

How to  
*Ruin Christmas*  
FOR A  
*Vampire*



CRYMSYN HART

DAHLIA ROSE

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

**Phaze**

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## **CONTENTS**

[How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[About the Authors](#)

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*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

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## **How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire**

a novella of paranormal erotic romance by

CRYMSYN HART

DAHLIA ROSE

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

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



## Chapter One

Jarreth stared at the Christmas display in the Macy's window. His tongue played along the curve of his fang as he tried to wiggle his lunch out from between his teeth. The blinking red, green and white lights were giving him a headache. And the annoying piece of scarf he had bitten through was stuck between his canine and the next tooth over. He had taken aim on the girl's throat, but missed it by a hair's breadth and got a small strand of yarn stuck between his teeth and it was driving him nuts. He lifted his upper lip to stare into the window trying to see his reflection; however he cursed himself when he remembered he didn't have one.

*Damn humans. Why can't they move to warmer climates?* He wondered as he stared up at the stormy sky. The sun had been hidden all day which had enabled him to come out and play a little early. He loved the cold weather and hadn't bothered to don an overcoat or scarf like the mortals around him had done. His body chemistry kept him at a moderate temperature all the time and when he did get too cold it was his body's way of telling him it was time to eat. The girl before in the alley was just a quick snack. He needed a pick me up since he was battling the daylight hours.

A tingle of wetness plopped on his cheek and hand. He looked up at the sky marveling how the overcast horizon could make it so he could go out in the daylight even if it was every once in a while. That was why he loved the North. It

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

snowed and the days were shorter in the winter. However, the one part of winter he hated was Christmas.

*What was the big deal?* Kids opened presents only to break them or forget about the gifts minutes later because something newer and more expensive was out on the market. It was the same with adults—granted they didn't have remote control cars, but they still had their toys—new golf clubs, a tennis bracelet, a new car. Anything that struck their fancy. Jarreth couldn't stand it. All the peppy, happy people gave him the shivers.

Charles Dickens was correct when he wrote Scrooge saying *bah humbug* to all the paupers begging him for money. The same thing had occurred to Jarreth when he saw the fake Santa's in their polyester suits ringing those God awful bells for charity. Get a job people, get a life. Stop looking for handouts. Life was a bitch and he made the most fun out of other's misery to pass the time. What else did a vampire have to do for an eternity? After the first couple hundred years or so you had to find a way to stay occupied!

He finally gave up on trying to get the nearly invisible fiber from between his teeth. It was bad enough it was making him itch because it was wool. He was allergic to the blasted stuff. Whoever heard of a vampire being affected by anything except the sun?

The vampire pulled down his lip and stared at the window display once again. At last check there were still twenty-two shopping days until the big holiday. However, the department store industry started marketing even before Halloween had a chance to march out of the local drug stores. Everything had

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

become so commercialized it turned his stomach. Granted, even as a mortal, he had never liked the holiday season with all of its camaraderie and kissing up to get gifts. Over the past century, he had watched Christmas move, from a major religious holy day, to one splashed across every headlining sale. The holiday was used to entice the interests of those who wanted to buy chocolate covered radios or some other nonsense.

The scene in front of him was a quaint, old-fashioned winter scene with girls wearing muffs and fur trimmed hats mechanically skating on a cardboard cutout wrapped in aluminum foil to appear like a frozen pond. In the background, a boy hid behind a snow fort getting ready to pelt them with a snowball. His skates rested neatly against the cotton ball and chicken wire fort. Paper snow confetti drifted down from above making it the perfect tableau of what family life was like when he was a child in the eighteen hundreds. He might have only been two centuries old, but he was starting to feel his age.

Jarreth sighed, his days as a mortal were never as happy as the captured scene in front of him. He had to fight tooth and nail even for the smallest scrap of food amongst the litter of brothers and sisters his parents insisted on having. His stomach turned as he thought of his mortal days. Baking in the sun, sweating like the pigs on their farm trying to coax crops from clay baked soil. He was the middle child of thirteen and when he was old enough he escaped the humdrum of country life and made his way into the city. Starting off there was exciting for a fifteen year old boy. He started pick

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

pocketing at first and then worked his way up into honest thievery by purloining jewels and such right off of women's necks all the way into high society as he lulled the old and gullible into false love affairs. That was how he met the woman who had stolen his heart. It had been right around this time of year. However he was never expecting to be the sheep in wolf's clothing.

*I have to find something better to do with my time,* he thought as he tried to block out the echoes of *Jingle Bells* blaring through his ears from a store three blocks away. This time of year was not the best to have heightened senses. *Maybe I should lock myself away in the house and come out when this is all over. Then it might be safer.*

Then again that was not the best idea ever. His new neighbor had moved in a little over a month ago. She was single, quiet, and kept to herself. All the qualities he adored in a human woman. She never had any company except maybe the occasional wild animal and had not come knocking on his door asking for sugar as women were prone to do when they realized a single, attractive guy lived close to them. From what he could discern she was also unhitched and worked most of the time. The closest thing he had done was said hello. He had no idea what she looked like. All humans were the same to him some just had different color wrappings as far as he was concerned.

However things were going beautifully in his quiet neighborhood until one night he awoke to the blasting of *O Come All Ye Faithful* coming from the house next-door. To his horror his neighbor's yard now looked like an overgrown, over

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

decorated Christmas card with animated snowmen, fake elves climbing up the side of the house to help the plastic Kris Kringle on the roof who had accidentally lost his toy sack. A smattering of reindeer looked on joyfully at Rudolph who was harnessed into the sleigh Santa was in. If all that wasn't bad enough the explosion of lights stapled onto the front of her house and fence could have been seen from space it blinded him through his heavy curtains. Evergreen wreaths with big red bows hung on every window and there was a massive one above the two car garage. He hoped it would fall down and crush her small VW bug which was also decked out in Christmas gear. Her black mailbox had been transformed into a demented candy cane and there was an angel instead of the little red flag.

Once Jarreth had seen all of this, he knew his neighbor was nuts. It had taken all his strength not to go over to her house and decimate the front lawn, rip off Rudolph's antlers stuff them in Santa's mouth, make the elves start doing naughty things to one another and go bowling for the snow men. Terror lived in him at the thought of what his new neighbor now had on the lawn as something new appeared each day. Each night it was more tempting to do something, but he held in his temper.

*Humans are insane.* He finally came to the conclusion her parents must have dropped her on her head when she was a child or something. With nothing else left to do and not wanting to go back to the house he decided he would head to the local café. Granted there his sensitive senses would be assailed with the Christmas cheer, but at least he could surf

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

the minds of the humans around him and take in their fears. Besides doing that he could fuck with them. He always liked to do that. It was like being in a zoo and dangling a steak in front of a lion. They get pissed after a while, but if the lion can't see you causing the havoc why not have some fun.

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

## Chapter Two

"Jingle bell, Jingle bells, Jingle all the way," Diana Kringle sang along softly to the music on her radio. It was twenty-two days until Christmas and she was busy in her kitchen making Christmas cookies for the senior citizens center down the street.

*God, I love Christmas,* she thought as she buried her hands in the dough for gingerbread men. She had already made almost five dozen cookies and she was enthusiastically getting ready to make five more. Diana knew she probably went overboard around the holidays but she could not help it. From the time she could even remember she was bounced around from foster home to foster home. Some of them were definitely not the greatest places to be and some she never wanted to leave. But she always had to eventually. Either the family could not afford to adopt her or when the checks came late they sent her back to the home. One thing always stayed the same, Christmas. Each place she ever lived had some kind of tradition for the holiday and each year whatever she had saved from her meager allowances or what she could earn, Diana bought a Christmas trinket. From an ornament for the tree, to a bobble head Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. Where ever she went, they went. Now at twenty-eight years old, she had amassed quite a collection, actually a garage full of Christmas cheer.

She had moved from Philly to New York after she had saved enough to buy a small house in Long Island. She

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

moved to New York for one main thing—this was the place to be on the holidays. It started with the Thanksgiving Day Parade where Santa came to town, Rockefeller Center and the big tree in the center with people ice skating around it, and the picture windows in the big department stores in Manhattan. The whole city seemed to come alive around the holidays. For a long time when she was growing up she pretended that Santa and Mrs. Claus were her real parents that is why she had the last name Kringle. As she grew older and the awful predicaments she was in at some points made her rethink that theory. But she never stopped loving this holiday or what it meant. Good cheer, peace and love to all men. Yeah, Christmas rocked.

Diana dusted her hands against her candy striped apron and went over to the oven when its buzzer went off. *Another batch of gingerbread men ready for gum drop buttons*, she thought with a wide smile. She happened to pass her window when she came back from her oven and looked out at her decorations. The lights that were strung around her porch glittered merrily. All her new neighbors loved her Christmas montage on her front lawn and most of the other houses had some form of holiday cheer. All except one, her neighbor directly across the street. Half the time there was no light even at night time and no one saw him in the daytime. On a few occasions she saw him leave his house at night with his long black coat.

He looked dangerous and made her shiver, was it from fear she really couldn't tell but he intrigued her. She did have the sneaking suspicion he was causing her elves to molest



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

each other and made Santa give Rudolph the finger plus broke a few of her candy canes. She woke up and found a few of her things wrecked but never mind she always had replacements. If anyone ever saw her garage they would think that the North Pole had permanently taken up residence. She replaced the trashed candy canes, fixed Santa's fingers. Her elves were stuck in that very naughty position so she had to put them away and bring out the spares. Her holiday would not be ruined by a few pranksters who did not know she was the queen of Christmas.

By the time she was done with her first set of cookies, it was time for the Christmas party at the senior center. She boxed up the finished ones and made sure to tie each package with a large pretty bow in red or green. She had made an extra package for her neighbor. No one that young and handsome should be alone or cranky on the holidays. She took off her apron from over her tight wool sweater and even tighter blue jeans and put on her winter coat. It was blue with black feathers around the cuffs and collar. Her dark hair was pulled up in a ponytail. Diana checked her face in the mirror by the door and made sure her shimmer cherry gloss looked particularly luscious against her creamy brown skin.

"Why are you doing this? He probably isn't even home anyway," she muttered to herself. She put the rest of her cookie packages in the back of her car before crossing the street.

Her boots crunched on the soft snow and the dim evening light reflected off the powdery substance as she crossed the street. She looked up at the darkened house that somehow

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

reminded her of the ghost houses she had seen in a few horror movies. She felt a chill go up her arms as she opened the gate and it creaked ominously every millimeter she pushed it. She looked up at the window once again expecting to see him looking through the thick drapes because he heard the gate open.

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" she muttered. "You are a grown woman and there is nothing to be scared of!"

Diana gave the gate one big shove and gritted her teeth against the noise it made. The only sound she could hear was her boots against the gravel and snow. She looked up at the steps, there were only seven but somehow they looked like a whole lot more. "Let's get this over with," she said under her breath. The steps were wide and not even cleaned off from the snow. Obviously he did not give a damn if he came out and it was covered in ice and he broke his neck one morning. She reached the fifth step and decided that was enough. Diana reached over to put the box by the door when it opened inward and she was looking at two very large black boots standing there. Her eyes traveled from the boots to the long black coat that hung down to the ankles. It felt like slow motion as her gaze went up to the black jeans on lean hips, past the dark shirt and to even darker eyes.

Diana felt like screaming and running away like kids would when they got a scare. Instead she swallowed the lump of fear in her throat and stood up to her height of five six meeting his gaze and pasting a smile on her face. "Hi! I was going to leave this for you but since you are here, Merry Christmas!"

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"What is it?" His short answer made her smile falter for a minute.

"It's Christmas cookies, gingerbread men to be exact!"

"What am I supposed to do with them?"

*Was he serious?* Diana looked at him with an expression of surprise. "You eat them of course."

"Lady, do I look like I eat cookies?" He asked. He leaned against the door jam and folded his arms. "Does it look like I do this whole Christmas thing?"

Diana let her gaze go to his chest. Damn he was rude and didn't even crack a smile. "I don't know, but you've never tried my cookies! And maybe you didn't have time to decorate, I could come over and loan you a few of my things..."

"God, no! I don't want any of that multi-colored crap anywhere near me! So what makes your cookies so good lady?"

"My name is Diana not lady and they are made fresh and with a healthy dose of Christmas cheer."

"Then I definitely don't want them ... Diana what?"

"Excuse me?"

"Your name, you said Diana. Diana what?"

This conversation had gone completely off course. "Diana Kringle."

He made a sound of amusement. "You're kidding? You must have been teased unmercifully."

"No I wasn't." Diana was getting irritated. "Listen, do you want the cookies or not? And since you know my name I should at least know yours."

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

"Jarreth." He supplied. "I'll take your cookies. Maybe I can find some use for them."

Diana handed him the brightly colored box with the green ribbon. His fingers grazed her hands and they were cold to the touch. *He was not standing there that long why was his touch so very cold?* "Well ... uh you have a good night, Jarreth. Hey don't you have a last name?"

"Jarreth is fine. I don't plan to be talking to you much anyway."

"Of all the nerve!" Diana stared at him aghast at his utter rudeness and then twirled on her heels to walk away. She called over her shoulder. "By the way your steps need to be shoveled before ice forms."

"I really don't care."

As she closed the gate she heard the door of his house crash and Diana got into her car and slammed the door.

"Rude insufferable, pig of a man!"

She took a calming breath before she started up the vehicle and pulled away from the front of her house. She would not let Jarreth or whatever his name was ruin her holidays. This was Christmas and this was the most wonderful time of the year.

