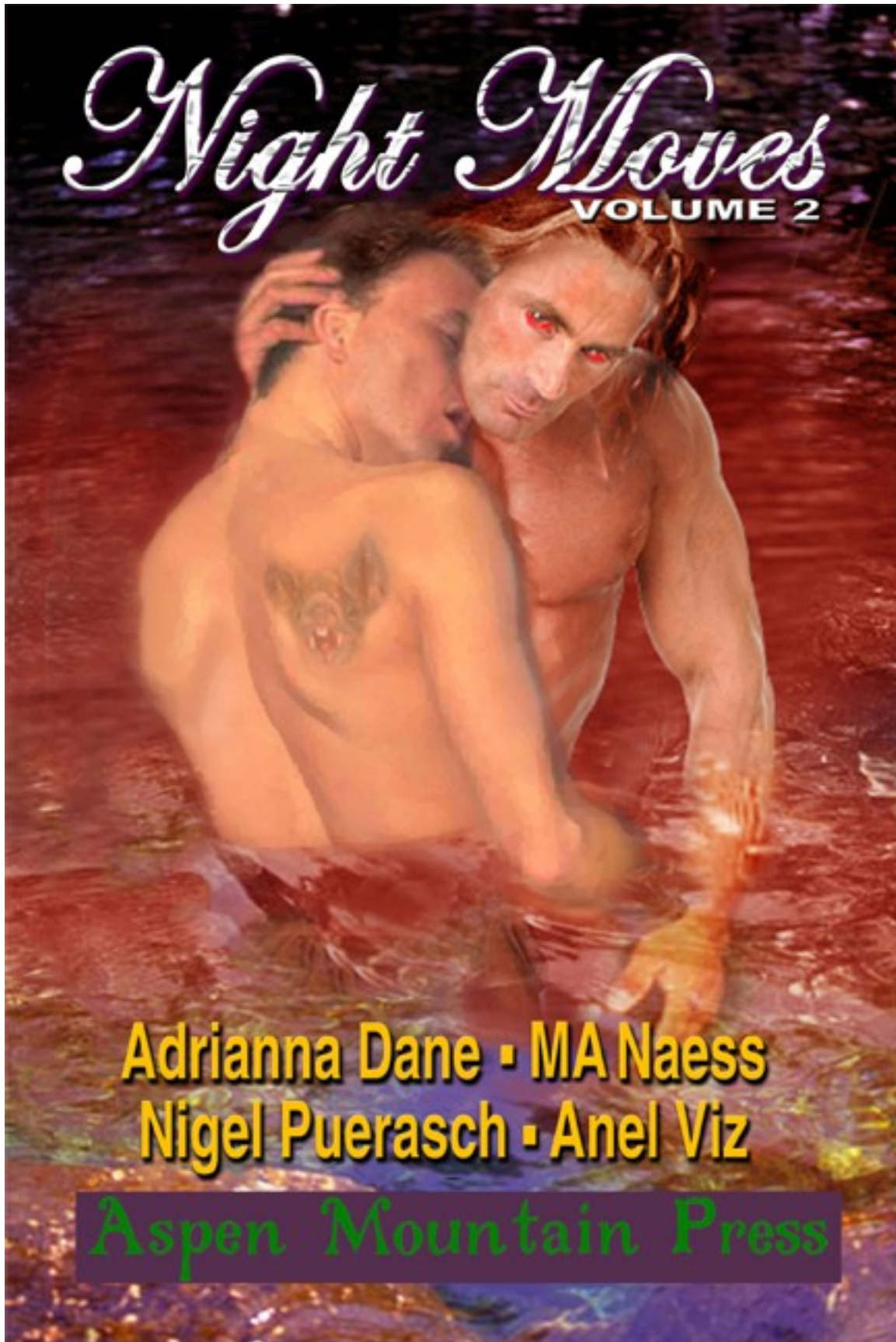


Adrianna Dane, M.A. Naess, Nigel Puerasch, Anel Viz



## **WARNING**

This e-Book contains material that may be considered offensive by some: sexually graphic scenes, male/male sexual encounters, some violence, dubious consent. Please, store your e-Books carefully where they cannot be accessed by underage readers.

# Night Moves 2

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Aspen Mountain Press

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## **The Enforcer**

M.A. Naess

The night was dark and Mikhail little more than a shadow as he slipped past the bouncers at the nightclub. He'd been here several nights now, making his quiet entrance, usually unnoticed by the drinkers and the dancers unless he wanted them to notice him. He scanned the dance floor and was pleased to see the boy who had caught his attention before. He gyrated in the middle of the crowd, lost in the rhythm of the music.

Mikhail first saw him several nights ago and had been instantly attracted to the energy and life that flowed in waves from the young man. Gradually he had worked his way into the group of hangers-on who vied for the boy's attention. Eventually, after much conniving, he elicited from the boy his name-Shane-and a casual, "Yeah, you should drop in and see me some time." Then Mikhail had followed him home, noted his habits, and checked out the apartment for access. Now he was biding his time before once more taking the young man up on his indiscreet offer.

Content at the moment to watch silently from the bar, Mikhail waited patiently, nursing his wine. The hour was late already and he knew it wouldn't be too long before the boy left, hopefully alone, to return to his apartment.

Finally, Mikhail's patience was rewarded. Shane gave a casual wave to several of his fellow dancers and made his way out of the nightclub. Mikhail watched him weave his way among the remaining crowd to the exit and disappear. He knew where Shane lived and the boy had left alone; he could wait before following.

