busy daydreaming about her new life and the changes she wanted to implement that she almost missed the announcement.

"We have decided to appoint Daniel Medcliff to the position."

A thin, dark haired man stepped from the shadows and took a bow as the reps applauded. Aria's mouth fell open. These assholes chose someone who didn't even work at the company and didn't know the first thing about this kind of work over her simply because he had a penis? Her fangs ripped through her gums. She was beyond pissed.

"Please welcome Daniel with open arms." Lorne said, directing his comment toward her before dismissing the group and evaporating into the air. Padma made her way through the crowd and wrapped her arms around her neck.

"I'm sorry. I thought for sure they would promote you this time."

Aria was so angry her body trembled. Seconds later, she found herself in Lorne's immaculately decorated office. He perched on the edge

of his oak desk as if waiting for her. When he smiled at her, it took every muscle in her body not to slap it off of his smug face.

"I'm sorry, Aria. I fought for you. I really did."

"I deserve this position, Lorne. I have worked here longer than anybody. Besides that, I'm a first gen."

"I understand," Lorne said, folding his hands behind his back and moving out of striking range. "But the decision was out of my hands."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "Then who made it? I demand to know!"

"I did."

She turned in the direction of the voice that had haunted her dreams for centuries. A deep, sensual timber that had sparked many sleepless nights. He emerged from the shadows so smoothly that he took her breath away. But then again, Scorpio always had that effect of her.

His six-foot-two, muscular frame towered over her five-foot-four one. Tonight, he wore a purple silk shirt with matching tie under a navy pinstriped suit that complemented his olive skin tone and piercing blue eyes. His shoulder length, chestnut hair was pulled back into a sleek ponytail. He looked more boardroom than master vampire.

Aria took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. She concentrated on the words of the speech that she had rehearsed for this very moment. But as she looked into his eyes, those words now escape her. How on Earth was she going to get through this meeting without ripping his clothes off?

Chapter Two

She turned her back to Scorpio. She had to in order to reclaim her breath and her thoughts. This was revenge, pure and simple. He was denying her this promotion because she refused to be his lair kitten. She was the only one in his territory that he hadn't bedded and, if she could just keep herself from looking into his eyes, she would keep it that way.

"How could you do this to me?" She could feel his gaze seep into every pore of her dark skin. She glanced at Lorne.

The president nodded at the master and left the office in a cloud of vapor.

Wimp. She didn't want him to leave her alone with Scorpio. She couldn't be left alone with him.

She had known Scorpio for centuries. He turned shortly after she did. They migrated to America around the same time in the 1800s. Scorpio pursued her the way a lion pursued a gazelle. It was only a matter of time before she became his next meal. Her white shirt stuck to her overheating body as he moved closer to her and leaned against the oak desk.

"You know how much I wanted this job." Her voice rose with each word. "And I am more qualified than Daniel. And you don't even work here! It's not your call to make."

She took a chance and turned around. With his arms folded across his massive chest, he watched her intently. Why did he have to be so fine? Her hands trembled from a combination of desire and anger. She looked

down and realized that she still clutched her empty mug. She set it on the desk as she exhaled the breath that she'd been holding since she saw him. She refused to give in. She didn't care who he was. Master or not.

"All things within this territory are my call," he said, "especially if it affects the balance of the species."

"Yeah, well—"

"You haven't eaten," he simply stated. "You must be hungry."

Aria frowned and placed her hands on her hips. "What does that have to do with this?"

"How are you to do your job if you haven't had a proper meal?" He materialized a bottle and held it out for her to take. She stared at the bottle of fresh blood, unsure whether to take it. He chuckled. In one swift motion, he uncapped the bottle and took a long sip. Her fangs lengthened as she watched the muscles of his throat work. She fantasized about sinking her teeth into his soft skin. She ran her tongue across her sharp tips. No, she told herself, she wouldn't go there.

"See. No poison. No mood enhancing drugs. Unless you're afraid of cooties."

Despite her anger, her rumbling stomach wouldn't let her turn it down. Reaching for the bottle, her fingertips brushed against his. A current of electricity flowed up her arm. She almost dropped it. She had touched him many times before, including the time that she slapped him after he grabbed her ass, but she had never had this kind of reaction to him. Was his persistence finally wearing her down or was it something else?

She tipped the black bottle to her lips. *It has been a long time, months, since I've been with a man*, she thought as the warm blood flowed over her taste buds. Her nipples stiffened. She wasn't sure if it was from the blood or the way that Scorpio was watching her drink. In no time, she drained the whole bottle. Her cheeks flushed in embarrassment. She didn't want him to see her so hungry, so desperate.

"Thank you."

He took the empty bottle from her. This time, she was quick to remove her hand before the sparks flew again.

"I always take care of my girls."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm not your girl."

"Not yet."

"I never will be, Scorpio."

He sighed as he disposed of it with the wave of his hand. "Why must we continue this dance?"

"This isn't about us."

"It is. Don't you see the two are connected?"

Aria held her chin high. "I won't sleep with you just to get a promotion."

"I would never ask that of you."

"What are you asking of me?"