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

### Chapter Three

Jarreth fingered the emerald ribbon around the box of cookies. He tried to ignore the itching on his hands from the instant hives which had risen on his skin where his neighbor's sweater had touched his flesh. She had been wearing a wool sweater. As soon as he fed, the bumps would disappear. He cursed under his breath as the hunger threaded through him and pounced against his fangs. She had come on a bad night. The little snack he had earlier in the city had barely taken the edge off. He needed to find someone to suck on before he pounced on an unwitting victim.

Unconsciously he ran his tongue along the curve of his descending fang. The vampire had to admit Diana was sweet to look at. The curve of her neck seemed very inviting. The spicy aroma of her blood had mixed with the cherry scent on her lips. It made him hunger. It made him want her as he felt a tightening in his groin. Yes, it would be nice to bed the wench and then trash all her brightly colored decorations. His mouth started to water thinking about her, but the annoying itch on his hand and the pungent odor of molasses wafting from the gingerbread men inside the cookie package brought him back to his senses. His nail caught on part of the plastic ribbon splitting it down the middle. In one quick swipe of his nails, he ripped the decoration from the package. *How could she even think about leaving me cookies! I don't eat ... cookies!* He smiled at the thought and then his annoyance

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

with his new neighbor got to him. She was a walking Christmas card. Humans! Can't they get the clue?

His eyes drifted over to her display of Holiday cheer. It made him sick to his stomach and the thought of hunting tonight after seeing the happy elves which he had so tactfully placed in fornicating positions had been removed and replaced with new ones. *Does she have a cache of elves? How many does this woman have? No matter, she won't have that many when I'm done with them.*

He was about to go over and do more handiwork on her thoughtful display when he remembered he had the box of cookies in his hand. Sighing he could be nice and give them to one of the Santas on the street corner or even place them back on her porch so she could reuse them for whatever holiday do-gooder cheer thing she was involved with, but decided against it. *Let her see how much I enjoyed the cookies!*

Not bothering to be neat about it, he tore his hand into the box and grabbed one of the cookies. He took a moment to stare at the painstaking work Diana had used to decorate the little brown men. She had used gumdrops for the buttons, raisins in place for eyes, and a small neat line of yellow frosting for the mouth and around the purple gumdrop buttons to match. It was so sickly cute he cringed. A cruel smile lit his lips as in one gesture he crushed the cookie in his hand. For a moment, he thought he heard the pastry screaming for mercy. The gingerbread crumbled to dust in between his fingers. He put the crumbs on his front lawn for the birds to find in the morning. He did the same with the rest

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

of the contents of the box, leaving the desecrated box next to his front door on the snow filled steps.

Her comment played through his mind about the ice forming on his steps. What did he care? It wasn't like he could die from slipping on them. It would be the mailman's own fault for trodding on them when the box was beside the gate. He should have had a sign posted that read *Humans, trespass at your own risk!*

He laughed as he jumped down the last few steps and his feet crunched in the ice hardened snow. The temperature had plummeted since this morning, and he actually needed to don a coat to avoid the chill which had set into his bones. The chill was also another sign he needed to feed. The tasty morsel, he had earlier, had run through his system already. Scratching at his hand, he easily sailed over his white picket fence thanking himself he had the mind to cut off all the points. It would be bad form for him to be staked on his own picket fence. He would end up being the laughing stock of the community. Of course he would be dead, so it would not matter, but he would be remembered and that was not something he was interested in. Crossing the street he realized it had begun to snow once again. It had turned out to be a strange season and it was not really winter yet. It was only the beginning of December, yet they already had a foot of snow. The snow drifts were knee high on some parts of the street where the plows had pushed the snow against the cars blocking the owners in. At least he did not have to worry about that kind of transportation. He did have a car in his garage, but he rarely used it. If you could fly, you would not

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

need an automobile either, but nonetheless he had learned to drive and kept his 1955 black Cadillac in the garage and was happy to say it was in perfect condition. He loved the car since it had great trunk space and back in the day if he was in a bind he could sleep in the trunk of the car without having to worry about getting caught in the sun's rays.

*Maybe I'll drive it once the weather settles down.*

As he thought about it, his smile faltered as he gazed upon the glittering light icicles hanging from Diana's house. Thank God he had heavy curtains on the windows because if not her house lit up the night like the sun. *She must pay a fortune in electric bills. Well, I can put a stop to that. Besides, all those lights are really a fire hazard.*

Scratching his hand once again he vaulted over her fence and quickly plucked the strings of blinking white and blue lights which spelled *Merry Christmas* on her fence off the posts and threw them over his shoulder. But before he began plucking each light off the wires like ripe fruit another idea ran through his mind. He gazed around the neighborhood and was glad everyone minded their own business except Kringle here who thought she could spread holiday cheer wherever she went.

Rearranging the lights, he had all the white ones spelling *Santa isn't real, kiddies. Long live Scrooge*. Jarreth had to stop half way through since he ran out of lights and then grabbed the rest she had hanging on her windows. They were the old multicolored bulbs which burned at a touch and looked like mini-pears ready to fall off the vine. Some of the bulbs had their paint cracked on them, but the vampire didn't care



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

as long as they worked. Finally he was done and sat back to admire his handy work. Glancing at his hand, the hives were still there and the burns from the lights on the pads of his fingers were healing rather quickly.

Dark laughter filled the snow filled sky. He was pleased with himself to say the least. *Let her be jolly and cheerful about that! That will show her never to bring gingerbread cookies over to a stranger's house again. Her and her gumdrop buttons my ass. Who ever heard of gumdrop buttons?*

Jarreth scratched at the back of his hand one more time before wrapping his coat around him tighter. He was going to go off and find some plump young thing so he could feel warm again. Remembering when Diana had handed him the box her flesh had been warm on his. It stirred his cock against his jeans. It had been a long time since he had indulged himself in the pleasures of the flesh as well as blood. Again he thought about waiting in the shadows for her until she got home so he could have his way with her. However he did not have time for that. The incessant itching from his allergic reaction to her wool sweater was driving him nuts. He had to feed. And he had to do it now! But when it came to his other desires he knew just the person he would see. Dominique. She was in town. The chords of their common blood lineage had been vibrating his mind like piano strings calling him to her ever since she had gotten to town a couple of months ago.

Jarreth smiled as he thought of the other vampire. They had some wild times together. Maybe it was time to rekindle

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

the flame. Licking his lips, he stared into the air. The currents of the cold night swirled around him as the snow caressed his flesh. His bones grew light as he lifted off the ground letting mother night protect him on his way.

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

## **Chapter Four**

"I'm going to kill him. As soon as I see him, I am going to kill him!" Two days later Diana was still fuming at her neighbor. "I know it's him. I just know it!"

She came home from the senior center to find Mrs. Locke in front of her house with her crying twins Timmy and Alice. The woman was livid and asked her what the deal was with her Christmas lights and ruining the holiday for her kids. When she looked up her lights basically told kids Santa did not exist and the tears of the children were her undoing. She spent the next half an hour explaining to Mrs. Locke that someone was pranking her decorations. Then she had to make it up by giving little Timmy and Alice the two dozen cookies she had to send to a friend in Philly for her kids. For the rest of the night she ended up re-stringing new lights from her garage and her anger grew when she had to throw out her antique lights after the prank cost them to have a short in the line.

The next day was no better. She woke up and looked out her window and there was a bunch of birds on his lawn. With only her bathrobe to ward off the cold winter air, she crossed the street and saw their little beaks pecking away at her crumbled gingerbread men.

Even their little gumdrop buttons were being eaten. She knocked on his door furiously for over two minutes freezing her butt off. But he did not even look through the curtains.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"Bastard!" She hissed while she stomped back across the street. She looked up into the cloudy sky that showed only a small peak of sun and hoped for hail the size of boulders to land on his house. For the rest of the day she fumed, when she left for work she was still mad and as the day progressed at the office she was only able to calm down by sucking on a few candy canes at her desk. As soon as she pulled onto her street, she felt her anger rise once more and she would wait patiently to have her say even if she had to watch his house all evening until he came out. Finally she got her chance when she saw the door of his house open and he began to step out. He seemed to have forgotten something because he went back in and left the door ajar.

"Perfect," she muttered while hurriedly putting her coat back on. She crossed the street quickly and opened his gate not caring about the squeaking hinges. She slipped a little on the ice she had warned him about but by the time he came back to the door she was standing on the threshold. She saw the surprise register on his face before he shut down and went to a completely blank expression.

"What do you want, Kringle?"

That infuriated her all the more and she poked a finger in his chest. "You! I know it's you who did it, you rat!"

"Pardon me, but I have to ask, what are you talking about?" Jarreth had a look of innocence on his face.

"Don't play innocent with me buddy! It was you who changed around my lights and made it say Santa didn't exist! Do you know what I had to go through to fix that? Then listen to Mrs. Locke and you made her kids cry!"

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

"Kringle, look at me. Do I look like I have time to play with your holiday crap?" Why would you think it was me?"

"Crap!" She sputtered. "It's easily deduced. You seem to hate Christmas and this morning the cookies I gave you was food for the birds."

"I fell and they spilled," he said mildly.

"You did not!" She declared hotly. "I've been waiting all day to tell you off. No one sees you in the day time. What are you a vampire? Well let me tell you something, Mr. Jarreth, whatever your name is! If you think I'm going to let you ruin my Christmas you are wrong, buddy! You bring it on, I'll replace anything you break!" Diana felt hot tears fall down her cheeks and that enflamed her embarrassment and anger. "Those bulbs were antique and it took me a long time to get them. Now they're ruined and you made those children unhappy! All because you are an idiot! I hope you get run over by Santa's sleigh!"

After her tirade Diana stood there breathing heavily while Jarreth stared at her with one eyebrow cocked in interest. Did nothing faze the man? He couldn't know her reasons why she loved Christmas so much. *How can I expect him to understand anyway? Why would I want him to understand? He obviously has no heart,* she thought as she wiped the angry tears still running down her cheeks. "Well, say something, damn it!"

His response completely surprised Diana. He pulled her into his arms and kissed the heck out of her. Diana struggled against him furiously but his kiss did not let up. He was so strong under that lean frame. His lips rubbed against hers

sensuously and his tongue licked at her lips begging for entry. Her furious moan turned into one of pure pleasure when his tongue invaded her mouth. She buried her fingers in his hair and deepened the kiss. His moan filled her ears now and he crushed her to him more securely. As quickly as he initiated the kiss he ended it, pushing her away. Diana could see the desire in his eyes and the bulge in his pants, the kiss affected him just as it did her.

"What was that for?" she asked softly.

She watched as the mask pulled back down over his face. "It was the only way to shut you up, Kringle. Now go home! I have places to go."

Diana's anger resurfaced once again. "I could really despise you."

"Yeah? Well, I loathe your accursed holiday!" He shot back.

She raised her hand to slap him but curled it back to her side. Instead she gave him a sweet smile. "I won't let you ruin my holiday, Jarreth. In fact, I think I'll make it my mission to show you how great Christmas is. I'll make you love it!" she said with a wicked smile on her face.

"No, wait—" Jarreth said, but Diana turned on her heels to leave.

Refusing to listen to his now apologetic voice, she walked down the steps singing *Deck the Halls* loudly. And she grinned when she heard his shout of aggravation and the slamming of his door. *Ain't payback a bitch*, she thought grinning from ear to ear. She went back home to plan her tactical assault, she had now fondly named "Operation Jarreth Bites". She was going to choke him with Christmas spirit.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

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

## Chapter Five

Jarreth curled his fingers into his palms as the door shut behind him. *Humans! Don't they ever learn! Does it look like I'm one of the happy, jolly mortals that celebrates this blasted holiday!*

He didn't understand what it was about Diana Kringle that got under his skin. The vampire tried to take a breath, but remembered he did not have to breathe anymore. He went to the window and peeked out through the thick curtains. His next door neighbor's yard looked like it had come from the local Christmas amusement park. All of her animated and plastic decorations danced, sang, or blinked. There were enough lights on her house now it could be seen from space. He dared think of it almost as bright as the sun and he wondered when a plane was going to mistake it for being part of the local runway. He winced at the glare as all her decorations reflected off the frozen snow.

Kringle was rummaging through her store of Holiday knickknacks in her garage, while *Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree* was blaring from her speakers on the house. He knew she had done that on purpose since normally she had the volume down to a low hum. *She is seriously becoming a pain in my undead ass. Why can't she get the hint and leave me alone? Christmas is for petty mortals who believe in peppy elves magically making plastic toys and shuttling them off in Santa's sleigh. I'll show her what we can do in the back of Santa's sleigh.*



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

As Jarreth stared out of the window he licked his lips absently tasting the faint peppermint of her lip gloss. He remembered his kiss. It was the only thing he could do to shut her up. Now watching her curvaceous bottom pointed at him, he wanted to take it in his hands and feel how smooth it was. He bet the rest of her tasted like the gingerbread. Her blood would be spiced like mulled cider and with one hot, and heavy bite, he would make her forget everything she loved about Christmas. A smile spread on his lips. *Yes. That is what I will do. She thinks she can make me love her stupid holiday. I'll make her forget everything about it. Once I sink my teeth into her she'll be mine.*

"Jarreth, it is so unlike you to be infatuated with a mortal. Weren't you the one who taught me that? Telling me it only gets you into trouble."

The vampire let the curtain slide back into place and shroud the room in almost total darkness as he noticed there was another drape open to let the moonlight in. His guest was one he had known for centuries. Dominique. From the faint light in the room, he saw the crimson of her velvet gown and how it clung to her form. Her luscious lips sported the same color lipstick which made her ivory fangs stand out in the light. Her eyes were dark flecked with burgundy. Her scent was a mixture of mocha and raspberries. He crossed the room to her and drew her to him. She slid into him, molding herself to his frame. Dark hair was caught up in ringlets which cascaded around her throat and down her back. Dominique's dress accentuated the red sheen on her mahogany skin. Her hand caressed his hard shaft through his pants. She waited

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

for a reaction, but Jarreth crushed her lips to him to get the taste of peppermint off his tongue. No mortal ruled him. Finally the vampires pulled away from one another and Jarreth sat back on his sumptuous couch.