A little over half an hour later Mikhail put his drink down and left. The nightclub was nearly empty.

From a small, partly hidden alcove on the other side of the dance floor, another pair of eyes had been watching the boy. No less drawn to the life force emanating from him, but less hypnotized by it, they had taken in more, had seen Mikhail watching him. Not long after he disappeared into fading strobe lights, this other watcher detached itself from the alcove and followed.

The walk home and cool night air had dried the sweat of the dance on Shane's body and by the time he arrived at his apartment he felt grimy and caked with salt. He debated whether to shower. Yawning, he decided he'd make do with a quick wash and reset the alarm for half an hour earlier so he'd have time for a shower in the morning. Something else about the clock and the alarm nudged at him, but he was too tired and whatever it was remained elusive. Never mind, it couldn't have been too important, he'd remember tomorrow.

Standing in front of the dresser, he yawned again and stared at his reflection as he unbuttoned his shirt. He leaned forward a little, running his fingers up through his hair, watching as the blond strands fell over his hand. He'd better get a haircut soon. Turning slightly he studied his upper body, patting his stomach. Still trim, despite the junk food he consumed on a regular basis. Throwing the shirt in a heap on the floor he retreated to the bathroom to splash water over his neck and chest, then washed his face, noting, when he

glanced in the mirror, that his hair was hanging in his eyes. *Yeah, Barry would be nagging him soon about hair in the hamburgers.* Wandering back to the bedroom he pulled off his jeans, leaving just his boxers in place, and threw himself into bed.

Waiting outside in the inky shadows of the bushes, Mikhail crept forward into the faint moonlight. As he expected, the window was again open to the unseasonably balmy night air.

It was an easy matter to brush aside the curtains and slip silently over the sill. Once in the room he stood, admiring the feast spread out before him: Shane stretched full length on the bed, lying on his back, his head turned slightly away from the open window, his gentle snores disturbing the stillness. He'd kicked off the covering sheet so that it lay tangled around his feet, exposing the finely sculptured and muscled body to the night air.

Mikhail approached, unable to resist the allure of such perfection. His imagination had not misled him; the almost naked boy was truly beautiful. Blond hair trailed the pillow and he pictured the deep blue eyes behind his closed eyelids.

He lay beside the boy and moving his lips close to his ear whispered quietly. Shane stirred but didn't wake, merely turned his head, exposing more of his neck to the gentle touch of Mikhail's lips. Satisfied, Mikhail took what he had come for. As he gradually moved downwards over the exposed areas of the lithe body, Mikhail's moans of appreciation and the sounds of gentle sucking echoed in the otherwise silent room.

Hours later, sated on the orgasmic pleasures he had taken from his victim, Mikhail rested. He felt the dawn hour approaching, but a quick glance at the bedside clock radio reassured him that sunrise was still at least an hour away. He turned his head to nuzzle again at the boy's neck. He was quite delicious, this strong healthy male. Mikhail felt the sluggish beat of the pulse beneath his lips. He knew he had feasted enough, but the allure of that pulse and the pleasures of the boy were too much. There was time for more.

Mikhail was sucking greedily when the clock radio turned on and blasted sound into the stillness of the early morning, causing him to jerk back.

“Good morning, listeners. Hope you all remembered to switch your clocks back for the end of daylight saving. Yep folks it’s 7.00 in the a.m. and the sun is...”

The voice carried on in that falsely bright manner, but he wasn’t listening any more, staring instead in shock at the window and the first rays of brilliant sunshine streaming into the room past the curtains he’d pushed aside so excitedly hours before. His last conscious thought was a final curse against the hateful world of humans. But the voice went on babbling, indifferent to his curse.

At length Shane stirred, groaned, then flung his arm out to still the irritating voice from the radio. How long had that voice been droning on? It seemed he’d been hearing it for ages before he finally managed to shut it off. He felt tired, drained, and the echo of seductive whispers lingered in his mind. He shook his head in an attempt to dislodge the unwelcome thoughts, then groaned again as the morning sun hit his eyes. *Damn I must’ve left the curtains open.* He rolled out of bed, lurched over to the window, and yanked the curtains closed.

The movement caused a twinge over his shoulder and neck, and he rubbed at the soreness, surprised when his fingers came away slightly streaked with blood. Puzzled, he rubbed against his neck again, and felt small lumps under his fingertips. He moved his hand further over his shoulder and across his chest. More lumps. He looked down at his torso. Small puncture marks were visible everywhere, even by the elastic top of his boxers and down his thighs. *What the hell had been feasting on him all night? Had a spider gotten in among the bedclothes, or had that damn cat from next-door picked up fleas again? Greedy little bastards had a field day – or night – whatever they were!*

He moved over to the dresser to take a look in the mirror. Moving his fingers down his body he examined the marks – bites, whatever they were. They



looked red and sore, although they were relatively painless when he touched them. Stepping back to take in the extent of the damage Shane realized the image of his body was slightly blurred around the edges, almost translucent and he was sure he could see a trace of the bed and bedside table through his torso. Frowning, he rubbed his eyes and looked again. No change. He tried moving backwards, forwards and to the sides, but whatever his position the illusion remained the same – a hazy edged, see-through image of his body. *Strange, what the fuck was wrong with his mirror?*

Giving up, he staggered back towards the bed and flung himself down. It was then he realized his bed was full of thick dust that had spread over the sheets and dribbled onto the floor.