His face softened. She almost forgot that he was a powerful vampire that had fought in, and won, many battles. She fought the urge to go to him and kiss him on his full lips. He picked up on her thought and smirked. His fangs peeked from beneath his upper lips.

Damn!

"Why haven't you mated after all this time?"

"You know the answer to that." She turned from him and went to stand by the window. She didn't like where this conversation was headed. Her feelings for Scorpio were stronger than she was willing to admit, but she didn't want to take the chance of sleeping with him only to have him leave her. "Everyone that I have gotten close to has been intimidated by you."

"I needed to make sure they're worthy of you."

"That's not your job."

"You deserve the best." His breath was moist on her neck. She didn't remember feeling him move behind her until that moment. His muscular frame felt surprisingly comforting. "You deserve more than this place, more than some ordinary vamp. That is why I denied your promotion."

She whirled on her heels and poked Scorpio in his solid chest. "You have no right! What am I supposed to do? Waste the rest of my life on the phones?"

"No," he replied, grabbing her upper arms. "You're destined for greatness but not from here. You need to change things for your sex from the only place the council will take notice, from by my side."

Aria jerked away from his grasp. Why was he offering her this now? This was her dream, to make her females equal counterpart to the males in terms of power. There were no female masters, no female leaders. There needed to be, but she didn't know how to go about changing things. The conventional way wasn't working, and she'd wasted enough time already.

"I am tired," he admitted, pacing away from her to answer her unspoken question. "I am ready to mate. I had hoped to be mated by this Hallows' eve, but the one person I want, *need* by my side, always pushes me away."

His words both stung and warmed her heart. It took a lot for him to make that confession. She was at a loss for words. Part of her, too, had hoped to be mated by the holiday, but her pride refused to allow her to speak the words. "Scorpio, I..."

"Forget it," he said, waving his hand. "What I mean is you know that only men are appointed to positions of power in our world. Even here at the call center."

"Yes, but—"

"And this business was created for single female vamps so that they would be able to earn a living while looking for a mate."

"Well—"

"You're still single. You're a first, but most of your female counterparts have already mated."

"I know, but—"

With his hands threaded behind his back, he circled her. "There are certain protocols in place. Even I can't break them." He glanced at his watch. "You've been off the phones for over an hour."

She blinked. She had?

"Why don't you get back to work?" With that, he simply dissolved into the shadows.

Dumbfounded, she stared at the empty space where he once stood.

What the hell just happened? She came into the office to give Lorne a piece of her mind and demand the promotion, but she was leaving with a throbbing sensation between her thighs.

She turned on her heels and stormed from the office. *Never again.*

Chapter Three

Scorpio had to get out of Aria's presence before he gathered her into his arms and took her to his Hawaiian lair, never to let her out of his sight. She stormed by him on her way to her cubicle.

From where he stood, he could feel the aching need between her thighs. When he inhaled, her sweet aroma penetrated his nostrils. Watching her drink from the bottle was foreplay. He almost bit her right then. He shook his head. She messed him up every time he was near her, and each time, he did something stupid to mess it up. He straightened his lapels. He had to stop this. He was a master, not some punk lower level.

Didn't she understand that he was doing this for her? That he kept her chained to the cubicle to keep other male vamps from trying to step to her and he'd have to start a war by taking out the threat. Didn't she understand that she was his alone and if she would just give in, he would place the world at her feet? Everything that she ever asked for, he'd give her on demand. He'd wanted to tell her this over the years but couldn't. Masters didn't do such things. Plus, how much rejection could one man take before throwing in the towel?

Why did he confess that he had hoped to be her mate by Halloween? He moved to the shadow directly beside her cubicle. She slipped the headphones around her neck and then opened her book—a long forgotten classic. She was the perfect combination—smart, beautiful, and deadly. He would give his right arm to be curled around her when dawn came.

It was true that he was tired of this lifestyle. He wasn't tired of being a vampire or a master; that he would never tire of. He was afraid of spending eternity alone, or worse, without Aria. He could have his pick of any female and had bedded almost all of them, but she was the only woman he wanted by his side. Why did she fight him?

He needed her to understand that he was not playing her, that he was serious about his feelings. He needed her like he needed blood, like humans needed air. He had hoped his persistence was wearing her down. This upcoming holiday was his deadline. He was going to give it one more try, and if she said no again, he would have to move on.

But with whom? He crossed his arms and leaned against a column. No woman had or would compare to her. She was breathtaking. Dark chocolate skin. Almond shaped topaz eyes. Long, onyx hair. He inhaled and exhaled sharply. Why did she have to be so damn sexy? Her simple white blouse and black skirt did nothing to hide her curves. The strappy stiletto heels at the end of her long legs were enough to drive him insane. She might as well have been naked. He would've preferred it.

When her body quivered from the air conditioning, she pulled a red cardigan over her shoulders before returning to her book. She looked more librarian than vampire. He loved that about her.

He frowned. Was he really in love with her?

He gazed at her neck, longing to kiss her on the spot where her jugular throbbed with need to be pierced. She needed to understand the depths of his feelings. He couldn't hold them back any longer. Time, though it was permanent in their world, was running out for them.