"To answer your concerns, I am not infatuated with the foolish human. She is irritating nothing more. She is obsessed with this stupid holiday of theirs. Who cares about jolly men in red suits giving out presents when they are only going to break in a matter of days? She is going to drive me crazy with the infernal singing blasting from her house during all hours of the day. Doesn't she know it is very disturbing?"

Dominique sat down next to him. Her hand rested on his leg and trailed up to his enclosed cock. Jarreth tried to let her caress, cool his mind, but he could not. Soon lips nipped at his neck playfully, but he resisted his visitor. The vampire remembered he had come across Dominique in the Orient in the early eighteen hundreds. He had gone into a brothel for a little rest and relaxation with a serious need to feed. Telling the Madame he wanted something exotic, he had been led to Dominique's room to find one of her hands bound to the bed. The madam explained she was one of their most prized possessions since Dominique was descended from an African king. Jarreth had not complained, but he could see where the slave was truly descended from royalty. He paid the Madame and untied the girl.

Something in him felt bad for her. He didn't know why. She reminded him of himself, in a way, being bound to a life without any choices until he was able to run away. Growing up as the middle child in a gaggle had been that way for him.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

He was expected to work the land until he dropped dead. However he had chosen a different fate for himself. Taking Dominique with him, he made her a free woman. He gave her control of his affairs, while he slept during the day. This made her very powerful in her day and age. Although there were times when he had to rescue her, because she was still considered a slave in some of the countries she visited.

Dominique accepted what he was, without question, as her tribe knew of creatures like him who supped on the blood of mortals, but he never touched her.

Over time, Jarreth introduced Dominique to his Master. She instantly fell in love with the older vampire. He had tried to warn her, not to get involved with him, but she hadn't listened. For a couple of years the two of them had a wonderful time until his Master decided he was tired of her being his human plaything. He forced immortality onto Dominique, when she didn't want it in the first place. The most hurtful was his Master had pawned her back off onto Jarreth and started sleeping around with another mortal. Dominique didn't take too kindly to being put aside. She killed their Master. This was something unheard of in their community. They had very few laws and killing one's Maker was highly frowned upon. To keep her safe Jarreth had taken the blame for it. Since he was older than she, his punishment was not so harsh. He was banished from the vampire community for a century. Alone to wander among mortals with no contact to others of his kind. All mental connections were cut off and he was invisible to others. And if any vampire did sense him, they were to shun him. The only one

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

of his kind he had stayed in contact with was Dominique and even that was sporadic. He had not felt her presence for the past decade. And every time they were together for long periods of time he could sense the ravages of time were taking their affect on her mind. She was not the same woman he had known. As it was with some vampires who could not handle eternity, she was tumbling into madness.

Jarreth lifted Dominique's lips from his throat as she play bit him with regular teeth. The crimson in her eyes had darkened to burgundy. She was getting hungry. He could feel the nervous energy pulsating from her. To tell you the truth he was getting hungry as well. Dealing with Kringle had taken all of his concentration of late. *Blast that woman for interrupting my solitude.*

"Jarreth, dear. Why don't you let me take care of your little Holiday problem?" Dominique purred as she sucked on his bottom lip. Her fang caught the soft flesh and drew blood. His eyes fluttered shut as she slithered on top of him and ground her hips against his hard length. He held in a moan as his hands roamed her velvet clad form.

If she didn't stop what she was doing there was no way in hell he was going to be able to control himself. That was her idea. Jarreth had known Dominique long enough to know when she was playing cat and mouse games. Normally he played along, but he was not really in the mood tonight. His thoughts were still wrapped around Kringle and her annoying gingerbread men with gumdrop buttons.

Taking a soft breath which left him slightly dizzy since he didn't have to breathe, he lifted the other vampire off of him

and set her on the couch. She pouted. Then the look on her face became twisted. "Dominique, leave my neighbor alone. I told you I would handle her."

The other vampire got up and shot him a dangerous look as she walked to the open window. Her eyes flashed bright red. "You had better take care of her, Jarreth. If you don't I certainly will. No one is going to take you away from me."

He opened his mouth to respond that he was not hers in anyway, but before he could she was already gone in stealthy vampire fashion. Getting up, he went to the window and looked out. His neighbor had gone back inside, but he saw Dominique sitting next to Santa in his sleigh up on the roof. His eyes narrowed. The other vampire could mean business. Not that he cared what happened to the mortal across the street, but he knew if Dominique got involved there could be trouble.

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

## Chapter Six

"Kringle!" Diana heard her name being roared from outside her house and dropped her magazine to the floor. She could only assume her cranky neighbor saw her little surprise. A grin spread across her face when she heard him yell her name again. She tiptoed to the window and pulled the curtain back to see him standing just outside her gate. On the opposite side of the road his front lawn was full of Christmas cheer. Garland and lights were draped across his white fence and on each curve hung a glittering red ribbon. She had decorated his tree out front even going as far as dragging her ladder over to put a star on the top. The thing she loved the most was the mat she put right outside his door. It played *Jingle Bell Rock* when it was stepped on, and to make sure he couldn't move it, she used heavy duty work glue to hold it in place.

"Kringle, I can see looking through the curtains! Get your ass out here now!" Jarreth roared again.

"Why, Jarreth. What brings you over here this wonderful chilly night?" Diana asked in a sweet voice.

He nearly pulled her gate off as he stomped inside her yard and almost tripped over an elf. His curses filled the air and Diana quickly wiped a grin off her face when he glared at her from her bottom step.

"What happened to my yard?" he asked with deadly composure even though his eyes flashed fire.

"Whatever do you mean?" Diana asked innocently.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"You know...!" He began to yell but stopped and took a breath before continuing in a calmer voice. "You did that to my yard, Kringle. It was not like that yesterday."

"Did you see me do it?"

"No but..."

Diana folded her arms across her chest. "Okay then. Bye," she turned to leave.

"Kringle! Diana, wait!" Jarreth called out to her. "Take it all down, please. The mat—it keeps singing and the damn song is stuck in my freaking head. I want to deafen myself with a hot implement!"

"My, aren't we melodramatic! It's the sprit of Christmas, Jarreth. If I put the decorations up, which I am not admitting to," she added hastily. "It was to bring a little holiday cheer to you."

Diana saw his eyes go to slants, even in the cold night his breath didn't puff like smoke from his body. *Why is that?* she wondered. He didn't have much on in the way of clothes only a long leather jacket over his usual black jeans and boots.

"Kringle, come take those blasted decorations down before I rip them down and burn them in revolt to your holiday cheer on your front lawn!" he hissed.

"Mister, you aren't going to take down the pretty Christmas stuff, are you?" The little voice of one of the neighborhood kids piped up from the other side of the fence.

When he turned, there were five little kids looking at him with innocent eyes. It was only six in the evening and after a bribe of a box of sugar cookies apiece, they had shown up right on schedule, to up the ante on Diana's Christmas act of

tyranny. She grinned and gave them a wink over the top of Jarreth's head while he faced her little co-conspirators.

"Mister, are you mad at Santa?" another piped in. Diana had to put her hand over her mouth to stop the laughter from bubbling out.

"Uh ... hi, kids." Jarreth said.

She could hear he was uncomfortable talking with the children. *Let him suffer!* she thought.

"I'm not mad with Santa at all," he responded to the question.

"Then why are you yelling at Miss Diana about burning down her house?"

"I didn't say I was going to burn down her house, only the decorations in my yard."

"So you do hate Christmas! You want to burn the decorations to stop Santa from coming to our neighborhood!" The kids began to wail and Jarreth balked at them looking at her for help.

*Poor man, he wants to run for the hills because of a few kids.*

Diana grinned, as she took a few steps down, until she was next to him. "Don't worry, kids. Mr. Jarreth won't do anything to the decorations because he wants Santa to come on Christmas Eve. Right?" She nudged him in the ribs.

"Right," he said through obviously gritted teeth. "Now me and, Kringle—Ms. Diana are going to go into her house for some hot apple cider and a good long talk. Bye, kids."

"Hey, wait a minute!" Diana felt the tables being turned on her as he held her none too gently by her elbow and dragged



her into her own house. "That was so very rude, Jarreth! This is my property. You can't just go dragging me around like a caveman!"

He put one hand on each side of her barring her from moving. Her back was pressed against the door and his head was dangerously close to hers. So close she could see the reflection of her Christmas lights in his irises. It was suddenly very warm, like she'd had a shot of peppermint schnapps.

"So you think you won that little battle, don't you, Diana?" He spoke softly and now his hand was busy playing with her hair.

She gulped and then spoke defiantly. "You can't take them down now. Every kid in this neighborhood will be watching you."

"Hmm, I see your point."

"Uh, okay then, well I should let you go." But he still didn't move. "Um, goodnight?"

"Nope."

"What! What do you want from me? I can't very well go take those decorations down now! The kids will see me and then blame me! After all the work I put into—

"Ahhhhh. So you did put them up!" A slow smile spread across his features and Diana thought vaguely this was how baby seals felt when they saw a shark.

She stomped her foot in frustration at her loose lips. "Fine, it was me, all right! There are you happy now! You poo-pooed all over my holiday and messed with my decorations!"

"Poo-pooed?" He repeated dryly.

"Yes poo-pooed! And it hurt my feelings and broke my holiday cheer for a minute. This is an important holiday for me ... fudge cake! Why am I explaining this to you?" she asked helplessly. She couldn't move and having him so close made her stutter. She wanted him to kiss her again. *Damn that was worse than being caught.* She was attracted to her grumpy neighbor who hated Christmas. "Why are you staring at me?"

He kept looking at her and it was making her uncomfortable.

"Offer me something to drink and we can talk about a truce amicably," Jarreth said.

"You're offering a compromise?" Diana looked at him skeptically "Why?"

"Maybe we can discuss the terms. It's the only thing I can think of that will keep Christmas from being upchucked all over my front yard."

"Fine. If you'll move, I'll get you something to drink. What would you like?" She asked as he moved his arms to let her pass.

"Blood ... Um Bloody Mary?" he asked.

Diana breathed a sigh of relief when she was able to walk past him and looked back when he asked for a Bloody Mary. *Why does he look so guilty? Great, I'm attracted to a freaking recovering alcoholic.* A few more seconds and she would have ended up kissing him and looking like a wanton trollop. *I have to stop talking like a fifteenth century novel,* she chastised herself.

"Um, no Bloody Marys, but I do have rum and cider if you like," she offered.

"Sure thanks." He followed her to the kitchen.

She knew all the decorations she had up must be driving him crazy. She saw him scratching his arm absently as he walked by. She hoped there was nothing he was allergic to in her house. He looked at her thick Christmas cushion that she had tied on to her wooden chair before he sat down on the red and green poinsettia pattern. He stretched out one of his booted legs from under the table, while she warmed up some cider and poured in a little rum. After looking at him sitting there drumming his fingers against the table she added some more into her own mug.

"Here you go," she said cheerfully. She put a smile on her face before setting the mug in front of him. "I'm sorry that we got off on the wrong foot, Jarreth. But this holiday is my favorite one of the year."

"Wanna tell me why that is?" He took up the mug and sniffed it before he took a small sip. Jarreth made a sound of surprise. "This is actually not bad."

"You say it like you've never had hot cider," Diana responded amused.

"I haven't had it recently let's put it that way. So why do you have this obsession with Christmas, Kringle?"

*Back to calling me Kringle again,* she thought in irritation. She pushed the thought aside and decided to tell him why. She didn't know why, but she felt like he would understand her reasoning. "I grew up in foster home after foster home and the only thing that never changed was Christmas. I

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

collected a little something from the holiday every year and some how it makes me feel a little better around this time, not so alone. I don't expect you to understand."

"I understand being alone more than you think, Diana," he responded quietly looking at her.

Heat traveled through her body with only his dark gaze on her. She rested her hand over his. "Thank you for understanding. Your hands are so cold!" Without thinking she took his hand and rubbed it between her own blowing on it gently. He made a sound low in his throat and Diana looked at him startled. Jarreth pulled her onto his lap before she could say anything and took her lips in a soft kiss. It was not like the other time. This was tender and sweet, but he still managed to ignite something deep inside her. She opened her mouth under his letting his tongue inside. She could still taste his last sip of cider and rum blending with his unique taste and Diana moaned softly under the onslaught of his mouth.

"I could keep kissing you for an eternity," Jarreth murmured against her lips while his hands moved up under her sweater and he pulled away suddenly cursing and scratching his arm.

"Don't you wear anything but wool!?" he asked. "Come on, get up. I'm beginning to itch."

"How was I to know you're allergic to wool? It's not like we sit and chat over dinner!" she declared hotly moving off his lap. Leave it to him to ruin a mood. "If you hadn't pulled me onto your lap and started kissing me you wouldn't be itching! Let me get some cortisone or something to help."

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"No, leave it. I'll get something while I'm out," he said with irritation. "I should have known that a woman who tries to relive some childhood feeling of loss through Christmas would have a closet full of wool."

"Excuse me?" Gone were the sweet words from a moment ago. Jarreth the grouch was back. Anger boiled up inside her waiting to be released. "You don't know anything about me, about my life as a child. Only what I just told you and that is not even skimming the fucking surface." Diana heard the curse slip from her lips. Her accent changed, from sweet, to tough Philly street kid. The one who had to live on the street before she slowly climbed out of the gutter. "You think you can judge my life, you bastard? I won't even waste my time on trying anymore to one up you. It's done, Jarreth. Go back to your life in your dark house across the street. This is my holiday and I am going to enjoy it! You can pretend you never met me."