Grunting with disgust, Shane leapt from the bed and stared down at the mess. *What the fuck was going on? First the mirror and now this. How the hell had his bed got full of this crap?* Shaking his head, at a loss for an explanation, Shane tried to remember what had happened the night before. The nightclub, the flashing lights, the dancing, the coming home alone. Nothing to explain this mess, nothing but his strangely familiar dreams, that quiet voice, and the feelings of pleasure that even now made him harden. He had no clear recollection of what he'd dreamt, only vague impressions of fear and longing – or was it lust?

He shook his head again in an effort to dispel the memories and get his body under control, and dragged the sheets off the bed. By the time he'd fumbled to the back courtyard, shaken out the sheets – wincing when the sunlight hit his eyes – dumped them in the washing machine and cleaned up the sooty mess with dustpan and brush, he was exhausted. What the hell was wrong with him?

He managed to return to his bedroom, make a quick call to the McDonald's he worked at to report in sick then threw himself on the bare mattress. Within seconds he was asleep.

As he drifted off, Shane recalled the large black car with darkly tinted windows he'd seen before, parked at the front of the apartment. It was there again that morning, he'd noticed it when he'd closed the curtains, and he wondered if he was being watched. The thought made him uneasy, and invaded his dreams.

\* \* \* \*

Quiet, persistent knocking woke Shane several hours later. Even when he pulled his pillow over his ears to shut it out, the sound still penetrated. Finally, he threw the pillow on the floor and rolled out of bed for the second time that day. He noticed that the sun had drifted past his window and it was now late afternoon.

Reluctantly, he opened his front door, wincing again at the overcast brightness outside. The man standing on his doorstep was older than Shane, maybe in his late twenties or early thirties, with short dark hair neatly parted on the left side and brushed flat. Dark glasses sat on his finely chiseled Roman nose. The man's smile was infectious, the mouth generous, with small laugh lines at the corners. He was dressed like the quintessential salesman, down to the neat suit, shiny shoes and briefcase by his side, but he didn't act like a salesman.

Although he exuded self-confidence, his manner was firm rather than pestering. Shane wished he could see his eyes behind those dark glasses to get some idea of what kind of person he was dealing with.

"Don't want any, go away."

The man pushed his foot into the doorway, effectively blocking Shane's efforts to close the door.

"Mr. Garrett...Shane, wait. I have to talk to you."

"How do you know my name? Who are you anyway?"

"If you'll let me come in, I'll tell you."

"Sure, come in," Shane said, without the slightest idea as to what made him say it. He stood aside to let the stranger in and immediately regretted it. He was still in his boxers, and he'd woken up with a hard-on, the kind that stays with you till you empty your bladder. "Um...let me just go put some clothes on. Take a seat. I'll be back in a minute."

"You can get dressed if you like, but it's not necessary. Underwear doesn't offend me. I'll make myself comfortable." The stranger's blatantly admiring stare made Shane's cheeks flame.

Retreating to the bedroom after a quick detour to the toilet, Shane hurriedly dressed, throwing on the jeans he'd been wearing the night before and fetching a clean T-shirt from the cupboard. Glancing down at his torso before pulling on the shirt, Shane could see that the bites were still there, but had faded to small, dull red patches. He avoided looking in the mirror.

Feeling more comfortable now he was dressed, Shane returned to the lounge room. The stranger had been staring out the window but turned around when Shane entered the room.

"My name's Connor...Connor Franklin," he said, reaching out to Shane and taking off the dark glasses. "My job is to find certain, er...individuals, and...well, I think you can help me find one in particular."

Connor's hand was warm in his, the grip tight, and Shane noticed his eyes were green. He wouldn't have expected to be able to see the color of a guy's eyes so clearly in such dim light. More importantly, he wondered why he had noticed them.

Shane hastily let go Connor's hand. "Sure. Okay. Who is it you're looking for?"

"Mikhail."

"Huh? Who's Mikhail?"

"Shane, don't play games. This is serious. I must find Mikhail now and er...neutralize him. You have to tell me where he is."

“Whoa there, mister...Connor, whatever.” Shane felt increasingly edgy. This guy was really starting to creep him out. “I have no idea who you’re talking about. And you still haven’t explained how you know my name.”

“I know your name because I’ve been trailing Mikhail for a long time, and you’ve been associating with him. Naturally your name has come to my attention.”

A vague memory came to Shane - a heavily accented voice and a face almost obscured by long hair.

“Do you mean that creep who’s been hanging around at the nightclub? Big teeth, scraggly hair and not much personality? Whispers a lot?”

Connor smiled and nodded. “Sounds like Mikhail.”

“Suppose you tell me what this is all about.”

“Okay. Sit down. This isn’t going to be easy.” Connor waited until Shane sat down on the lounge suit, then seated himself in the armchair. “Shane, what do you know about vampires?”

“Vampires? Those are just crappy stories from horror films.” To his own ears Shane knew his voice was thready, uneven.

“You’re wrong, Shane. Vampires are very real. Mikhail is a vampire.” He paused. “You’re one, too.”

Shane stared at Connor. The guy took himself seriously, that much was obvious. But vampires? Shane decided to humor him. “What makes you think either Mikhail – or me – are, err...vampires?”

“I can sense another vampire. You have all the signs.” Connor’s voice was sure, his expression serious.

Shane flushed, remembering his near naked state when he’d first opened the door to Connor.

“Oh, come off it. This is crazy. Just because I had a few bug bites on me.”