He had things to do, but he couldn't tear himself away from her yet. His gaze dipped into the sliver of skin that peeked from beneath her white blouse. He wondered when the last time was that she felt like a woman and instantly became jealous. He should be the only one to give her such pleasure. Before he could stop himself, he exhaled. Every ounce of pent up desire within him washed over her like a breeze.

Instantly, her head snapped up from the book she was reading. She looked around to see where the sensation was coming from, then returned to her book.

He closed his eyes, imagined her in his lair. He sent her the image. Candles burning around the room. The heat from the flames sizzling against her bare skin.

Panting, she held the page with her index finger and looked directly at him. This took him by surprise. He didn't think that she had the ability to sense a master vampire's presence.

He waited for her rejection.

He received none.

The call center faded away. She glanced down. Gasped. He knew she was seeing herself as he imagined her—naked, her ebony hair flowing around her shoulders.

In his shared vision, his breath hitches as he moves toward her. He cups her full, right breast in the palm of his hand. He kisses her erect nipple before flicking his tongue against it.

"Please," she whispered.

He detected the plea in her real response but was unsure of the force behind it.

So help him, he wanted to stop but couldn't. She had to know. He had to put every fucking thing on the table so that she would never doubt his true feelings for her. So dangerous for him to do, but for her, he would give up his territory and live in obscurity if she asked.

As the vision continued to implant the illusion of privacy, he kissed his way down her abdomen. She leaned back against her desk, though in the vision they shared it was the edge of his soft king sized bed, and his lips were touching bare flesh instead of the soft cloth of her blouse. A sigh escaped her perfect lips as he parted her silky thighs. He wanted to take his time with her, but that was now an impossible task.

In his imagination, he licks her firm bud then pulls it between his lips. Letting her know what he wanted to do in reality.

"Scorpio..."

His name had never sounded so sweet.

Her hips began to move in rhythm to his real touch and the illusion of his gentle suckles. He blanketed her in an invisible veil so that she could let go in peace, without the risk of drawing the attention of others in

the office. He was playing with fire, but stopping was no longer an option. When her fangs lengthened, so did his. The tip of his incisor nicked the soft flesh of her lower lip. She moaned. Standing, he replaced the image of his tongue with the reality of his index finger, dipping between her legs and beyond her clothes. Her essence flowed around him as he thrust his finger deep inside her core. She arched her back, exposing her throat. He swiftly took it in a hard bite. Her fingers dug into his scalp as her orgasm claimed them both.

When she opened her eyes, she was back at her desk. She clutched the sides of the cubicle, obviously trying to regain her breath.

He looked into her sparkling irises as he stepped from the shadows. Before she could react, he swept her into his arms and kissed her for real. She tensed when his lips first touched hers. Then one muscle at a time, she relaxed in his arms. If he hadn't felt her fangs brush against his bottom lip, he could have sworn that she felt warm in his arms. That he could feel her heart beat through his chest.

She pulled away from him, a question in her eyes. One that he couldn't answer without scaring her more than he already had. He rested his forehead against hers. Once again, he had overstepped his bounds, but he didn't care. Now, she knew, and she could do with it whatever she chose. He stepped away from her, blended back into the shadows, fighting with himself to not look back at her.

Chapter Four

The sea-foam green and bubblegum pink fairy costume was starting to get on Aria's nerves. She adjusted the corset over her breasts. If her boob popped out one more time, she was going to scream. She tossed her curls over her shoulder as she headed for the bar. There were at least five other fairies that stood between her and a tall glass of cranberry juice with vodka.

"Damn!"

"Told you to go as a bumblebee." Padma smirked.

"What do I look like as a bumblebee with fangs?"

"Bees have fangs," Padma said defensively.

Aria shook her head as she ordered her much needed drink. "No, they don't."

"Yes, they do." Padma whipped out her iPhone and opened the Web browser. "How else do they suck out all that pollen? I'll bet you the next round."

She really didn't care about the life or anatomy of bees. She didn't feel like being out tonight. She wanted to stay home where the chance of running into Scorpio was minimal. Her cheeks flushed with embarrassment and excitement. She still couldn't believe what had happened. And at work! Why did she let him control her like that? Why did she enjoy it so much? In that short moment, he had already ruined her for anyone else. Now, what was she going to do?

Sipping her drink, she just wanted to put that event behind her. She

thought that it'd be better to be here than at home, where she had played the fantasy over and over in her head for the past six nights. She hadn't run into him since then and was very glad. She was unsure of her body's reaction when she did see him again. At least she had the night off tomorrow, too. Besides, he couldn't still be in New Orleans, she reasoned. He had a whole country to manage.

She had decided to quit VGR first thing Monday evening. She couldn't continue to work there. Her cubicle would always be a reminder of that which couldn't happen again. Ever. Plus, Scorpio was right; she shouldn't be spending her nights in a crowded call center for a crappy paycheck. She should be up in the big house with the boys. It was time to shake things up in the vampire world.

"Oh damn!"

"What?" Aria frowned.