"Diana, wait..." he began.

Was that remorse in his voice? She didn't even care she just wanted him gone. "Get out of my house now!"

His eyes darkened with anger. Diana stared right back at him. Without a word he stomped out letting the door slam behind him. She watched from the window until he crossed the street. It was like he just made a move and flew over his fence landing lightly on the other side. He tramped up his steps and stood on the mat that was probably still singing. He clomped on it over and over again until he seemed satisfied and went into his house viciously slamming his own door.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

"I hope the mat sings until March of next year," she muttered under her breath. She turned off her Christmas tree and the lights that were strung up all over the house before going upstairs to watch TV. She was tougher than anyone knew. No one knew what she had to go through to get where she was now. Diana was going to enjoy her holiday. She didn't care if her lousy neighbor didn't like it.

*Why does your heart thump a little faster when he's around or when he kisses you?* she asked herself as she lay in bed with her remote in hand. She pressed the button hard and let the room fill with the sounds of the Christmas movie on TV. She didn't know why but she was not going to give herself the opportunity to find out either. Jarreth no longer existed in her world.

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

## Chapter Seven

Jarreth clenched his fists, in the darkness only his bedroom could provide. Here the drapes were darker than the ones downstairs, where the garish lights Kringle had despicably decorated his yard with, flamed through. In the bedroom he had made it a point to have double sets of curtains to make sure the sun was not going to peek through while he slept. And it was here he was able to have the most peace. Jarreth tried to block out the inane Christmas music coming from the mat which was now slurring *Jingle Bell Rock* because he had stomped on it so much. No matter what, his enhanced hearing could not block it out nor could he drown out the scent of Diana.

*Kringle*, he laughed at himself calling her by her last name. He liked how his lips formed around the sound of her first name. Diana. Wild and free, like the Roman goddess. She would let none claim her, yet he desperately wanted to. He'd had her in his grasp, but she had bounded away from him like her namesake. She thought he didn't understand hardship, but she had no idea. His neighbor didn't know about the years he had been alone. Shunned by his own kind. Shut off from the web of minds which bound them together. It was not so much a sharing between vampires, as a knowing one another's thoughts. It was the knowing you were not alone he missed.

For years he had been rejected because of Dominique's actions. Killing their maker went against their unwritten law.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

He had accepted the ruling, trying to fit in as well as he could with humanity, but it was hard. His tongue ran the length of his lips as he could still taste the molasses he picked up from her lips from her blasted gingerbread men along with the rum from the drink.

*I bet the molasses is ground into her creamy skin since she makes so many blasted cookies.* He sighed, and sat down on the bed, as an ache in his heart shivered through him. Another reason he shied away from human contact was the Council had decreed he was not allowed to make another like himself. His offspring would be exterminated if he defied their ruling. What good was it to get involved with a human, to watch them grow old and die? He had already lived that nightmare once with his beloved Virginia. Before he had met Dominique, shortly after he was turned, he had fallen in love with a mortal.

He had confessed his love to her. She was a simple woman, from a wholesome family. He was attracted to her at first for the innocent outlook she had. Her view of the world that everyone was good had him falling in love. Jarreth had wooed her until finally she had confessed her love for him. She was alone in the world as her parents had died of influenza. He had confided in her his true nature and offered it to her. However, Virginia had refused his gift. So he had gone against the wishes of his Master and instead of drinking her dry and imbibing her memories, he chose to stay with her.

Eight decades passed and they loved one another to the fullest. She understood that he could not give her children.



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

She cared for anyone who needed her help. It saddened him as he slowly watched her wither and die. Letting mortality consume her until Virginia breathed her last breath, with his name on her lips. He would always remember the day she died was Christmas Day. Ever since that fateful day, he locked himself away from the joyous season as it reminded him of his lost love. Diana reminded him of Virginia with her giving nature. Of course Virginia was not about having Christmas exploding on her lawn, but deep down he understood Diana's need to have something to hold onto. You had to have something to hold onto when you were all alone.

Jarreth ran his fingers over his arm, itching absently.  
*Damn wool. Couldn't she wear something else?*

He groaned internally remembering all the snow on the ground. For a human it was cold out, but the elements didn't bother him at all. Sometimes his trench coat was a bit too much, but he wore it nonetheless. From the looks women gave him, he knew he was hot in it, and it helped him fit in with the mortals. It would be rather odd for him to walk around in the dead of winter, in the frigid cold without a jacket on.

*Diana had wondered why I was so cold when she touched me. If only she could warm my heart. One sip of her exquisite blood would warm my heart and—he smiled—and something else.*

He shook his head. "What am I thinking? Dominique was right. I'm infatuated with a mortal. A luscious one at that. The best thing for me to do is put her out of her Christmas

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

misery. I don't need lights and bows on my house. Vampires aren't frilly things they're creatures of the night.

"We love darkness and things that go bump in the night. Whoever made Christmas into the sickening gift driven holiday was—Blast my infernal allergy. It's too late for me to hunt. I'll sleep it off then tomorrow I'll go hunting."

The vampire reclined on his bed and shut his eyes. Visions of blood dripping sugar plums danced in his head. *Hunting will be good. It will clear my head. Maybe I'll get some Chinese takeout. Or some pizza. Does Diana like pizza? I wonder what she would want for Christmas besides more outlandish decorations. Maybe a nice cashmere sweater. Yeah I think...*

Jarreth drifted off to sleep with the thought of appeasing his neighbor in his mind and maybe being able to taste more of those delicious lips.

\* \* \* \*

Dominique smiled to herself as she felt Jarreth drift into the dreamless sleep of the undead. Since she was still connected to him on a mental level it was like a switch had been turned off and he was just not there anymore. She had kept herself concealed from him as she had been doing most of the night. She was used to it, hiding from all the other vampires because Jarreth had taken the fall for her. He was such a push over. A little cry here, a pout there and she had him. He might have modeled himself to be the fearless tough vampire, but she knew better. Honestly she was surprised he had lasted as long as he had away from the rest of their kind. She had always assumed he would have bit ash after the first

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

decade of banishment, but he had lasted seven. Now he was infatuated with a Christmas crazed human woman.

*Jarreth, what am I going to do with you? If you can last this, long you belong to me. Both of us are outcasts. I'll make your little human wish she had never met you. You'll want nothing but me soon. She'll hate you when I'm done. I'm sorry dearest, but it is for your own good.*

Dominique emerged from the shadows and stared at the house and the disaster the front yard had become. She shook her head as she stared at the blinking snowmen and plastic Santa Claus. Clucking her tongue against her teeth, she decided on her course of action.

*Off with their heads.*

She grabbed Santa's head and plucked it off in a loud snap. She then took it and speared it on one of the white pickets of the fence. Then she took the snowmen and did the same thing alternating them along the fence like Halloween Jack O' Lanterns. Ripping off the flashing lights, she picked up Santa's body, then wound the lights around his feet, carried it over to Kringle's yard, made a noose and strung it upside down in the lowest branch of the neighbor's tree. The mechanical device inside was still chanting *ho ho ho*. Next she grabbed one snowman and stuck it in the middle of the road awaiting demolition from the snow plow she heard rumbling down the street. In the distance she could see its blinking lights like the yellow eyes of a predator stalking its prey in the night. She left the other in the yard but moved it to the center of his walkway laying it down. She decided next to cover the snowman with snow and made a makeshift

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

tombstone. She took the ribbons and decorated them on Frosty's grave. She took the remaining lights from Jarreth's, the next-door neighbor, and along with Kringle's house she began to arrange them into words.

It took her a few minutes, but she finally got it done and the lights read, *Here lies Frosty, the Decapitated Snowman.*

*Let the children weep when they see this. The neighbors can't talk their way out of this one. I can hear the children now saying. Poor Frosty. Mommy, what happened to him? Did Santa do that? Did mean Jarreth do that?* She smiled as she admired her own work. Now there was one thing left to do.

She went to the front steps and ripped the singing mat off the steps. She took it and ripped it in half with a couple of tugs.

*See if this puts the ho, ho, ho back in your steps,* she smiled. As she stared at Diana's house, licked her fangs desperately wanting to sink them into the human Jarreth was infatuated with. But she did not want to spook him away by killing Diana. Besides, toying with the two of them was so much more fun. For good measure she made a point to slam Jarreth's door. Snow fell around her in an icy shower from the roof, but she didn't go inside, rather she concealed herself in the fading shadows. As she did, she saw a light switch on at Jarreth's mortal obsession's house and the curtain move aside.

Dominique smiled to herself. *Good. Very good. See if you're welcome around here now my dearest, Jarreth. She'll hate you now and always. When you've had enough I'll be waiting...*

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

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

## Chapter Eight

*He didn't even try to hide it.* Diana fumed as she crossed the street, there was a crowd outside Jarreth's house and their voices were getting louder. The twins were crying again, of course. In Diana's opinion those kids were always crying at something but she would never say it out loud. She had seen the little destruction episode from the night before and looked at it first hand as she went outside to go to work the next morning. Luckily she pulled down hanging Frosty and the other stuff from her yard before anyone saw.

*I should let him suffer!* she thought with a wicked smile, but she felt her senses tingling saying something was not right. It looked like him dressed all in black and wrecking mayhem on the Christmas decorations she had put in his yard. On the other hand it didn't look like him either; the person seemed shorter in the dark. The person didn't move quite like he did, she couldn't tell for certain in the shadows of the night. As the rest of the people in the neighborhood passed by, throughout the day, it spread on the street about Jarreth's anti-Christmas display. She assumed they couldn't take looking at it anymore and came to confront him. It was almost seven in the evening. The crowd was getting a little rambunctious.

"I told you I didn't do this!" Jarreth's voice carried across the voices of their neighbors.

"Yeah it's your front yard, buddy! How come they vandalized only you, huh?" That was the voice of Mr. Bruner.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

He was known as the neighborhood father who was as much of a bully as his sons were. "I should come over that fence and punch you in the face."

"I'd like to see you try," Jarreth replied softly. As Diana pushed through to the front of the crowd she heard the deadly intent in his voice.

"Hey, hey there is no need for all of this!" Diana said, getting to the front of the crowd and holding up her hands for silence.

"You know he hates Christmas, Diana! Look at what he did to the pretty decorations you put up! That was the voice of Mrs. Johnson from two houses down. "You tried to be nice and get him in the Christmas spirit and he destroys it for all of us!"

The crowds' voices rose in approval of her words and anger. Diana held up her hand for them to be silent again. "God knows I would not be defending Mr ... Um," She tuned her head just a little and muttered out of the corner of her mouth. "What is your last name anyway?"

"Don't have one."

"Okay," she replied and turned back to the crowd. "As I was saying I'm not defending Mister ... Jarreth. But did any one see him do it?"

The various answers of no came from the crowd and Diana nodded. "So it is safe to assume that he didn't destroy the decorations. I'm sure he'll clean up the mess, won't you, Jarreth?"

His response was only a nod but she could see the fire to fight flashing in his eyes especially towards Mr. Bruner. "Now

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

while all you guys are here. Christmas party at my house on Saturday night, lots of goodies and rum filled cider. Start showing up around eight."

That got the crowd in a better mood as they began to walk away calling out that they would see her on Saturday night. She turned back to the gate and opened it crossing over to his side of the fence. "You, in the house now!" she ordered as she walked by him. He raised one eyebrow at her in amusement as he followed her up the steps and into his house.

The door closed with a click and Diana whirled on him. "I saw you massacring the decorations last night, you rat!"

"Then why didn't you let the mob rip me to shreds over some plastic, tinsel and lights?"

"I don't know. I should've. Why did you destroy them, Jarreth? Were you that mad at me?" she asked softly looking up at him.

"I didn't do it, Diana. I have a suspicion of who is guilty, but it wasn't me." He explained.

Diana searched his dark eyes. Not knowing what she was going to see. She was surprised when she saw honesty there. "Ok, I believe you, who would want to make trouble for you? You said you know who it was."

He shook a finger at her. "Ah, ah, ah, I told you I suspected not knew who it was."

Diana saw a grin cross his face changing his pale features from dark and sullen to boyish and cute. It was amazing how his smile softened his face. Diana couldn't help herself; she



reached up to caress his face. "You are so beautiful when you smile," she whispered.

A look of something indiscernible passed over his face for a moment before he closed his eyes and pressed his cool cheek against her palm. It surprised Diana as she continued to rub his cheek. "Jarreth?" She spoke his name in a question and so soft it was almost unheard in the silence of the room.

He opened his eyes and swooped her up in his arms claiming her lips in a feverish kiss. Diana moaned as pleasure infused her body all at once. This wasn't a soft sweet kiss, but one that sent heat down her body making molten wetness at her core. He easily lifted her off her feet. She wrapped her legs around his waist. He walked up the stairs, not asking if she wanted to and she wasn't about to refuse. She desired him. Without his saying a word, Diana knew he desired her, too.

He set her on her feet and broke their kiss. It gave her the opportunity to look around as he turned on one dimly lit lamp. The drapes at the windows, in his room, were thick. The bedspread on the bed was plush and the color of deep red wine. Everything about the room said darkness; if the light wasn't on the room would be pitch black. He sat on the edge of the bed and stared at her. Diana felt a thrill run through her body; he excited her and made her nervous all at the same time.

"See, no wool," she teased pulling at her sweat shirt.

"Take it off," he ordered softly. "Take it all off."

Diana swallowed and pulled the red sweat shirt over her head taking the tank top with it. His eyes never wavered as

she pulled her fuzzy boot off and her black leggings after them. She stood before him completely nude. She felt more exposed than ever before. Jarreth took her hand and pulled her between his legs. He laid his head against her breast as if listening to her heart beat and sighed.