The image of teeth marks rather than insect bites flashed through Shane’s mind for a moment, but he pushed it aside. “And so what if it looks like I can see

through myself in..." He stopped, regretting the words as soon as they were out, and hurried on. "All that dust in my bed was probably just those no-see-'em things. You know, those little blood-suckers. They have them in the States, I hear, but what they'd be doing here I don't know."

Shane knew he was babbling, and judging by the expression on his face he could tell that Connor knew it too. Shane didn't like the look of sympathy he saw there either. "Next thing, you'll be telling me you're a vampire," he said, hoping Connor would laugh and admit the joke.

"This has all been very helpful, really it has. What you've said gives me a fairly good idea of what's become of Mikhail."

"Oh boy," Shane thought, "irony. Now the man is making fun of me."

"And by the way, I am."

"Am what?"

"A vampire."

Shane sprang to his feet and headed to the door. "Oh, man, that's it! You are completely bug shit crazy. Just get the fuck outta here, will ya? Vampires. Jeez!"

Connor was suddenly beside him, his hand out to prevent him from opening the door. *How the hell did he do that so fast?*

"Shane, don't be foolish. You need to feed; if you don't you'll die. And you need to learn exactly what it will take to survive as what you are now." Connor's eyes bore into his. "You need my help before it's too late, before you do something that brings the ire of the Council on you, or you fall afoul of another vampire."

Shane shook off the restraining hand, pulling his eyes away from the green ones. He turned the doorknob and yanked open the door. "Out, now, before I call the cops."

"All right. I'm going, but here's my card." The door-to-door salesman once again, Connor fished a small white business card out of his breast pocket

and handed it to Shane. "Whenever you need me, call my cell phone. Day or night. And believe me Shane – you'll need me."

"Yeah, right," Shane muttered, shoving the door closed behind Connor.

He glanced at the card, which contained only Connor's name and a phone number, then slid it into the front pocket of his jeans. His cock stirred at the brief contact and he remembered his half naked state and the hard-on he'd been exhibiting. The guy would've had to be blind not to have noticed. But vampires! Shane shook his head, then realized his hand was still in his pocket, idly playing with his cock. *Shit! What the fuck was he thinking!* Jerking his hand away he headed towards the kitchen. He was hungry.

He was halfway to the kitchen when he realized he still hadn't had that shower he'd promised himself the night before. Pulling the front of his t-shirt away from his body he dipped his head and sniffed loudly. Not good. Okay, shower first, then eat.

The shower was perfect, warm water splashing down over his body, cleaning away the debris of his not so perfect day and the sweat and grime of the night before. Working the soap over his body, Shane caught himself thinking of Connor. The guy was a complete whacko, but kind of cute. And those eyes - almost feline - slightly slanted and a brilliant green. Shane closed his eyes and leaned back against the shower tiles. As the water sprayed over him, he began to stroke himself with a soapy hand, prick half erect, as he imaged Connor without the dark glasses, his hair mussed up, those green eyes watching him.

Completely absorbed now, he kept up a steady rhythm, letting his other hand wander over nipples and stomach, enjoying the sensations his hands and the water sliding down his body brought to him.

Shane dreamed on, hands busy, Connor's face becoming clearer.

A voice echoed through his mind, sibilant sounds and memories of erotic suggestions whispered in his ear. Another, less attractive, face superimposed

over Connor's and the green eyes of his vision turned to red fiery orbs and long, viciously sharp teeth sprouted from the mobile mouth.

Shane gasped and jerked back in fright, banging his head against the tiles. Shuddering, trying to catch his breath, he held a hand against the tiles and rubbed the back of his head with the other. This was getting ridiculous. Now he was having nightmares in his daydreams. He turned the shower off – the water had gone cold anyway – dried and, wrapping the towel around his waist, headed to the kitchen, intentionally avoiding both the bathroom and bedroom mirrors. He'd have something to eat, then go to the nightclub, hang out with the guys for a while. Maybe that would take his mind off Connor Franklin and talk of vampires.

Half-heartedly rummaging through the kitchen cupboards, looking for something that appealed, Shane eventually settled on a tin of tomato soup, pouring it into a saucepan to heat. But when he lit the gas, he realized how unappetizing the soup looked and smelled. Suddenly he wasn't so hungry after all. Sighing, he threw the contents into the bin and the pan in the sink.

Searching through his wardrobe a few minutes later he pulled out a pair of good jeans and a blue shirt. He opened his underwear drawer, grabbed some socks and was just about to pick out clean boxers when he hesitated. He remembered the expression on Connor's face and the hot look when he had gazed at him, almost naked, earlier. Leaving the boxers where they were, he slammed the drawer shut again.

Not long after he was dressed and ready for his night out.

Just as Shane could not keep himself from thinking about the intruder, Connor Franklin's thoughts were focused on Shane and the memory of his near naked body, cock erect and straining the material of his boxers. He sat in his car for a moment, gazing at Shane's apartment, deep in thought wondering if the attraction he felt for the young man had warped his judgment as far as dealing

with Mikhail was concerned. He ran a hand through his hair, ruffling it out of its combed-down perfection, then made a call on his mobile phone.

"Yes?" The deep, almost gravelly voice answered.

"It's Connor. I've just left his apartment. Mikhail was definitely there, as we suspected, but there's no sign of him now. It's more than likely he miscalculated and was...singed. The boy mentioned some dust in his bed. Whatever happened in there, my guess is Mikhail turned the boy. Of course there's no way we can be sure till tonight without putting him at risk."

"That's not good. Did you tell him?"