Padma read from the Wikipedia page. "...so they use their tongues to suck it out of the flower like a giant straw." She picked up her Dirty Girl Scout and took a sip. "I guess I'm buying." She signaled the bartender for another round.

"Don't worry about it. I don't think I'm staying long."

"Because you don't want to run into Scorpio?" When she shrugged, Padma placed a hand on her shoulder. "You can't run from him forever."

"I know. I'm just not ready to face him."

"Why?"

"You know why."

"No one saw anything. I didn't even know happened until you ran out of the office."

Aria paused as the new drinks were set in front of them.

There was no way that she could work after that, so she left. Part of her had hoped that Scorpio would be waiting for her at her apartment to finish what he'd started. She even called him, something that she'd never done. He didn't come. She was upset with herself for caring but, this time, she felt it. He cared for her, cared about her. It was in the way he'd kissed her.

But, could she really be happy being his mate? She traced the rim of

the glass with her index finger. He could never truly be hers. He'd be expected to be promiscuous. Could she handle that?

"What if Scorpio is your mate?"

Aria sucked air between her teeth. "I doubt that."

"Why? He's never taken a partner in all these years. Maybe he wants to make you his mate."

Her lips parted, but Aria couldn't bring herself to admit out loud that what Padma said might be true. She didn't want to get hurt, but her feelings for Scorpio had changed. She was falling in love with him and didn't want to fall.

She shook her head. He was only interested in her body, and she wasn't interested in being anybody's lair kitten. Before she could reply, she felt him standing behind her, some feet away. His gaze caused her body tremble. She refused to look at him. She wouldn't give him that satisfaction.

Padma leaned toward her. "He's here isn't he?"

Aria could only nod. He could hear everything she said, could read every thought that crossed her mind. She desperately tried to wipe both clean as she felt him approach the bar the old-fashioned way, by walking up to her instead of materializing at her side. She smiled. She was making him work for her, and he was actually doing it.

"Aria, my sweet song," he said.

With those simple words, her nipples betrayed her. She crossed her arms over her chest and kept her back to him. She glanced at the mirror over the bar, though his reflection couldn't be seen in it. She already knew what he looked like. His image was burned in her memory. Chestnut hair that flowed over his muscular shoulders. Piercing blue eyes. Creamy olive skin. Scorpion tattoo that draped over his exposed right shoulder. He stood behind her like the Greek god he was, dressed in his customary costume of a toga, with nothing underneath, and a set of devil horns on his head. The same corny, sexy costume he had worn every Halloween for the past one hundred fifteen years, not that she was counting.

"Padma," he said. "Would you excuse us?"

With a nod, Padma vanished. Aria huffed. He moved around her to

take the vacant seat.

The other female vampires sent Scorpio signals, promises of what they could do for him that she wouldn't. She tensed. Why was she getting jealous? Those whores could have him. Besides, she didn't want to have anything to do with him. Right?

"I'm glad you came out to celebrate."

Instead of bouncing off of her, his velvety voice, with a hint of ancient Greek accent, pierced her skin like his gaze. The syllables alone were about to make her have an orgasm. She sipped her drink, not trusting her voice to answer him.

"I take it that you're still mad at me."

She slammed her glass on the bar. Red drops spilled over the side and onto her hand. "You think? You mind fuck me in front of everyone, and you expect me not to be mad at you!"

His simple smile at her outrage made her blood boil. He leaned toward her. She tilted back in her seat, not trusting herself to be within arm's length of him. She looked at his amused expression.

"I'm sorry."

Just like that, her anger melted away. "Thank you."

"You didn't tell me to stop."

She bit her lip. "I know." Was it any wonder why she couldn't hold onto her anger?

"I thought you wanted it to happen."

"I did, but..."

A crowd gathered around them, trying to eavesdrop on their conversation. She picked up her gold, glitter-covered wand and prepared to leave. She would not have this conversation here. His voice slipped into her mind, and she almost fainted from the pleasure.

I'll go anywhere you want.

He lightly touched her forearm. Electricity from his fingers caused the hairs to stand on edge. To stay in his presence any longer would be a mistake.

I can't do this, Scorpio.

The bartender set a glass of scotch in front of him, then, quickly left.

I waited for you. That night...

He sat back in his seat but didn't remove his hand. Her confession surprised them both. This was something that she never intended to make public. Something she had planned to take to her grave.

I needed you. She closed her eyes, but it didn't make the ache in her chest any easier to bear. *I called you. You never answered.*

She took the chance to glance up at him. His expression was so serene, so calm. The overhead light shone on him like a halo.

I'm here now.

Before she could stop them, tears streamed down her cheeks. He massaged her arm. Each stroke broke down the centuries old wall that she'd built around her heart. She loved him. Always had. He brought her hand to his lips and kissed her knuckles. It wasn't enough.

She leaned into his solid chest. When her lips connected with his, she almost slid off the stool. He gripped her waist, pulled her closer to him to keep her upright. His lips were the perfect combination of soft and hard. She took her time to explore them before thrusting her tongue into his mouth. She was overstepping her boundaries, but she didn't care. She'd waited an eternity for this man. It was time to stop running from her destiny.