She tunneled her fingers though the thick hair at his nape. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing at all. The light glows off your body, you look like you were carved from gold." He whispered. His lips left little kisses across the smooth surface of her breast before taking the nipple in his mouth. Diana gasped at the feel of his mouth at her breast. The sensation was different, cool as if you drank water after eating a mint. But it still made her body shudder while his hands roamed over her body. He shifted his attention to its twin and his hand went between her legs and caressed her already wet mound. A low moan escaped her lips when his thumb rubbed against the sensitive nub of her clit. He slid one long finger inside her and Diana's head fell back in pleasure.

"You are so tight, Diana. I can feel your body clenching around my finger. Yes that's it baby, spread your legs and take a little more."

His words were like heat on her skin making every nerve ending tingle. She spread her legs farther apart even though she felt as if she would crumple at his feet at any minute. When he slipped another finger inside her and moved them deeper she could feel her orgasm begin.

"Jarreth, I'm going to come." Her words were almost like a plea as if she was begging for release.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"Yes you are. I feel you trembling, Come for me, baby." Jarreth took her nipple between his lips once again and sucked it deeply into his mouth. All the while he used his fingers to manipulate and tease her silky wet pussy. Diana felt her body come apart in his arms as her orgasm sent her reeling over the edge. Her womanhood flowed around his fingers and she was left gasping for breath. Jarreth pulled her down to the soft covers on the bed before standing and undressing quickly.

"Hurry please. I want to feel you inside me." She spread her legs for him to see the wetness of her pussy by the dim lamp light. She saw him stand naked and proud, his hard cock jutted outward in arousal.

He growled low in his throat the sound of a predator claiming its mate as he slid his body over hers. With one hard thrust he let his cock sink into her waiting pussy. Diana cried out from the feeling of fullness once he was inside her.

"Is this what you wanted, Diana?" His words were harsh against her ear. "Do you like how I feel inside you?"

"Yes, oh God, yes!" She cried out as he plunged his cock deeper inside her pussy.

He lifted her legs high around his waist and Diana locked them tightly around his back. They moved together taking them both to the heights of passion. Their bodies moved hard in that ancient rhythm of pleasure. Jarreth flipped her over suddenly so she was riding his cock, she moved her hips letting her body slide down on him slowly and torturously each time until he couldn't hold back his moan. It was her turn to tease him pinning his hands above his head and

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

taking his cock inside herself slowly each time. She watched as he gritted his teeth. Each time he reared up to bury himself inside her Diana moved upwards. He made a growl of frustration and pulled his hands from over his head to grab her hips. He pulled her down hard against his waiting cock and the rhythm built to a frenzy until she arched her back and cried out as her orgasm took hold. Jarreth followed suit and buried himself to the hilt in her pussy while his body was taut with his own release. She collapsed against him her breath coming out in short pants while his hand caressed her back. Before she rolled off Jarreth to lie next to him.

A giggle escaped her lips. "Well I didn't expect this to happen."

"Neither did I." His tone made her look at his face and she met his dark gaze, the mask was back.

"Um ... So what happens now?" she asked

"I don't know." He turned away from her and put his hand over his eyes. "You want dinner or something?"

"You mean a date?" Diana asked.

"God, no! I meant are you hungry after sex!"

Diana felt as if she had been doused with cold water at his words. She rolled out of the bed and began to put on her clothes. "Well, gee, don't make it sound like a death sentence to go out on a date with me! Some people have done it and enjoyed it; I might add."

"What? I didn't mean ... Where are you going?" Jarreth asked as he sat up in bed. "I didn't mean it like that."

"Home, obviously you got your rocks off and now it's time for me to leave." Diana sat on the floor of his room and

started to mutter under her breath. "I saw your face, from the time your cock went limp, it was slam down the metal barricade!"

"Listen Kringle, it's been awhile since I did this girl, guy thing ... I'm not used to it ok! Plus you can't be that naive. Thinking that automatically once you fuck a guy you start dating? We don't even like each other."

Wrong words, he ducked as one of his boots flew past his head barely missing its target. Diana stood up with her eyes flashing fire and threw his other boot at him making him dodge away from it. "No! I'm not that stupid. Nor do I fuck cold bastards on a whim, either. We don't like each other you're right. But here I was thinking that maybe this was the start of some thing." She slapped her hand against her head. "Oops I forgot you're a Christmas hating, elf molesting asshole."

He got right into her face still naked. "You're a Christmas loving, cookie eating loon with a complex, Kringle"

"Bastard!" she hissed. "I should have let the neighbors flay you!"

"Bitch!"

He took her lips in a hot kiss. Diana felt herself sinking into that pleasure haze he created in her as his tongue slipped into her mouth. But she pulled away and slapped him hard. "You no longer have the pleasure of kissing me."

"Come on, Kringle, you know it was your pleasure a few minutes ago."

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

She made a sound of frustration and stomped down the stairs stopping in the middle and calling back up to his room. "Oh, and you are not invited to the party on Saturday night!"

"I'll be there!" he yelled back.

"You do and I'll make sure every surface of my house is covered in wool!" She continued down the stairs stomping on each wooden step to emphasize her anger. His loud laughter followed her until she slammed the door and made ice fall from his gutters. Diana crossed the street to her own house muttering about stupid men and sending him a herd of sheep, if she could afford it, just to watch him break out in hives.

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

## Chapter Nine

Jarreth raked his fingers through his hair as he threw his jeans back on. He knew he was royally screwed. For whatever reason, there was something about Diana Kringle that pushed his buttons, obviously since they had just slept together and he had not seen that coming. Dominique was correct in saying he was infatuated with his human neighbor across the street. It was more than that; he was in love with her. Whatever was it about her that irritated him more than the wool of her sweaters? He turned his back to look at his darkened house and missed the energy—

*Wait a minute! Did I just say I loved her? That can't be. I haven't loved anyone since Virginia. I can't love Diana. It would be a death sentence for her. I couldn't even turn her. I would have to watch her die like Virginia all over again and I can't go through that once again. Oh, God! What have I gotten myself into?*

He sat down on the couch and stretched his feet out trying to get Diana out of his mind. Grabbing a remote, he clicked on his television, DVD, and surround sound all with one press of a button. He liked that humanity had created a universal remote. It made life easier. Not that it was such a hassle to get off his ass and turn on each one or change the channel, but like humanity he had grown a little complacent in his ways. Hence, Diana interrupting him. He had come to accept his solitude with dignity and grace. No matter what the Council had passed judgment on him for, even though it

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

wasn't his crime, he had taken the punishment and lived with it for so many years. He let his head fall back as the DVD began to play and a strange melody came over the speakers. It seemed otherworldly and melodic.

He tried to focus on it, but it reminded him of Diana. The feel of her body against his. Her warm skin had smelled like molasses and ginger. The feel of her heart beating against his chest had almost made him remember what it was like to be human. What it was like to be alive and warm when the sun could shine down upon his face and he could turn his cheek to its caress without the worry of it burning him alive. He had resigned himself to his darkness, and his solitude. Why did she have to come in and interrupt him?

Jarreth opened his eyes and they fell on the movie. He watched as a human girl ran through the rain with her dog back to her parents' house where she was forced to babysit. Later that night, fed up with the crying child, the girl summoned the Goblin King to steal the baby away into the dark and awful night. The king came and gladly took the child to turn it into a goblin, but later the girl realized the error of her ways and begged for the return of her brother. The Goblin King gave her one task to rescue the brother—go through his labyrinth, defeat him by the thirteenth hour and she could have the baby.

The vampire smiled as he let himself get carried away by the movie. He rather liked the Goblin King fellow and seemed to fancy there was a resemblance to him. Even though he was watching a movie, he still couldn't take his mind off Kringle. She seemed to be the girl in the movie. Raging against every



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

obstacle, put in her way, to save the one thing which she held dear. Of course, this was her precious holiday and not a little baby. Jarreth could see the same fire in Diana, that the little girl in the movie had. His beloved, Virginia had that same fiery spirit. The spirit to survive. No matter what the obstacle. They would overcome it.

Jarreth knew exactly who the culprit was who had rigged the Frosty debacle outside. It had to be Dominique. Only she could have the gall to ruin the one thing which he found happiness in after all these decades. She had always thought she had a claim to him after their master died. He realized now how crazy she truly was. Killing their master in the past had not been because of self defense or whatever farfetched excuse she had given him ages ago. It was all because she wanted to have a little bit of fun and out of spite their master had turned her away and chosen another favorite.

*I was a fool to take the blame for her,* he realized. He shook his head and stared at the movie. They were in a ballroom and the girl was trapped in a world she didn't understand where everyone was hiding their true faces and the Goblin King was toying with her even though it seemed he loved her. Was his love a farce? *What was I thinking? After all these years. She wants to keep me from Diana.*

"Jarreth, I wonder if it is you who are going a little batty?" Dominique stood in front of the television holding the DVD case. "Watching children's movies, are we?"

"Dominique, I told you to leave Diana alone. You caused me a lot of problems. Why don't you run along and leave me be for the night. We had the same master so I hold you in

respect for being my blood-sister, but you've screwed with my life long enough. Leave town now and I'll forget this incident and I won't go to the Council with all the lies you've spilled over the past seven decades."

Her laugh purred over her lips as she moved in a blink and landed cat like on his leather sofa. A puff of air went into his face causing his hair to cover his eyes. Dominique reached out to move it out of the way. He caught her wrist before it touched his face. He snarled at her and bared his fangs. She only laughed and leaned in close to him with her lips only inches from his.

"Jarreth, you really have to lighten up." She broke his hold and moved down his naked chest, heading farther south. Once her finger tips reached his waist band, she kissed along his neck hitting his sweet spot. "You're such a spoil sport. I only did what I did to liven up the place. These pesky humans won't come banging down your door with pitchforks and torches. That was the olden days." She bit him lightly on the throat.

Jarreth held in a moan as her hand went over the bulge in his jeans. Try as he might, his body was not responding to what his mind was telling it. He kept the image of Diana in his mind. He was not going to do this with Dominique. He was not going to play her games. He grabbed her by the shoulders and shoved her away so she landed on the opposite end of the couch. The anger in his blood turned his eyes red.

"Mark me well, Dom. Get the hell out of town before I take your head."

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

Her expression darkened then. "I see the little bitch across the street has gotten to you. I could forgive that you fucked her upstairs to get her out of your hair. A girl needs a good *wham-bam, thank you, ma'am* every once in a while and I could see it coming with her. That bitch was so frigid I could see why she hasn't gotten any. It's more like she was a born again virgin or something the way she carries on about Christmas. Please. But your infatuation with her has gotten intolerable. I'll give you one more chance to prove to me you are just playing around like you did in the old days. You and I are going to go to that party she's having next week. We'll give her a show she won't forget. Just think about all the fun we can have."

"And what if I don't want you to go?"

"Oh, you can't say no because if you do I'll kill the bitch right now. You will have to watch her bleed out all over the pretty white snow like cherry syrup on a snow cone. And I know you don't want that to happen. If you truly *love* her as you claim, you will do as I ask. Only then will I spare you and she and the rest of the humans will run you out of town. You'll have no choice but to go with me."

Dominique bared her fangs and one of them slipped over his lips and he tasted his own blood. For the first time in a long time, he felt the true need for killing rising in him. He wanted Dominique's head and he was going to have it one way or another. However he knew she was serious in her threat. She would kill Diana without a second thought if he didn't go to the party with her.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"Fine. I'll go with you. You leave her alone and don't cause anymore upheaval in the neighborhood. There will be torches and pitchforks before you know it and you don't want to see me run out of town just yet, do you? Where would the fun be in that?"

Dominique smiled her deranged smile and he knew she certainly belonged in a mad house. Clapping her hands, she launched herself at him and wrapped her arms around his neck in a bear hug like a child who had gotten a new toy. "I knew you would see it my way. Now I'll leave you to watch the rest of the movie." She pulled away, planted a wet kiss on his cheek, and stood up. As she did, Jarreth watched as the shadows melted around her form and she became one with the darkness as only their kind could.

He pushed the hair from his face and stared back at the movie. The girl had fought her way to the end of the maze and was confronting the Goblin King. He saw fear in her eyes and in the king's. She was afraid he was going to harm her or try to trick her once again. The Goblin King was frightened he would never have the love he so desperately craved. The vampire watched it feeling what both characters felt in the movie. At that one moment, each of them were enemies and was alone in the world even though desperately some part of them wanted to be with the other. However, that could never be as in the end the girl defeated the evil king, saved her brother, and returned to her world. The king was left alone to roam the boundaries of the night looking for his soul mate.

Jarreth wondered if that was going to be his fate as well. He could not let Dominique win. He had to keep Diana safe

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

from her. No matter what it cost. Diana would never know what they truly were, what evil he embodied. He loved her too much and his love could mean a death sentence.

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

## Chapter Ten

*One week before Christmas.*

Diana was putting the finishing touches on a gingerbread house she was going to use as a decoration for her Christmas party. She even used colorful gumdrops around the icing trim to simulate colorful holiday lights. Everything was prepared. Ham with sliced pineapples, all over its perfectly glazed meat, a turkey with its white paper booties in place and assorted side dishes and desserts, covered the table. Her music played and it echoed through the house courtesy of a surround sound she bought that afternoon and one of her neighbor's teenage sons, Mathew, helped her install it before the night's festivities. This was going to be her best Christmas party, since she'd moved into the neighborhood. Her thoughts darkened when they shifted in the direction of Jarreth. She had been thinking about him constantly since that night in his house. She had felt nothing like that in her life with any other man. His touch was cool, yet he still managed to ignite a fire inside her body. Even now as she thought of the way he took her body to the heights of pleasure she could feel the tingle of arousal between her legs.