"Yes."

"That may not have been a good idea. How did he take it?"

"I handled it badly. He doesn't believe, or rather doesn't want to believe."

"That's hardly surprising. We all had a certain amount of difficulty adjusting. You know we can't let him go rogue, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I know that." Connor rubbed his hand across his forehead as he considered what to say next. "Give me some time. I'm sure I can talk him round, get him to cooperate. He's an innocent in this. We messed up, not him. I should have got to Mikhail sooner."

"Everyone is innocent until the hunger hits them." There was a brief silence before the voice continued. "Don't get too close, Connor. I'd hate for you to be harmed if it turned out you were less than willing to resolve the matter in a...shall we say permanent manner...if it became necessary."

"Thanks for your concern, Martin, but I think I can remain detached enough to do what has to be done."

"I hope so. Nevertheless, I would like to see you Connor, to discuss progress."

"Why? Don't you trust me?"



“Of course I do, you’re one of our best operatives. However I feel it would be good to touch base, so to speak. My place, any time after midnight will do.”

Connor knew better than to argue. “Fine, I’ll be there.”

With no goodbye uttered, they clicked off.

Connor studied the apartment again, his forehead creased in a frown. Then he sighed and started the car, driving to where the cul-de-sac entered onto the main road. He parked where he could have a good view of the apartment, made himself as comfortable as he could and settled down to watch and wait.

\* \* \* \*

The strobe lights hit Shane as soon as he entered the nightclub, flashing iridescent beams that split the air. Bodies moved in disjointed rhythm - marionettes suspended from invisible wires. He could see clearly through the smoky haze. The atmosphere was heady. He spotted Mike, Charlie, and Julian at the centre of the dancing throng. Someone handed him a beer, and he took a long swig. It lay heavily on his stomach, making him nauseous and forcing him to swallow hard to stop himself from bringing it back up.

Shane began to sway to the music. Julian moved close, rubbing his groin against him. Shane felt Julian’s arousal and it matched his own, but his was more than sexual. There was an element in it he couldn’t define, something more primal. He felt strange, aloof, not quite part of the humanity that surrounded him, yet aware of the vibrant and throbbing life of the undulating bodies. He let Julian move against him for a while, glorying in his warmth and the life-giving blood pumping in the swelling penis rubbing against him. Then he turned away.

Other dancers gyrated around him, but Shane remained in his own space. His friends tried to talk to him; he ignored them. The more he danced, the more the music seemed to take him to another place. He began to whirl, a maniacal

dervish. Faster, faster, faster the lights flashed as he spun, and the pulse beat of the music echoed through his body, joined with the pulsing blood he heard, smelled, sensed around him.

As he whirled he saw Connor in the periphery of his vision, standing on the edge of the dance floor watching. Damn Connor! Shane wasn't about to let the man spoil this perfect symmetry he had found with the music and the beat of humanity.

"Hey, Shane, man. What're you doing? Stop - you're acting crazy."

Charlie had hold of his shoulder, had stopped his mad spinning across the floor.

Shane turned on him, teeth bared in a savage snarl.

"Whoa, what's got into you, man?" Charlie took a step back, hands held up as if to ward him off.

Shane blinked, dazed and uncoordinated. No one was dancing now. He looked around the dance floor and saw his friends looking at him with concern. The other dancers stood staring, sending him frightened looks. He stared back, as frightened as they were. What was happening to him? Had someone spiked the beer? He swung round, searching for an explanation, scared of what he would find but needing answers.

Very clearly Shane saw a man standing just beyond the light that surrounded the dancers. The man's eyes glowed with their own luminance. Shane stiffened. The back of his neck ruffled, like the hackles of a dog poised to attack. A low growl formed in his throat. The figure retreated slightly, and Shane settled again, eyes sweeping the surroundings. He thought for a moment he saw Connor moving through the crowd to stand beside the man, but he wasn't sure.

Charlie's voice drew him back to himself. "Shane, are you okay? You don't look so good."

"No, I...I don't...better get some air."

Panic gripped him. Turning from Charlie, he fled from the nightclub out onto the street. Out of nowhere, the figure he'd seen from the dance floor jumped in front of him. He swerved to avoid it. It came for him again and Shane pushed against it, flinging his hands out in front of him, but it grabbed hold of him, crushing his arms against his body and squeezing the breath from his lungs. Then Shane caught a glimpse of green flashing eyes, and another shadowy form latched on to the first. The two crashed to the ground at his feet wrestling furiously, rolling towards the gutter. He jumped over them and fled.

He heard Connor calling out for him to stop; he just kept running until he reached his apartment.

Connor and Shane's assailant wrestled almost silently for a few seconds before Connor gave an almighty heave that sent his opponent flying into the middle of the roadway. Ignoring the crumpled figure, Connor headed after Shane, keeping well behind and out of sight.

Standing in a doorway across the road, he watched as Shane entered his apartment. The bedroom light flared briefly but otherwise the apartment remained dark and silent. Connor waited for a short while, then, satisfied Shane would remain where he was for now, left. There were things he had to do, the first of which was to feed.

He soon found what he wanted. A derelict lay curled up in a dark alley fast asleep, clutching an almost empty bottle of cheap wine to his chest. The drunk's blood was wine tainted and slightly sour but Connor couldn't afford to be fussy. There was much to be done before Shane stirred again. He took as much as he needed from the derelict, left some folded bank notes in the frayed pocket of his jacket, and hurried to his car. It was time to see Martin.