Her hands were in his hair. His searched the curve of her back. Her fangs grew to passion length as his erection pushed into her hip. She didn't care that the females hissed their displeasure. Scorpio was her man now. They would just have to get over it.

Let's get out of here, he said telepathically without breaking their physical connection. *We'll go back to my lair, and I will make it up to you.*

She reached between his parted thighs and stoked his manhood through his toga. He groaned. She wanted him more than she'd ever wanted anyone, but would one night be enough to satisfy her? Could she really handle it if that was all he wanted from her?

Then what? We make love tonight and then what?

What more do you want, Aria?

You, she admitted as she broke the kiss and rested her forehead against his. *I want you.*

He removed her hand from his erection and gently placed it into her lap. *That's a tall order.* His expression had changed to something frozen, more guarded, but why?

She didn't understand. *Isn't that what you want? That night, I thought I felt...*

Nothing, he said picking up his drink. *You felt nothing. I just wanted to satisfy you. That's all.*

She blinked. *But in Lorne's office, you said...*

Words that shouldn't have been said. He winced from sipping his drink. *I had no right to say those things to you. The holiday's always make me sentimental.*

She was silent as he looked around the bar as if wanting to flee. She wasn't making it up. She felt how much he cared about her. Why was he changing his tone now?

A redheaded vampire sliced through the crowd and curled up beside him. He kissed the female as if Aria wasn't sitting next to him.

Just like that, all of the feelings that she'd developed for him dissolved into pain. In one swift motion, she picked up her drink and poured it over his head. He turned to her, a look of surprise in his eyes. The redhead stood beside him, unmoving, as he tried to blot the drops of red liquid on his face with a napkin. Aria's low hiss caused him to stop.

As she moved, Aria's breast popped out of her costume. Scorpio stared at it before turning his gaze to her eyes.

"Fuck you, Scorpio."

Aria, wait...

She picked up her wand and ran from the bar. The cool New Orleans night greeted her. The streets were still filled with Halloween revelers, both human and not. She wrapped her arms around herself as she walked blindly through the crowd.

How could she be so stupid! How could she think that Scorpio would want anything more from her than a one night stand?

It was approaching midnight, normally her favorite time of night. The tears in her eyes wouldn't allow her to enjoy the rest of the holiday. She stood on the corner and glanced at the opposite direction of the bar,

toward the park. She didn't feel like going home, yet. She needed to hunt. Needed fresh blood to forget how Scorpio, once again, humiliated her in front of everyone.

Chapter Five

He pulled away from the redhead, dissolving the image of the buxom vamp that he'd conjured with the wave of his hand as the bartender scurried over to clean up. Scorpio ran his palms down the length of his face. How was he going to explain to Aria that he had to put on this show to protect his status? He rubbed his temples as the bartender brought him another scotch. He picked it up, but put it back down. No longer in the mood to party, he left the bar in a ball of mist.

She was on the move, had cornered a designated human in the park near the French Quarter. He leaned against the wrought iron gate at the entrance, deciding to wait for her. They needed to talk. He'd already waited an eternity for her. What was a few more minutes?

He looked up at the full moon as the human male dressed as a vampire stumbled by him, clutching his elbow. Scorpio chuckled. She always drank from the arm, never took her victim's throat. She was so pious that he often wondered if she was really a vampire.

Facing the bars, he banged his forehead against the cold iron. He'd fucked up. He wouldn't blame her if she never spoke to him again. Once he explained why he did it, maybe she would understand. And maybe she wouldn't, but he had to try.

In the bar, he had picked up on the presence of his nemesis, Barista Aldridge, a rogue vampire that had been after his title for years. He'd stop at nothing to exploit any weakness and gain what he wanted. Aria was more than Scorpio's weakness; she was everything to him. So, Scorpio had

conjured the female to throw his rival off of the scent. If Barista learned of Scorpio's true feelings for Aria, her life would have been in danger, and he would rather die before that happened.

He turned to search the dark street for Barista's presence but didn't sense him.

He'd lied to her in the bar. He'd meant every word that he spoke to her in the office. Had hoped his fingers and tongue would show her all that he couldn't say. And, until now, it had worked.

When Aria emerged from the darkness, it took him a moment to catch his breath. Her eyes glowed a beautiful shade of crimson from the feed. Her breasts rose and fell from the exertion of the hunt. Her fangs still peeked from behind her upper lip as she dabbed with a handkerchief at the blood that had pooled at the corner of her mouth. He was faced with a dilemma. Dare he tempt fate again or leave well enough alone. His eyes drank in her glistening ebony skin and, despite his self imposed deadline, he would never leave her alone. He couldn't.

"I could have taken you some place nicer than this."

She glanced in his direction but then hurried down the stairs.

"Aria, please stop. We need to talk."

"I have nothing to say to you."

"Then just listen to me."

"You made yourself clear at the bar." The quiver in her voice broke his heart. She moved fast. She was halfway down the sidewalk before he could catch up to her. He couldn't blame her for being angry with him. The only thing he could do now was tell her the truth. She deserved it.

"You're not wrong about my feelings for you." She stopped walking but didn't turn around. He wished that she would. He wanted to see the way her eyes danced when he said the words. He quickly closed the distance between them.