*Pity he is such a complete jerk,* she mused while she tasted her hot buttered rum and nodded her approval.  
*Perfect.*

She was not going to let wayward thoughts about Jarreth ruin her Christmas party. Even if he did show up, she planned to ignore him all night. Her black velvet cocktail dress hung to

her knees in soft swirls. The dress was sleeveless and clung to her bosom while the big black bow at the back emphasized her creamy milk chocolate skin. She had dressed carefully just in case the brute did show up.

*To show him what he was missing, of course.* As she walked out to the cleared living room to place the punchbowl on the table along with the other treats, the door bell rang. Diana opened the door with a smile and greeted the first of her guests. In no time, the party was in full swing with people eating drinking and laughing merrily with holiday cheer.

"I see your crabby neighbor showed up." The comment came from her friend Abby from down the block. She was about Diana's age and was helping her in the kitchen.

"What crabby neighbor?" Diana asked absent-mindedly as she placed more appetizers on the tray.

Abby laughed. "What crabby neighbor my ass! You know who I mean. The one who's been watching you ever since he got here."

"Jarreth is here!?" Diana didn't even see him arrive she was so busy with her guests. She cracked the door to the kitchen and saw him standing in the corner holding a plate of food and a glass in his other hand. When he thought no one was looking he dropped the plate on the table uneaten and threw the contents of the glass in her potted plants.

*Of all the nerve!* "Who let him in?"

"Uh, I did since I thought the party was for the whole neighborhood. I thought he was invited."

"I uninvited him."

"Oh, really! When did you do that?"

"Never mind, long story."

"Do I sense some chemistry between you and Jarreth the Scrooge? That's what the kids are calling him, by the way."

Diana made an un-ladylike snort. "Chemistry! Please. He's an irritant and the kids are so right about him being a Scrooge."

"Uh-huh, so what are you going to do about him?"

She could feel Abby's eyes on her as she lifted the tray and put her back against the door to open it. Abby held the door open when it didn't budge for her nudge.

"I'm going to ignore him," She replied pointedly. Diana pasted a huge smile on her face and went out to her guests.

As soon as she put the tray down, she was swept up in male arms and danced around the room until she was under the mistletoe. It was Scott Jarvis from down the street, the dentist who had asked her out a few times. His nose was a bit red from too much hot buttered rum and he smiled goofily at her.

"Look Diana, mistletoe, time for a kissy poo!" His speech was slurred and he planted a wet sloppy kiss on her lips amidst the cheers of the party goers.

*It's like kissing a Labrador*, she thought. Her eyes traveled to where Jarreth stood. Somehow his face looked darker as he watched. *Was he jealous?* She wondered. Just for that she let the kiss last a little longer than necessary. The door bell rang once more and that was reason enough to be able to pull away from the disgusting kiss of Scott Jarvis. She thought that everyone who was coming was there since it was going on to eleven o'clock. Diana opened the door and



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

shivered slightly. She didn't know if it was because of the cold wind that gusted in off the street or because of the figure that stood there. He must have been new to the neighborhood because she didn't ever remember seeing him before. His long black cloak hung to the snow on her steps. His manner of dress reminded her of Jarreth. She looked around as she thought about him and saw him trying to move forward through the guests. *Great he was leaving!*

Turning her attention back to the man at the door she placed a welcoming smile on her face. "Merry Christmas! Welcome to my home, won't you come in?"

The man's smile seemed to gleam. "Thank you so much for welcoming me into your home." He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it softly.

"Your hands are so cold! Come in and warm up, have something to drink!" She ushered him inside just as Jarreth came to stand by her side.

"What are you doing here?" Jarreth asked.

Diana looked from one man to the other and felt uneasiness settle in her. "Do you two know each other?" She asked while closing the door.

"We're old friends. I'm Luke. Jarreth and I have known each other for a very long time."

"So you don't live in the neighborhood after all?"

"No, he doesn't." Jarreth answered her question never taking his eyes off the new arrival. "I asked what you were doing here, Luke?"

"I came for a visit old friend and when I found your home empty and heard the music and I just knew that you couldn't resist a party, Jarreth."

Luke's words were laced with sarcasm, and the uneasiness that Diana felt increased. She didn't need these two ruining her party by fighting so she did the next best thing.

"Why don't you boys go and talk this over in the kitchen?" she said. She put her hands firmly on their backs and propelled them that way. The door closed behind them and she let out the breath she was holding.

*This is just perfect. Family feud in my kitchen,* she thought as she pasted a smile on her face while walking over to the table to collect empty food trays.

"Who was the yummy eye candy that Jarreth went in the kitchen with?" Abby asked as she came over. "Think he'd give me an intro to Mr. Yummy?"

"Family, I guess. I'll ask him for you when I get in there." Diana stacked two trays on each other. A wooden spoon that had been accidentally broken was in one of the empty punch bowls so she put that in the trays. She maneuvered her way through the maze of dancing, talking people and pushed the kitchen door with her butt. She wasn't facing them when she got inside but she could hear their raised voices.

"I'm telling you I didn't do anything to mess with the Council! Banished, remember? You were the first one to vote if I recall."

*Council? Banished? What were they talking about?* She put the trays down on the table next to the door and picked up the spoon to put in the garbage can before facing them.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

That's when she saw the men had their hands locked around each other's throats.

"What the hell! No fighting in my kitchen!" Diana yelled.

"Diana, run! Now! Get everyone out of here!" She caught Jarreth's eyes and saw the urgency in their depths.

With almost a feral hiss Luke turned his menacing gaze on her. His teeth gleamed and Diana swore she saw fangs. His look alone made her step back in terror but instead of the door she hit the table sending the trays clattering to the floor. Luke slammed his face into Jarreth's jaw sending him to the floor and moved towards Diana. She looked around wildly seeing nothing to defend herself with, because the knives were in the drawers on the other side of the counter. The only thing she had in her hand was the big wooden spoon that had broken in the living room.

*Ah, shit. I'm fucked!*

He moved with speed and Diana could barely see him but she raised her hands to protect herself as he came forward. She closed her eyes and when she did not feel the blow she squinted one eye open. Luke was standing in front of her with his face frozen in a horrified expression. When she looked down she saw that the handle of the spoon was stuck into his chest.

"Oh, my God! I'll call an ambul..." She never finished the words. She watched him turn from flesh and bone to dust before her eyes.

Jarreth rushed over to her. "Kringle! Diana! Are you okay?"

"I'm ... I'm fine." She stammered. When the realization of what she saw hit her, she pushed him away. "No I'm not fine!

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

I just saw a man turn to dust in my kitchen! Oh, my God! What was he? What are you! He is dust, I mean look!" she kicked her foot through what was once Luke.

She picked up the first thing that came to her hand as she moved. "Get away from me, Jarreth!"

He looked at her hand amused. "What are you going to do, spork me to death?"

Diana looked to see what she had taken from the counter. It was a red plastic spork. She had bought them so she wouldn't have so much of a clean up after the party was over. "I don't care what it is, I'm not putting it down." She was backed up against the refrigerator with her hand raised over her head. "What are you, Jarreth? Please don't say what I think you are going to say."

"He was and I am a vampire." He stated simply. "You never should have invited him in."

Diana's breath slowly escaped her body like a balloon with a slow leak. "That's what I thought you would say."

"Go back to your party, Kringle. If you want to know the truth you'll come to my house when your guests leave. I'll clean this up and go through the back door.

Diana could barely nod as she walked towards the door. She eyed him warily with each step she took.

"Don't worry, Diana. If I had wanted to drink you I've had more than one opportunity before now." He smiled and this time she watched his fangs descend in amazement. "You are safe with me I swear it."

She went through the door quickly. For the rest of the night all that kept running through her mind was the word

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

**VAMPIRE!** By the time she'd gone back into the kitchen any remnants of Luke was gone and so was Jarreth. She was going to go over there and find out exactly why two vampires were going to fight in her home.

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

## Chapter Eleven

Jarreth stared at the clear night sky as he sat on top of his snow covered roof. It seemed to be the only part of his house which Diana had not assaulted with Christmas decorations. From his vantage point, he was able to watch all the guests leave. By the position of the stars and his internal clock, he guessed it was around one in the morning, afternoon for his kind. He had cleaned up Luke's ashes and scattered them to the four winds so the vampire could not regenerate. He sighed as he watched the humans filing out of the house. He heard all their combined heartbeats and it sounded like a symphony. It made his mouth water that such an easy smorgasbord lay at his feet. Yet no matter what, he was not going to feed from the neighborhood he lived in. And the one heartbeat he cared about most diligently was the one who was still sputtering and hiccupping from the events of the night.

The only reason he had gone to the stupid party in the first place was because Dominique had threatened to kill Diana if he didn't go with her. However, he had waited there in the shadows for the longest time—an invisible ghost to the humans. He had expected the arrival of the other vampire, but she never showed. Finally he had gotten tired and made himself mingle with the humans at the party. He just made himself blend in. He had seen all the trouble and hard work Diana had put into making all her food. He desperately wanted to try it, however the best he could do was hold a

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

morsel of food in his mouth savoring the taste for a few moments and then spit it back out. His kind could not ingest human delicacies. He could drink whatever he wanted, but when he smelled the amount of alcohol in the punch he was not about to take any, incase there was trouble. It took a lot to get his kind drunk, but he wanted all of his senses in perfect working order for the night.

As the party wound down, he had seen Diana kissing that stupid neighbor. He knew she didn't enjoy it. She had been putty in his hands. He was the one who had made her whisper his name at the height of her passion. He was the one she dreamed about and for whom her body ached. He knew it. He sensed it. Just thinking about her made his hunger rise. He wanted to taste her. He had restrained himself from doing it at their last intimate encounter, but tonight, if things went the way he planned, he would have her and make her his. He knew it was wrong to love her, but his heart had not felt so light since Virginia. He knew if the Council found out it could mean her death even if she was not turned into a vampire. He would not have that.

The crisp night air wrapped around him and made him wonder what it was like for the humans. They would be huddled together, blowing into their hands to keep their fragile digits warm. To him the cold was nothing more than a part of nature. It didn't affect him at all. It was just there.

His gaze narrowed to the people below and his eyes searched the shadows for Dominique. She was no where to be found. He opened his mind to the vastness of space searching for her thought patterns, his link to her, it only came back as

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

silence which meant she was too far away for him to sense. If he had not been banished, he would have been able to detect all the other vampires in the area. Since he had been cut off by the Council he had gotten used to the solitude. He wondered if he even wanted to be linked to the web again. No matter, he suspected the reason for Dominique not showing up at the party was because she was the one who told Luke where to find him. If that were the case, then he suspected there were things going on in the vampire community he wasn't aware of. He had an idea of who was doing it. He only hoped there would be no other Council members coming to look for him. No matter. He was safe for the rest of the night and so was Diana. He had never wanted to tell her about what he truly was. And yet the past week without having any contact with her had nearly driven him crazy. His sheets still smelled of her and it nearly broke his eternal heart when she had walked out the other night the way she had.

*Why are women so difficult?* He had to admit to himself, once he had gone to the party, he was hoping to get a chance to apologize to her. She didn't understand that he had to cut himself off from the world, to keep his heart from being broken. He hadn't shared his loss with her. Maybe now, she would understand. Besides he had bought a present for her and had wrapped it himself in gold and green paper with an oversized red bow which he knew she would love since she was a Christmas fanatic. Jarreth had wanted to give it to her at the party, but then she had uninvited him and Dominique had threatened him so now seemed to be the only time. And if Dominique was planning anything, he decided he might



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

have to high tail it out of town and he wanted to give Diana something to remember him by even if she would not accept what he truly was.

Finally her house darkened across the street. All the guests were gone. A stab of sorrow went through him as he was sure Diana had forgotten all about him. But after a few moments he saw her come out onto her front steps, look around the snow covered landscape for him, and then blow into her hands trying to keep warm. After a moment, he watched her cross the street, and then heard the gate slam on his fence.

"Damn, pain in my ass! Wants me to meet him in the freaking cold and he won't even answer the door."

Jarreth smiled as he listened to her talk to herself. He wanted to make her wait even if it was for just a moment longer.

"Jarreth, get your ass out here or I don't care what happened in the kitchen, I'm leaving and your—"

The vampire stood up and then allowed himself to jump off the roof and land cat-like in the snow. He heard Diana gasp as he stood up. He brushed the snow from his coat and took in her look of sheer surprise.

"It's true. You're a-a vam—"

He bowed low. "A vampire. Yes. That I am."

A look of horror did not appear on her face. Instead, it was one of awe and something else. He could peek into her mind if he wanted to find out, but he didn't want to breach the truce they had at the moment.

Her mocha skin bleached out if that were possible and the smell of fear wafting from her mixed with the molasses and

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

the butter rum from the party. It made for an intoxicating aroma that made his mouth water and he couldn't help but lick his lips and when he did, Diana saw his fangs. But she didn't run away screaming, now that she was one on one with him and that gave him some hope. He looked at her, wearing her bright red coat and Santa hat with silver tinsel trimming it. She hadn't changed from the party and he noticed she was shivering. He went to his front door and opened it.

"After you." He extended his hand inviting her into his lair. She didn't move.

"So, you got more friends in there? Am I supposed to be vamp-sushi or something?"

He chuckled and then grew serious. "I would never hurt you. I swear. Please come inside. I have something for you."

She crossed her arms over her chest and stared at him with her intense chocolate brown eyes. If she only knew how much he melted inside from them she would be able to lick him off the snow like hot fudge. "You have something for me? That's a laugh. Look Jarreth. I'm here. I don't want you thinking I'm falling under your undead spell. I'll go in on my own two feet not under the power of your fanged influence."