It didn't take long to reach Martin's multistoried mansion, set well back on a large estate in one of the more affluent suburbs. The house, fronted by a long driveway lined with poplar trees, was sufficiently isolated that comings and goings in the dead of night remained unnoted by the local residents.

Connor waited impatiently in the vestibule of the house, pacing restlessly before he was ushered into Martin's office by Martin's perpetually unsmiling manservant.

"Good evening, Connor. You have news on our problem, I trust?" Seated behind a large, ornate desk, Martin didn't bother to rise as Connor entered.

"There have been developments, yes." Connor ignored the straight-backed chair in front of the desk and settled instead into a comfortable armchair to the side, forcing Martin to swing around slightly to maintain eye contact with him. It paid to keep Martin a little off balance.

An imposing figure, with leonine features accentuated by a mane of long silver hair Martin was one of the oldest vampires Connor knew. Connor respected him and they were friends of a sort, but he knew the ancient vampire wouldn't allow any personal feelings to interfere with Council law.

"The boy's transformation is almost complete, his hunger obvious. He was attacked earlier tonight when he trespassed on someone else's territory."

Martin nodded. "He is willing to cooperate now?"

"I think he will be. He's frightened, of course, and still very confused, but on the verge of acceptance. He's returned to his apartment and will not be going anywhere tonight. I'll go back when we're finished here, watch over him during the day and he can feed from me when he wakes, that way I'll be sure he doesn't budge."

"I still hold concerns about this boy, Connor. The situation has been precarious from the start. I need your guarantee that you will dispose of him if it becomes necessary."

"Have I ever let you or the Council down, Martin?" Connor said, wondering how Martin had sensed his growing attraction for Shane, his reluctance to see harm come to this vulnerable fledgling vampire.

"No, your service has always been exemplary, Connor. I'm only concerned because I know your...uh, inclinations. Very well, I'll continue to

leave the matter in your hands for the moment. However, I advise you to be prepared to act as the rules stipulate. The Council made them in the best interests of us all.” Martin gave Connor a knowing look then turned back to the paperwork he had been studying when Connor entered.

Accepting the dismissal and the admonition, Connor rose. “I’ll report back tomorrow.”

Martin glanced up. “Yes, Connor, do that.”

With nothing more to be said, Connor walked from the office, closing the door quietly behind him.

When he arrived back at Shane’s apartment, Connor parked a block or so away, then walked the rest of the distance. He stopped outside the apartment for a moment, listening intently. Satisfied by the sounds of light snoring that Shane was asleep, he stared at the door lock. It clicked open and he entered. He stayed long enough to make sure Shane was comfortable and safe, then left. He would go home, get some rest himself. He’d sense the boy’s need when it was time when it was time to return.

\* \* \* \*

Shane stirred, tried to force his eyes open. He knew daylight had come because there was a faint light behind the tightly closed curtains. Funny, he couldn’t remember closing them so tightly last night. And what was that draped across the window? Cracking his eyes a little wider and sitting up slightly, he saw a blanket had been fastened to the curtain rail and wedged tightly against the windowsill.

He certainly couldn’t remember doing that. He didn’t remember much at all from last night except a mad dash home and throwing himself fully clothed on the unmade bed. He was still fully clothed, but his shoes were missing and he was covered with the quilt.

Groaning, he sat up, then fell back against his pillows. He felt like death. Glancing at the bedside clock he was surprised to find it was early evening. He'd slept all day. Shit. Work. He hadn't even phoned in sick. Knowing what an arsehole Barry was, he would probably get the sack. God, how much worse could things get?

Making an effort, he pulled himself up off the bed and reached for his mobile phone. A quick conversation with Barry confirmed the worst; if he didn't turn up for his next shift, he needn't bother coming in at all. Damn, he needed that job, even if it was only part-time work at McDonald's.

Shane wandered into the kitchen and put the coffee maker on, decided he couldn't stomach coffee after all, and turned it off. He made toast, but the first bite tasted like ash, and he dumped the lot in the bin.

What the hell was wrong with him? He felt sick and weak. Had he caught AIDS or something off some uncaring bastard? Oh, fuck! The very thought made it impossible to stand, and he lowered himself slowly onto a kitchen chair to think. He was panicked enough already; no point in dwelling on *that* now. He'd get tested first thing in the morning.

Edgy and restless he prowled the kitchen and the lounge. Retreating to the bedroom, he considered pulling the blanket down off the window but was strangely reluctant to do so. Finally, he made his way to the little courtyard at the back of the apartment and stood in the cool evening air. The moon was full - bright and large in the now darkened sky. He gazed at it, seeing startling detail in the moon's surface. The events of the night before, the nightclub, the living pulses he felt around him, the sensations - everything came back to him, and he shuddered. What was happening to him? He felt tired, drained of life. But worst of all was the hunger, the craving for something he couldn't define. Turning, he dragged himself back into the apartment

He was trembling and nauseated. His legs barely held him up and he stumbled into the bathroom, just making the toilet before he started retching,

nothing in his stomach to expel, not even bile. When was the last time he'd eaten? Still trembling uncontrollably, he stripped off his shirt and made his way to the washbasin, turning on the tap and splashing water over his face then scooping more water into his mouth and spitting it out, trying to get rid of the foul taste in his mouth. He looked up, breathing heavily, struggling to get a hold on himself.

It took a few seconds before it hit him. He was staring directly into the mirror, and it was empty. He wasn't there. Tentatively he reached out, wet fingers leaving marks on the shiny surface as he touched it. He could see the water glisten, but his fingers were not reflected.