Her shoulders relaxed, but she continued to keep her back to him. At least she was listening.

I heard your call. He told her. Closing his eyes, he played the scene for her as if it were a black and white movie. How he had stood in the rain outside her bedroom window, listening to her agony. How he'd slipped

into the corner of her room to watch her writhe against the white sheets, begging him to make love to her. He'd fought with himself not to go to her and rip that red silk gown from her body. He shared with her how much he'd wanted to pleasure her.

As he'd watched her that night, he'd realized that he wanted more from her than just one night.

I love you, Aria. I want an eternity with you not just one night. If I came to you then, that's all it would've been. I want to give you so much more. You deserve that.

Now she turned to him, her breasts once more breaking free from the offending material of her costume. He stared at them, unable to tear his gaze away from the full and inviting globes. How he longed to suckle at her nipple like an infant. He covered them from where he stood, moving her long hair so the strands cascaded over her chest.

He looked into her eyes, which held so many questions that he wanted to weep. What was he doing? He was a master for crying out loud! By rights, he should take her right here, right now, but he didn't want to be anything less than a gentleman with her.

Before he could stop himself, he kissed her lips. The metallic taste of blood still lingered on her tongue. He was a liar. He would rather spend the rest of his days alone than with a lesser female. Didn't she understand that whatever she desired he would make happen?

She felt so perfect in his arms, but he had to let her go.

"Well. What do we have here?"

Scorpio stiffened at the sound of Barista's voice. He turned to keep himself between his nemesis and Aria as Barista stepped from the shadows. When Barista passed under the streetlight, Scorpio could see the smug expression on his face. Scorpio's eyes widened, but he quickly covered his surprise.

Barista knew.... But how?

"Nice costume," Barista quipped. "I see the holiday finds you well."

Scorpio balled his hands into fists. "What do you want?"

"We need to talk." He turned his attention to Aria. "But first, aren't

you going to introduce me to your latest conquest?"

"No."

Barista chuckled. "It's not nice to keep something like that to yourself, Master Stansakopolis."

Aria tensed behind him. She stepped in front of him to stare down his enemy with her hands on her hips.

"Something like that? I'm no one's property," she said, tossing her curls over her shoulder. "Not his and not yours."

When Barista made a sudden move toward her, Scorpio's fangs lengthened, and he pulled her behind his back as he bulked, preparing himself for battle. He would kill this motherfucker in the middle of the street, right now, if he had to. His low growl stopped Barista in his tracks.

"Fine." Barista held his hands in front of his chest and met Scorpio's gaze. "We'll talk later, you and I." His gaze then lingered on her before he dissolved into mist.

It took a moment for Scorpio to calm down. How dare that jackass roll up on him while he was with his woman, that is if she still was his after that. *He's why I did what I did at the bar*, he said with his back still to her. *I sensed his presence at the bar, and I didn't want my enemy to know how strong my feelings are for you. It puts your life in danger. Forgive me for misleading you, but I would rather die than let any harm come to you. I promise you I'll finish this.*

He began to dissolve, to go after Barista, and finish it once and for all. A soft hand on his shoulder stopped his transport.

"Let him go. He's not worth it."

When he turned toward her, their lips met. She clutched his shoulders, desperately trying to hang on to him while she, at last, gave him the desire that she had been withholding from him for centuries. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her against him. Her mouth and the unleashed passion of her kiss made him forget his enemy, made him forget his name. All that mattered was her.

He hugged her closer to him. His tongue explored the depths of her warm mouth. Her tears wet his cheeks.

There was an old vampire saying that Halloween was a time of

magic and wonder. He never knew what that phrase meant until this moment.

Chapter Six

In the blink of an eye, they were standing in the bedroom of his Hawaiian lair, the same one that he'd virtually shown her several days ago. Aria pulled away from him to walk around the chamber. She viewed the four poster bed with the luscious black silk sheets, the black leather and glass furnishings, the mirrored tile fireplace that cast the dark room in an eerie orange glow.

The truth was that she was nervous. Her body quivered as she moved to stand by the large bed. He hadn't touched her yet, but her stomach fluttered whenever she glimpsed him on the other side of the room.

This was all so surreal. For centuries, she had fantasized about this moment, and now it was about to come true. She held her trembling hands behind her back, forcing herself to be patient and not run across the room and rip off his toga.

Without moving, he lit the torches and candles that surrounded the room on various surfaces. She smiled at the irony of this handsome, powerful vampire being so romantic. Her remembered dreams told him that one thing was missing. He nodded. Red rose petals rained from the ceiling. She giggled, collecting the petals in her hand as if they were raindrops and letting them fall to the ground. Being in love with a master did have its perks.

"Are you sure?" Scorpio asked.

Her voice no longer working, she could only nod. He walked

toward her. He stripped her of her costume fairy wings and let them flutter to the floor. Her wand followed. She liked that he was undressing her the old way, the way that she had always fantasized about.