He said nothing and waited for her to move past him. He closed the door behind him and realized even though he could see perfectly well, it was dark for her. Snapping his fingers light suddenly sprang into the room as it was ablaze with candles. He heard her gasp. Hey, why hide any of his power from her now. She already knew what he was.

"Do you want anything to drink?"

"So what you gonna offer me Type O or something. I think I could use something stronger, say AB Negative. I hear that has great spice to it something like a Bloody Mary."

Jarreth shook his head and sat on the sofa. Diana sat on the edge of the chair next to the door. On the coffee table in front of her was the present he had bought for her. He saw her eyes glance at it and felt the excitement bubbling under her sarcastic exterior, but she was squelching it and tried to focus on their conversation. "I appreciate you coming. I know what you think of me after the encounter we had. I didn't mean to come off so cold. It's just that—"

"Encounter! Is that all it was, just some run in with me— No you look, mister."

"Diana, please. Will you let me finish!"

She suddenly stopped at his tone of voice. He hated to be firm, but he was in no mood for beating around the bush.

"The other night was wonderful. It's been a long time since I've been with someone that I love." He stared down at the table and then met her eyes to see the shocked expression on her face soften some.

"You-you love me?"

He got off the couch and knelt by her chair and took her hands. They were cold and he wanted with everything in his being, at the moment, to be able to warm them up, but he couldn't. His body hadn't been human warm in centuries. He smiled and ran his knuckles along the smooth skin of her cheek. "Yes, Diana Kringle. I love you. It's been centuries since I've allowed myself to love. The first and only woman wouldn't accept my gift and I watched her die after being with

her for decades. And then I took the blame for someone very close to me because she killed our father, our Master. That is forbidden in our laws. You never kill your sire. For it the Council banished me for a crime I didn't commit, cutting me off from all of my kind save the one I took the blame for, Dominique.

She was the one who murdered your snowmen and hung Satan, I mean Santa. I think she's setting me up with the Council which was why Luke showed up at your doorstep. She must have told them I was killing again. I don't know. Please believe me when I say I want to keep you safe. It's just been so long. So long alone with a dead heart and then I met you. I—"

He broke off as he thought of Virginia dying in his arms on Christmas. However Diana laid her palm on his cheek. Her body heat scorched him, but he didn't care. He admitted he loved her and that made all the difference.

"Jarreth, I didn't know. God, I'm so sorry. Why didn't you tell me all this in the first place?"

He looked up at the tears on her cheeks which mirrored his fractured heart. He had given up that ability a long time ago. Smiling he turned to the coffee table and took the package and laid it in on her lap. He watched her expression turn to absolute glee like that of an innocent child on Christmas morn. She even clapped her hands together and stomped her feet. This was what he loved about her.

"You bought me something? I thought you hated Christmas?"

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"Let's just say I have my misgivings about it still. But, yes, this is for you. Are you going to open it or do you want me to take it back to the store?"

Her hands closed over it possessively and she hugged it to her chest. "If you even dare touch it. I'll bite you."

Jarreth laughed. "I'd love to see you try. I'd love to see you try."

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

## Chapter Twelve

Diana chuckled at Jarreth's last comment. Hell yeah she wanted to bite the man in front of her. He was such a pain in the ass. In her mind, she saw herself snapping her teeth at him.

"So are you going to open it or hug it?"

Jarreth's voice filtered into her thoughts and away from biting even though that might be fun. She felt herself smile instinctively. He had gotten her a gift, far more he had declared his love for her. This night had turned out to be one of the strangest of her life. He was a vampire banished from his kind and for loving her they both could be in danger. He had a crazy ex girlfriend that was more than likely insane and that was another problem. It looks like they would be stuck between a rock and a hard place. Somehow all the problems seemed to pale in comparison to knowing he loved her and his showing it by giving her a gift for a holiday he didn't like.

"I'll open it, Mr. Vampire," Diana said cheekily. "I still don't know how I feel about the whole undead thing but..." She started to open the ribbon of the present with trembling fingers. "I'll work through it." Diana undid each piece of tape carefully not wanting to tear the shimmering paper. She was going to save it in her box of Christmas treasures where she kept all her special holiday things. A gasp escaped her lips when she got to the gift inside the box. There was a glass ornament figurine of a carousel unicorn; it was painted in Christmas colors on his intricately craved horn and saddle.

The glass unicorn was nestled into pink fabric as she lifted it in her hands.

The candle light glinted off its glass surface. "Oh, Jarreth! This is magnificent! I love it!"

"Well he is not the only thing in the box, my love."

Warmth spread through her body when the term of endearment left his lips. *My love*. Two simple words meant more than anything to her. She had been alone all her life and all she ever wanted was to feel loved and wanted. She made a home for herself for security because she never had one and the times when she thought she found love she still felt out of place. With those words Jarreth gave her something she longed for all her life. Diana lifted the pink cashmere sweater from its box and rubbed the soft material against her cheeks.

"Trying to get me out of wool, I see?" She teased and she saw the light of mirth in his eyes.

"Well it's kind of itchy and antihistamines won't work on me," Jarreth replied with a smile. "Do you like your gift, Diana?"

"I love my gift, thank you." She let her fingers slide around his neck while he knelt before her and placed a soft kiss on his cool lips.

He pulled away and Diana could feel him searching her eyes. "What about what I said before? I love you, Diana, and if my heart could beat once more it would beat for you."

Diana caressed his cheek. He pressed his face against her palm. She wished she could warm his cold skin with her

touch. "That is the best gift, Jarreth. To have your love because you have my love as well."

He pulled her to him in one fluid movement and devoured her lips in a kiss. Diana let herself drown in the flood of emotion and sensation that assaulted her body. His hands roamed over her bare shoulders and down the rest of her body sheathed in her party dress. He pulled his mouth away from hers to press kisses down her neck and every piece of skin his kisses could find. While her breath came in little pants, this time she noticed that his was still.

"Come to bed with me, let me love you."

"Right here. Right now please." She didn't want to go anywhere else. She did not want to shatter the magic they were creating by walking up a flight of stairs. With a nod Jarreth flicked his wrist and the logs in the fireplace lit with flames. Diana laughed in delight. "You'll have to tell me how you do that one of these days."

He lifted her into his arms and walked the few steps that took them to the fireplace. "I will share all with you, Diana. I swear it."

She slid down the length of his body as he let her stand on her feet. She felt the hardness of his arousal pressed against her. His eyes gazed into hers and she felt as if she was drowning in their depths. When his hand slid from her cheeks to bury themselves into her hair Diana closed her eyes in pleasure from his touch.

"The flames bounce off your skin as if you were a golden statue," he whispered it softly while his hands trailed across the skin of her arms. His touch made her tingle and goose



bumps form on the surface of her body. "I feel as if I should worship your beauty or the fact that you could love me.

Diana let her head fall against his shoulder as he spoke to her. His hands reached behind her to untie the bow of her dress before sliding the zipper down. The dress pooled at her feet. He looked amused, and raised an eyebrow at her. "No panties Kringle?"

"I told you I was freezing out there." Diana replied with a laugh.

Jarreth cupped her breasts and she gasped in pleasure. She lifted the hem of his shirt and pulled it over his head when her flesh met his. He moaned as if in agony.

"You feel so warm, like you could heat my blood once more."

"Jarreth."

She could say no more because his lips claimed hers once more. The flames of passion licked at them both. Diana let her hands move down his body and rubbed against his engorged cock pressed against his slacks. His hips pushed further into her hands wanting more pressure on himself. She deftly unzipped his pants letting them and his shorts fall down his muscular legs. Her lips licked and nipped their way down his body until she came to his hard length. Her tongue licked at the tip before sucking it into her hot mouth gently. A groan of agonized pleasure escaped his lips and his fingers tangled in her hair as she knelt before him. She took his length deep, sucking and stroking his cock with her tongue and lips. Her eyes looked up to him and saw his eyes closed and his head arched and taut. He looked down at her as their gazes met.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

The heat of his stare made her weak. She kissed the tip and Jarreth got to his knees in front of her. Their lips met and tongues mated. His hand slipped between her legs to caress the soft mound that was already slick with desire. When his fingers touched her clit, she made a tiny sound in her throat. When he buried his fingers inside her, Diana spread her legs wider to give him more access. With each stroke of his digits pressed into her pussy, he sent her pleasure higher and her body trembled.

"Now, Jarreth, please!" She begged. She lay back against the carpeted floor and held her hands out to him. He came to her arms willingly. Diana wrapped her arms around him while he filled her with his cock. Her legs wrapped around his waist and her body moved with him as he surged inside her. With his head pressed against the smooth curve of her neck she felt his teeth nip and scrape her skin. She almost wished he would sink his teeth into her flesh and drink her blood. She wanted to feel what he felt and see the world through his eyes. The thought of being in his world and immortal like him fueled her passion.

She could have his love for an eternity.

Their pace increased and her body became ever slicker as he slid his hands under the curve of her ass to pull her to him. "I'm going to come my love, oh, God, yes!"

"Yes, baby. Come for me. I'm with you!" Jarreth kissed her and let his tongue penetrate her mouth like his cock was doing to her body.

Her body arched and shuddered. Her cries of release were muffled by his lips on hers. Diana felt his body become taut

as his orgasm followed hers. He collapsed against her and she welcomed his weight pressing her into the plush carpet.

"Jarreth, can I ask...?"

He raised his head and with one finger caressed her cheek. "Ask what, my love? Anything and it is yours."

Diana took a breath and met his gaze. "Make me like you."

He pulled away from her and sat staring at the crackling fire. "You don't know what you're asking of me, Diana. The Council will want you and I both dead just for us being here now. If they know I passed on my blood to you they would hunt us for sure!"

"Who cares, Jarreth, as long as I'm with you. We could have this kind of love for an eternity! I know what I'm asking!? We could run, go somewhere far away!"

"Do you know how they would hunt us!?" He gave her a violent shake. "I can't do that to you, Diana!"

"As long as I have you I could deal with anything, Jarreth. Don't you understand that!" She implored him with her eyes and reached up to caress his face. She could see his resolve slipping and pushed forward whispering softly. "I love you. Let's have our love forever. I know what I'm asking and I want you."

"This is not like the movies, Diana. If I do this you will be in pain and hurt for days. Then you will have to learn to control your thirst for blood."

Diana nodded. "I understand the risks, baby and I want it all the same."

She waited as his fangs descended from his gums. They were so sharp that they glinted in the firelight. Diana moved

her stray tendrils of coppery curls away from her neck and Jarreth took her in his arms.

"Well isn't this just the sweetest little Christmas picture. Just another vampire, fucking Christmas."

The sarcastic voice reached them from the doorway and they both looked over to the woman standing there. Diana could tell who she was and she could see the anger written all over her face.

"Dominique," Jarreth growled in menace.

"Jarreth, that does not sound like happiness to see me." She pouted her lips and Diana felt like slapping her senseless.

"Oh I am, Dominique." Jarreth stood and pulled his clothes on. "You know why I am happy to see you because I'm going to kill you."

The air of the room changed from one created by the lovers to one filled with danger. Diana scrambled to her feet and pulled on her dress quickly. She, for one, was not going to stand back and let Jarreth fight this bitch alone.

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

## Chapter Thirteen

Jarreth stared at the vampire he had called blood-sister, lover, friend for years. He knew now how conniving she was and how much she was obsessed with seeing him in misery, trying to completely control his life. He was not going to be a fool again and take the rap for her stirring up the Council. He knew she was the one who had gone to them to stir up the hornets' nest. It was an unspoken rule that as long as he stayed out of their way during his banishment they would stay out of his as long as he was not causing trouble. He growled low in his throat, feeling the rumbling as a panther roar. It made the killer instinct in him reawaken. His fangs lengthened and he bared them at the other vampire. He was pissed the vampire had interrupted his night. Jarreth had waited so long to have another woman in his life, another mate and Diana had given herself to him. She would brave the Council and his bite to face eternity alone. That alone fired his heart to stand against Dominique.

"What's the matter, Jarreth? Did I interrupt your little love bite with the little Miss Gumdrops over there? You do know honey he was going to pop you like a juice box and then suck you dry. He really doesn't love you."

Before Jarreth could say anything, he saw Diana launch herself over him and push Dominique to the floor. She was scratching her and biting at her. The scene was a little amusing as he watched the two women fighting and he was a little turned on by it, but he shook his head once Dominique

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

kicked off Diana so she crashed into the entertainment center. He went to race to her side, but the other vampire stood in his way.

"Ahh, ahh ahh!" She wagged her finger at him. "No human for you. You're mine, remember, Jarreth." She purred as she crossed the distance between them. His eyes darted to the prostrate form of his love, but realized she was still breathing. Relief caressed his insides as Dominique's hands wrapped around him. The other vampire pressed herself against him, squashing her tits into his chest hoping to raise desire in him but it only set his jaw on edge and made him want to swat her.

"Dominique, get the hell off of me." He pushed her hard enough that her back connected with the front door. Her momentum was so strong, it blew the hinges off the door, and Dominique and the door went flying into his front yard. He didn't care if the neighbors saw anything. He was beyond caring about hiding his precious secret and being quiet. Dominique had manipulated him long enough. It was time to end this!

He marched outside aware of the snow crunching under his bare feet like small daggers in his soles since it had hardened. The cold didn't affect him and as he broke the snow, parts of the door lodged in his flesh as well. No matter the wooden splinters would hurt him, but they were only an irritant and would not kill him unless they were forced through his heart. Outside the moon was half full and the night was clear. Dominique was laying on the ground looking like a dead snow angel in her perfection. However, he knew she was faking.