Vampires! Terrified, he staggered back. Sweet God in Heaven, what was he going to do? He needed Connor.

*Where was that damn card? Jeans pocket. Where the fuck were his jeans?* Scrabbling on the bathroom floor he finally found them and dug into the pocket for the card with shaky fingers. He hurried back to his bedroom, grabbed his phone, and punched in the number. The phone clicked straight into the message bank. Shit. As soon as the required beep ended Shane spoke into the phone, his voice panicked. "Connor, you said to call. I'm not feeling too good. I need to see you. Don't know anything anymore. Just come...please."

Clutching the phone he lay down on the bed and curled up into a small, tight, shivering ball, unable to stop the sobs coming, whispering to himself, his voice breaking, "Come soon...come soon..."

"Shane, where are you?"

Was he here already? How long had it taken? "Bedroom," Shane managed to croak. Connor was there in an instant. "You got my call?"

"You called? No. I've been standing in the street outside. I left the phone in my glove box, a few blocks down the road. I heard your despair through the walls. But you called. That's good." Connor's tone was gentle. "You know what has to be done now, don't you?"

Shane watched Connor slowly unbutton and strip off his shirt, throwing it on the end of the bed. He was wearing a sleeveless undershirt that exposed his upper arms and shoulders. It clung tightly to his muscled chest and outlined his hard, raised nipples. Shane wondered what was turning Connor on more, Shane himself or whatever it was Connor was going to do to him. This man, vampire, whatever, was more attractive, more desirable than his salesman's outfit let on. Shane stared, fascinated as Connor brought his wrist up to his mouth and made a small tear with the fangs Shane could see jutting from his mouth. Connor held the bleeding wrist up in front of his face, and Shane stared, transfixed by the blood running over the edge of the extended wrist.

Quickly, before the blood dropped onto the mattress Shane lowered his head, tongue darting out and scooping it up. It was warm and sweet on his tongue, like hot chocolate on a cold day, bringing back childhood memories of fires burning brightly in fireplaces and steaming mugs full of the rich liquid. He licked again.

Lifting his eyes to Connor's face Shane could see his smile at this first step. The next step came quickly. Having lapped up all the blood on and around Connor's wrist, Shane now fastened his mouth over the wound and sucked, pulling the blood in, reveling in the taste. "Hey, not too much too quickly, or you'll drain me dry." Connor instructed as he pulled his wrist away slightly. Shane slowed the suction a little, taking smaller gulps.

"You're certainly a greedy little fledgling."

But Shane wasn't really listening to Connor's voice - he was listening instead to the sound of Connor's blood as it was pulled from his vein, a sound that echoed through Shane's mind like soft music, and with it the smell of the blood mingled with Connor's own personal smell, rich and lush, and as heady, as intoxicating, as the blood taste.

Finally Shane leaned back on his pillow and smiled a sated, satisfied smile. Connor reached over with his thumb and wiped at the blood smears



Shane could feel staining his lips, lifting the thumb to his own lips to lick clean. Shane shuddered at the sensuousness of the act.

Connor continued to lick at his thumb, watching Shane through slightly hooded eyes. "For a newly made vampire the first taste of blood after the transition is the best – sweet and syrupy after being hungry for so long. But it's not good to gulp your sustenance from a host Shane." Connor leaned down, lips inches from Shane's. "I'll need to teach you how to do it properly," he said as he brought his pink tongue to lick the remaining traces of blood from Shane's lips. Shane reflexively opened his mouth and Connor's tongue accepted the invitation, sweeping in quickly then withdrawing as Connor broke the contact.

"We feed off humans most of the time," Connor continued as his lips moved to suck gently just below Shane's ear. "But we have to be very subtle; otherwise they would realize vampires are real, not just stories from mythology. They would want to destroy us. Humans are like that when they encounter something they don't understand."

"Like gays," Shane thought, and he shuddered as the lips moved further down to nibble at his neck just above his shoulder.

"It's not pleasant when humans become vampire hunters. Stakes and hatchets often play a big part, so it's important not to scare them, otherwise our very existence could be in peril." Connor bit down a bit harder on Shane's neck and Shane gasped, waiting for the sharp incisors to break his skin. But instead, Connor lifted his head to look in Shane's eyes again. "I won't feed from you now," he said. "But I will show you how to seduce any human into giving you his blood – you'll want to feed on men, as I do, I assume – and allowing you to come back again for more."

Shane couldn't help the tremor that went through him at Connor's words and the intense look in those slightly slanted green eyes. Then Connor was gone. As he lifted himself up and away from Shane's side, Shane started to protest.

Then he saw Connor taking off his undershirt and pants, revealing all of his muscular body. Shane licked his lips as his eyes traveled slowly over the broad shoulders, down the flat stomach, to the long thin cock nestled in the thatch of slightly curling hair between his legs. Smiling, Connor let Shane's gaze linger on him for a moment before he returned to the bed and quickly undid the button on Shane's jeans, then unzipped them and pulled them off, Shane raising his hips off the mattress to help.

"Always treat your human prey as something precious - as you would a lover, because they provide you with their life blood and give you untold pleasure if you do it properly." Connor lay down beside him on the narrow bed. Before Shane could reply, Connor's lips returned to their exploration of his neck, and Shane suddenly couldn't say anything, only revel in the feel of that sensual mouth.