As he unzipped her costume he took her mouth in a hard kiss before he pushed her garment down her torso to pool at her feet, exposing her skin an inch at a time. Like her soul, her breasts were in his hands. When he stroked her nipples with the pad of his thumbs, she moaned. She arched her back. She threaded her fingers through his gloriously soft tresses. The fake horns of his costume came off in her hands. She tossed them over her shoulder.

He kneeled in front of her, pressed his lips against her abdomen. It made her sad that she could never have a child for him. His shoulders tensed beneath the palms of her hands. She quickly lets the thought go. She was scaring him, probably. She just needed to enjoy tonight and not worry about things she couldn't change.

After a slow swipe of her clit with his tongue, he stood and took her left nipple in his mouth. A sigh escaped her lips.

What was the matter with her? She could kick herself for running from him for so long. He suckled on her left nipple, lightly brushing the tip of his fangs against her swollen pebble, sending shivers down her spine. Somehow, she needed to make it up to him. But, how?

I'll think of something. He grinned.

She laughed as he slid his hand down her torso and cupped the smooth mound between her thighs. She was serious. They still had an eternity to spend together. Were the words I love you strong enough to express the depth of her feelings for him? Was the phrase enough to keep him by her side?

I haven't left you, he said as he straightened his posture and swiftly removed his toga. *I never will.*

Don't say never. She said as he scooped her up into his arms and deposited her on the bed. *We'll be together for a long time.*

It's not long enough.

He blanketed her with his statuesque body. Tenderly, he kissed her forehead and both of her eyelids before consuming her mouth. She'd

never tire of kissing this man, would follow him to hell for a taste of his mouth. Her fingers ached to touch him. She reached down to stroke the length of his erection. His groan flowed into her mouth, down her throat, and settled into her core.

Aria...

Without warning, he flipped her onto her stomach. He kissed her ear and then her neck. She arched into him, begging him to enter her. His lips traveled down the length of her spine, taking the time to kiss each vertebra. Parting her thighs, he licked her opening. She climbed onto her knees to give him better access to her as he leisurely explored her with his velvety tongue.

The silky rose petals pelted her back as she moved her hips in rhythm to his tongue. The sweet floral scent perfumed the air. Each sweep of his tongue pushed her closer to ecstasy. She clawed at the silk sheets. He left no corner unexplored. It felt so good. Had been so long since she'd come. A whimper escaped her throat as her fangs broke from her gums. At this point, her body was no longer hers. She belonged to him to do with as he willed. She thrust against his mouth, mentally coaxing him to bite her there. He chuckled against her opening.

Suddenly, his fangs pierced the top of her left thigh. Blood streamed down the taut muscle and pooled around her knee. As he sucked her blood from the wound, she couldn't stop bucking against his lips. She looked back at him. Her essence, mixed with her blood, dripped down his chin as he climbed up her body. He entered her with such force that she almost lost her balance.

She dug her knees into the soft mattress, bracing herself against his erratic thrusts. He wrapped her curls around his fist and yanked her upright, pulling her torso against his chest. She gasped but continued to match his rhythm. He kissed her deeply, her essence danced from his tongue back on to hers.

Oh, my sweet song. He let go of her hair to cup her breasts. She held onto his wrists as he drove his dick deep inside her pussy. *Why did you make me wait so long?*

I'm sorry, she babbled. I said I'll make it up to you.

Now, he demanded with a hot hand to her backside. *Make it up to me now!*

Her pussy ached with pleasure as his cock pressed against her slick walls. Yeah, this is what she deserved. She deserved to be punished for making him wait so long. She couldn't blame him. She cried out his name, over and over, as he dove deep inside her.

Come for me, Aria, he cooed inside her mind.

She closed her eyes. Oh, she was going to come alright. She trembled in his arms. There was one thing she needed him to do first.

The strike against her neck was swift. "Fuck," she exclaimed as blood dripped down the valley of her breasts. Yes, that is what she needed. How did he know her body so well in so little time? She pumped against both his mouth and cock as another orgasm claimed her.

She didn't think her body could take any more of this, but when he rolled her onto her back and once more plunged deep inside her still wet pussy, she knew she could and would take whatever he wanted to give her. Her nails dug into his shoulders. She didn't have time to catch her breath or adjust to his rhythm. At this frenzied pace he was going to kill her, but she didn't care. Just as long as he didn't stop moving against her, everything would be ok.

She gripped his hips with her thighs as he claimed the other side of her throat. She orgasmed so hard that her nails scored the flesh that covered his shoulder blades. He plunged deeper inside of her as he lapped the warm elixir that spilled from her throat.

I love you, he whispered against her forehead before rolling onto his back and taking her with him in a tight embrace. As she tried to catch her breath she snuggled against his chest. Soon, he softly snored against the top of her head. She leaned up on her elbow to watch him sleep. He looked so peaceful. He didn't stir when she brushed strands of hair from his cheeks.

Because of the time zone difference, it was still early evening on Halloween. She was sore, but her body begged for more of him. Though the bites on her neck had sealed, drops of blood dried on her breast.

She giggled. A dead woman had never felt so alive.

She gazed at his magnificent body, noticed that he was still aroused, so she cupped his hard cock in the palm of her hand. She realized that he hadn't orgasmed. She kneeled between his thighs and brought him to her lips.