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

Jarreth could sense her light breathing and as he extended his mind into the atmosphere around him, sensing for human life, he picked up an intrusion. A big intrusion. It felt like a blimp had appeared in the neighborhood radar and the normal humans who were sleeping, dreaming of sugar plums while waiting for Santa to come in a few nights, had no idea what was going on around them. Someone was cloaking the encounter between him and Dominique and to do that took a lot of power. More than he had. More than she had and only possessed by some of the oldest vampires he knew. And the only ones were the ones who sat on the Vampire Council. If they were here, something had definitely stirred the hornets' nest more than he realized. It could only be the queen bee lying in the snow. She had probably told them that he was the one who had killed Luke. He was going to kill her.

His eyes glanced around to assess the yard for weapons. There were no shards of the door big enough to kill Dominique with and he didn't feel like getting his hands dirty by tearing her throat out and then beheading her. He wanted to do her nice and clean. He should torture her, to make up for all the years of suffering he had been through, but that would take too much time. Dawn was only a couple of hours away. No, this had to be taken care of tonight.

"Dominique, I know you're faking. I'm not stupid."

He watched as her eyes opened and wicked laughter danced across her lips. It was as insane as her idea he was going to spend the rest of his eternity with her. "Jarreth, my sweet. I understand why you're mad. I interrupted your little foray into the human experience. I get it. You wanted to play

human. Your solitude has driven you to crave an unnatural attachment with that woman in there. You've been driven mad by you're time apart from your brethren. Well I'm here now. The Council knows you were the one killing their other members yearning for power. All you have to do is tell them. They will forgive you. Come with me and we will go to them." She held out her hand to him as if wanting him to help her up from the snow.

He was about to say something when he heard the clatter of feet like reindeer hooves on his roof. He looked behind him expecting to see Diana when there were two members of the Council squatting on his snow covered roof. One was Anya. She was as pale as the moonlight on the snow wearing nothing but red looking like a smear on the whiteness of his roof. The other was Kent. He was dressed all in black, like the angel of death. He wondered if he was there to come collect his soul. Kent looked on the scene and put a finger to his lips. Both of their eyes reflected the moonlight like a wolf hunting its prey. He realized then they were shielding themselves from his blood-sister.

"Jarreth, dear. What are you looking at?"

"I thought I saw Santa and his eight tiny reindeer. Piss off." He turned just in time to see one of the wooden posts used to hold up his gate aimed at his head.

He ducked and caught her wrist. He growled and brought his other hand up and swung his fist and hit her cheek. He felt the impact of bone and heard it break. Dominique dropped the post and stumbled back. Before she could recover he took another swing and hit the other side of her



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

face. Now her jaw was completely unhinged. But acting quickly he gave her one more shove and she slipped on the ice covered sidewalk. Her arms grappled for a handhold in thin air, but she found none and fell over backwards. As she did, her back impacted with his white picket fence and she was impaled on every human's dream of a perfect house with a picket fence.

The point pierced her heart. For a moment she took in a long quaking breath and then her face went lax. It returned to its ebonized human beauty he remembered the first night he saw her. He looked down on her form, kissed two fingers and ran them down her cheek as her body released itself from the flesh and turned to ash before his eyes. He closed his eyes for a moment and composed his thoughts. When he opened them, he found Kent standing in front of him guarding the door. Fear raced through him as he realized Anya was inside with Diana. He stepped forward, but Kent put a hand out and stopped him.

"Please. You can't—don't hurt her please. She—"

Kent put a finger to his lips and silenced Jarreth. The vampire knew not to piss off the Council. He remembered the first time he had stood before all of them in their formidable glory and he was scared to death he was going to die right on the spot, but they had only punished him. The older vampire stepped aside and Anya came out carrying a still unconscious Diana.

"You love this human?" Anya asked. He still heard the Germanic accent in her voice.

"You know I do."

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

The Council members looked at one another. Anya handed Diana over to Kent who cradled her gently. Jarreth was not too happy at how long he lingered at her throat. "You did not breach her flesh and yet you wanted to. I can smell you on her. She loves you too and was willing to give you an eternity."

"What are you going to do with her?" Jarreth asked.

"Do you know why we are here?" Anya asked. She walked around him with the moonlight shining off her eyes.

"I assume Dominique told you I had killed Luke or the others on the Council. Please, I have stayed away, by myself as you decreed. I have shunned human company. I have not turned any others as you have told me not to do. Punish me if you wish, but leave her be." He shivered as Anya rested her head on his shoulder. Her mind sliced his like Diana had carved the turkey at her party. He closed his eyes against the immense power of her mind. But her examination was over barely before it began. When he opened his eyes Diana was on the ground laid careful on his front steps. Kent's long coat was used for her pillow. He hesitated before he knelt before her as he still sensed the two members around.

*We know you did not kill the other Council members and that Dominique was the one who killed your sire. Our edict has been rescinded. You are free and clear of all charges.* Kent whispered in his mind.

A sigh wracked his whole body. He hugged Diana close to him. *Thank you.*

Anya's thoughts caressed his mind like a lover it almost gave him an orgasm as her tendrils slid inside his brain. *You*

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

*are free to bring her into the night. Love her. That is our decree now.*

*For all time.*

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

## Chapter Fourteen

The council members left as silently as they had arrived leaving Jarreth with a sense of relief and freedom that he had not felt in a long time. He lifted Diana from the cold snow covered steps and carried her into the house. The fire still crackled as he laid her on the long settee, his fingers caressed her lips then her cheeks that were cold from being outside. He knew soon she would be cold all the time and he felt a feeling of loss knowing that her warmth would be gone. But the thought of losing her to the ravages of time and old age was something he could not bear. She wanted this and when their bodies came together they would create their own warmth from the love that they would share as immortals walking through time. He would have lots to teach her about his world and his life, he was glad to share the knowledge he had from centuries past. He would not be alone any longer.

Jarreth watched the pulse on her neck beat steadily and strong even though she was still unconscious. *It will be better this way* he did not want her to be scared when he drained her life force and replaced it with his own immortal blood. He pushed away her hair from her neck and leaned in closer as his fangs descended once more from his gums. This time he would not be interrupted and now he had the blessing of the Council, Diana would be his. The smell of her blood was as heady as her hot buttered rum, the aroma surrounded him like the cinnamon and spices that filled her kitchen. Kissing her neck softly and feeling the blood run through her veins

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

Jarreth bit into her neck and let his mouth fill with her life essence. She arched her neck and gasped but did not awaken. His eyes closed with the pleasure of her taste, his arms pulled her to him tighter while he swallowed her blood hungrily. He saw her life with each mouthful he took, he felt her loneliness, saw the life she had as an orphan and now he could see why Christmas was so important to her. Her heart beat slowed as he drained her life and when it stilled to almost nothing he drew away from her neck. Two drops of blood beaded at the puncture marks and he licked them off her skin. Her lips were tinted blue from the loss of blood. Jarreth kissed them softly and they were already cool. She was limp and he easily tipped her head back so her throat would be open to receive his gift. He bit into his wrist and let his blood pour into her mouth knowing that it would flow easily into her body and begin her transformation. Jarreth laid his head against her breast and listened to the last hollow sounds of her heart dying. Stillness over took her. She wasn't dead. He knew this was just the beginning of her new life. He carried her upstairs to his room and undressed her before placing her in his bed under the thick covers he used to ward off the winter cold. He too undressed and climbed in beside her wrapping his arms around Diana and pulling her close under his body. He would watch over her until her body completed its transformation.

\* \* \* \*

Diana could hear voices through the haze of her mind, some were singing and it seemed far away. There was one

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

always soothing her with sweet and tender tones as she struggled to climb up out of the fog and into consciousness. Her body was flushed with heat at one moment and then chilled to the bone and all the while the voice talked to her even though she could not understand the words. *How long was I out?* Her eyes opened finally to the darkened room. The only light was coming from the small lamp on the bedside table. *The last thing I remember was making love with Jarreth and ...* The memories of the night came rushing back. She reached up quickly to feel the back of her head expecting a lump after Dominique sent her flying across the room. *Hmmmm, nothing,* she was surprised there was not a lump from her battle with the vampire. Diana turned her head and saw Jarreth lying on his back and his body still in sleep. One arm thrown across his eyes and the other on her thigh as if he was making sure she was there.

"Jarreth?" she whispered. He sat up instantly even though the words were spoken in such a soft tone.

"Diana, you're awake." He reached over and pulled her close in an embrace that surprised even her. He kissed her gently once, twice, three times before pulling away to look into her eyes. "How are you feeling?"

Diana laughed softly. 'It was only a bump on the head, takes more than that to damage lil ol' me. "I take it the fight is over, how long have I been unconscious?"

"My love it has been two days since Dominique was here. It is Christmas morning!"

Her eyes widened with surprise. "That long did I have a concussion or something? Did you at least get me checked out by a doctor!?"

"Calm down, Kringle, and I'll explain." He sat up against the headboard and pulled her close to rest against his chest. "Dominique is dead."

"How did that happen?" Diana looked up at his face expecting to see remorse or sadness, there was none in his eyes.

"By my hand we fought after she knocked you out and I impaled her on the picket fence."

"Serves the bitch right."

Jarreth laughed. "The claws on you, Kringle! Anyway, after she was no more, two Council members came and told me they knew the truth and I was free. I am no longer shunned or banished."

"Oh, Jarreth, that is wonderful!" Diana exclaimed. In the back of her mind she felt a sliver of fear not knowing if he would leave her now because he was free."

"I will not leave you, Diana."

"How did you know what I was thinking?"

"That is the other part of my story. They gave me a gift, a gift I do not deserve but I gladly accepted."

His hands caressed her shoulders as he spoke and Diana asked. "What was the gift?"

"It was you, they gave me permission to change you and accepted our love."

"Do you mean we can be together? You can make me like you?"

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

"I already have, my love."

Diana felt joy rush through her. "You mean I am a vampire and I can be with you forever!?"

"Feel your heart, there is no beat, I can sense your thirst even now." He explained softly.

Diana pressed her hand against her chest and felt nothing in the seconds that ticked by not one beat. She looked at her hands and for the first time noticed that her skin did not feel like her own. She felt new and alive even though she was now part of the undead realm of vampires.

"Are you upset I changed you?" He took her silence for distress and Diana quickly calmed his fears.

"No! I asked you to, Jarreth! This gift was given to me by you and I love you for it!" She laughed out loud joyously and it rang like a church bell heralding the holiday. "I am a vampire and on Christmas morning, no less! How cool is that, it is the best gift ever!" Diana threw her arms around his neck and smacked kisses on his lips that turned from fun filled to heated passion in seconds. When she pulled away to caress his cheeks she saw desire in his eyes and it thrilled her to know she would see that in his gaze for eternity. "Wait a minute, if I have been inside all this time was I dreaming the Christmas music?"

For the first time she actually saw Jarreth looking sheepish. "It was me, I played it while you went through the transformation. It seemed to sooth you when you were feverish."

"Aww, Jarreth, you did that for me!? You hate Christmas!"



How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart

"Don't get all mushy, Kringle." Even though he said it, he had a smirk on his face. "I'm growing used to the holiday."

"I'll tone it down next year, I promise." Diana giggled.

"No, you go all out every year. As long as it makes you happy I am thrilled to share it with you."

"I love you, Jarreth, and I'll love you for eternity." Diana knew that for as long as she walked the earth with him she would not love another. He was her heart and happiness now and the best thing she could have gotten for Christmas was his love.

"I vow the same to you, Diana, you have my love for all the lifetimes we share together. Merry Christmas, my love."

"Merry Christmas, Jarreth."

The words were said on a sigh as their lips met in a kiss that sealed their eternal promise of love. Christmas day dawned bright for the world outside. The sun reflected off the snow while children of all ages opened presents that were placed under decorated trees. For the new immortal lovers nothing mattered beyond the darkness of the room. When the day faded and night took hold the vampires would roam the streets once again.

The End

*Happy Holidays! May you have a new pair of fangs in your stocking or under the tree. May your gingerbread men have plenty of gumdrop buttons and your Frostys not be pulverized by snowplows. Hopefully you won't wake up to find Santa doing naughty things with his elves, and if you do, you might have a vampire living next door to you. I would keep an eye*

How to Ruin Christmas for a Vampire  
*by Dahlia Rose, Crymsyn Hart*

*on that neighbor who doesn't have the Holiday cheer going on. You never know...*

*We wish you Peace, Blessings and Love for the upcoming year.*

*Merry Christmas to all and to all a good bite!*

*Dahlia and Crymsyn*

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

## About the Authors

**Dahlia Rose**, bestselling author of contemporary erotica, suspense, and paranormal romance. She was born and raised on a Caribbean island and now currently lives in Charlotte, NC with her four kids whom she affectionately nicknamed "The children of the corn" and her biggest supporter/long time love. She has a love of erotica, dark fantasy, Sci-fi and the things that go bump in the night. Books and writing are her biggest passion and she hopes to open your imagination to the unknown between the pages of her books.

**Crymsyn R. Hart** is a bestselling author of erotic romance. Her worlds are filled with luscious vampires, gorgeous gods, quirky witches, and everything else that goes bump in the night.

Crymsyn worked as a psychic for many years in Boston while attending Emerson College. She graduated with a BFA in Writing, Literature, & Publishing. When she gets bored, she sneaks away to local cemeteries and coffee shops to find peace and quiet. Granted, graveyards might be a great place for the dead, but she still has to listen to their chattering. It can get annoying when all you want to do is write, but she can tell you quite a ghost story. Crymsyn shares her life with a small zoo a playful puppy and her hubby Mark. If you come after dark, you're more than likely to find her snuggled up with a gory horror movie, or a bloody vampire movie.

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