My turn.

Chapter Seven

Scorpio didn't remember drifting off to sleep. He had never been so relaxed, so off-guard with any female. This was the first time he was able to sleep with someone in his bed. He cut his session with Aria short because he didn't want to take the spotlight from her. He had waited so long to have her that he didn't want to spoil things by seeking his own pleasure.

The breeze from the open windows caused him to shiver. He reached down to cover them with a blanket. His hand brushed against something soft between his legs. He opened one eye and peeked down at the mass of curls that were in the palm of his hand. She was kneeling between his thighs, his hard cock between her lips.

Aria, don't.

Shh.

How could he argue with that? She licked his dick from the base to the tip, curled her tongue around the end before starting over again. He winced from the pleasure of her moist mouth as his eyelids slid closed. Her lips against his flesh were a symphony that he could listen to over and over again. No. Eternity was not enough time to spend with her, to do all of the things that he dreamed of doing.

Damn, he sighed as she gently squeezed his sack in rhythm to her suction. She was toying with him, now. Making his body hers. He inhaled sharply when she flicked her tongue against his sack. Her scent still lingered in the air. It flowed into him, settling in the space where his heart

once beat.

Didn't she know that he was already hers? He had been since the first moment he saw her in Rome. She was brought to the ancient city from Egypt by her master who'd turned her. The fool attempted to sell her to him. That night, he killed the owner to free her from his cruelty.

I remember that, my savior.

No, she was his savior. He threaded his fingers through her hair. From the first moment that he saw her, he found his purpose. One glimpse of her beauty brought him back from the brink of insanity. He almost went the way of Barista, but she saved him. Instead of lusting after riches and power, he lusted after her.

Another flick of her tongue brought him back to reality. He opened his eyes and looked down at her. Her onyx tresses spilled over his olive thighs like water. He cupped her cheek. When she looked up at him with so much trust in her eyes he knew that he would give up his life to keep her safe.

His dick fell from her lips. She climbed on top of him and guided his hardness inside of her core. Gripping her hips, he thrust deep inside her wetness. She grasped his wrists for a moment, and then she leaned forward to hold onto his shoulders. Her breasts bobbed in front of his lips. He couldn't help but draw one of the sweet berries into his mouth.

Her reply was the arch of her back and a moan. He looked up at her. Her eyes glowed a beautiful shade of crimson. Her fangs peeked from beneath her upper lip. He had never seen anything so sexy. His plan was to take his time with her, but that was no longer an option. Not when she ground against him so expertly. Yes, she knew exactly what she was doing to him.

Why do you drive me so crazy, my song?

Because I love you, and I never want anyone to please you like this.

Anything you wish, my song, is my command..

Kiss me.

Sitting up, he didn't break his rhythm as he took her mouth.

What do you want? she asked.

You. You're all a dead man can ask for.

Her whimper was his undoing. He couldn't hold back any longer. He turned her onto her back, pushed so deep inside of her pussy that he was afraid that he had hurt her. Her honeyed scent always made him do stupid things. He began to downshift to keep from tearing her in half.

No, she sighed. Don't stop. I like that.

He kissed her forehead and resumed his speed. She was more than his match. She was his equal. He felt her pussy contract around him, causing his normally smooth movement to be erratic, fast paced. *Damn.*

Gripping his biceps, her gaze pierced his soul. He studied her beautiful face. She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth, the tip of her incisor splitting her lip. He took it from her and nibbled on the sweet flesh.

There was something on her mind.

What is it, my song? Just name it.

When she sent him her vision, he lost all composure. He had never allowed any woman to bite him. Not even on the wrist. Yet, this was no ordinary woman. This was his woman. The one for which he'd waited a lifetime, several lifetimes. He admitted that he'd spent many sleepless mornings imagining what her fangs would feel like against his flesh. He shuttered in anticipation.

Yes...

She shifted her weight beneath him and moved his hair that lay in the way across his neck. His eyelids slid closed. He drove hard against her center, unable to slow down.

Please, he begged. Do it!

This was messed up. Here he was, a master begging to be bitten. He bellowed as her razor sharp fangs pierced his jugular. He spasmed against the pull of her lips, releasing both his blood and his seed.

Spent, he collapsed on top of her. "Damn."

With his eyes still closed, he turned onto his back. She curled along his side. Wrapping his arm around her waist, he covered them with the sheet.

He would love to take her hunting right now. There was a romantic spot near his lair; he had always wanted to take her there.

Maybe tomorrow. She yawned.

Tomorrow. Yes, they always had tomorrow.

Given his age, there wasn't much he was looking forward to anymore. He couldn't wait for dusk to come with her in his arms.

After a while, she snored softly against his chest. He kissed the crown of her head before slumber claimed him, too.

The End, For Now

Author Bio

R.W. Shannon is the author of *Pink Cashmere*, also available from Cobblestone Press. She has been fascinated with vampires since she first saw *Dracula* as a young girl. She currently resides on the East Coast where she is at work on the next saga featuring Scorpio and Aria, as well as a full length novel. She can be contacted at authorrwshannon@gmail.com.