Connor continued licking and sucking gently as he progressed over and down Shane's body, lingering to pull on each nipple with his lips and teeth before sliding his tongue over the taut stomach. Shane moaned and arched up to meet Connor's mouth. Connor continued on his course, his hands holding Shane's hips down on the bed as he kissed and licked over his groin, then down one thigh and up the other. By now Shane was a quivering mass, convulsing with each new touch and lick. Connor's voice was mesmerizing, his lips cool and hot at the same time, making Shane forget everything but that mouth and the pressing call of his own needs.

Connor dropped a kiss on the top of Shane's now erect prick, then looked up. "Remember Shane, you must never take too much from a human. If you do it right you can seduce and feed, then leave and return later for more from the same source. But if you go too far and he dies, you will create a vampire."

"And that's what happened to me!" Shane gasped, fear and horror at what he now was closing over him, his desire and arousal doused as if a bucket of cold water had been dumped over him.

Sensing Shane's withdrawal Connor moved back up his body to lie next to him. "Yes. Mikhail was greedy and selfish. He took too much from you."

Shane was silent for a moment. "It's all real, isn't it? I'm turning into a vampire."

Connor's tone was gentle as he reached out to touch Shane's face. "You already are a vampire, love."

Shane brushed Connor's hand away and pulled himself up off the bed. Connor stood too, but didn't approach Shane, who stood for a minute looking around the room, seeming to look for a place to escape, but finding nothing. Rage consumed him. Why did this have to happen to him? The blood he had just taken from Connor pulsed through him, burning. A vision of Mikhail – his creator – flashed through his mind. With a cry of anguish he picked up the bedside table and threw it at Connor, who brushed it aside without effort.

"Why the fuck do bastards like you and Mikhail even exist?" he screamed.

Connor didn't answer him.

With a cry of fury Shane launched himself at the being who represented all the terror and pain he had been going through. His momentum was enough to bring them both crashing to the ground. Shane lashed out, punching and kicking at whatever part of Connor's anatomy he could reach.

Connor swore and brought his knees up to protect himself, at the same time trying to grab hold of Shane's wrists. They struggled until Connor managed to wrap an arm around Shane and roll them over. With his arms around Shane's waist he heaved to his feet, bringing a still struggling Shane with him. They stood, locked together for a moment, breathing in great gasps, Shane's back tightly held against Connor's chest, his butt firmly pressed to Connor's groin.

"Stop, Shane. Enough." Connor's voice was ragged.

Shane stilled, then pulled away as Connor released him. He stood looking at the wall in front of him, refusing to turn and meet Connor's sympathetic eyes.

Then all the frustration and built up tension flared again. Shane slammed his fist into the wall, almost punching through to the other side.

Shocked at the power of his blow, he withdrew his hand from the hole and examined his knuckles; they were undamaged. He surveyed the wreckage of the bedside table and the chair that had been knocked over in their struggle and shook his head. He glared at Connor.

"Why me? Why the fuck did this have to happen to me? Why do I have to turn into something as stupid as a fucking vampire, for God's sake?"

Connor's voice was gentle when he spoke. "What's done is done and you can't change that now. You have a choice to make. You can accept what's happened, or you can keep on denying it. If you deny it, you will truly die. The choice is yours, Shane."

Shane continued to glare at Connor, fists and teeth clenched. Then he sighed and his shoulders slumped, the rage draining out of him. Defeat welled up inside to take its place. Shivering, he sat down on the bed and wrapped his arms around his body, trying to hold back the tears that ran down his face as he grieved for his lost life. Connor moved to sit beside him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders to draw him close to his body. As if he could read his mind, he said, "You haven't lost your life, Shane; it's been exchanged for another. Our life also has its joys and hopes. It can be a good life, as you'll find out if you give it a chance."

Shane rested his head on Connor's shoulder until his sobs subsided, then pulling back from the strong arms, he wiped at his eyes. Standing, he walked over to the window and stared at the blanket secured to the railing, then glanced back at Connor.

"You did this, didn't you? When I was asleep?"

"Yes, I didn't want to take any risks. Some vampires can withstand a certain amount of shaded or indirect sun. Others can't." He shrugged. "I thought it prudent to be careful until we could test your resistance."

Shane nodded again, the suspicion that Connor had easy access to his apartment confirmed.

"All that crazy stuff at the nightclub last night? And the things I can see and sense, what's that all about?"

"Your heightened senses. You'll learn to control them in time."

"And the guy outside the club? He was a vampire, wasn't he?"

Connor nodded. "Yes, he was trying to protect his territory. Or maybe he just fancied you."

Shane smiled slightly. "Are all vampires gay, then?"

Connor laughed. "No, of course not. We are what we were when we were human."

"Why are you helping me? Mikhail did this to me. All the stories say vampires are evil and all that crap. Why are you helping me?"

"Why? Because it's my job, and supernatural beings aren't all bad. Usually they're just victims of circumstance, like you."

"Is that the only reason?"

Connor shrugged.

"Do you fancy me, too?"

Connor reached out his hand to caress Shane's cheek. "Do you think I go down on all my pupils?"

"Are there a lot of these 'beings' out there?"

"There are, Shane, and wonders you would never dream about. Our world is as different from the human world as night from day.

Shane smiled. He didn't try to resist the temptation to turn and playfully bite at the gently stroking fingers that were sending shudders down his spine

Connor yelped, drawing his hand back. "Hey, those fledgling teeth of yours are getting damn sharp."

Shane grinned, unrepentant, and grabbed the nipped fingers, drawing Connor back to the bed.

"C'mon. Tell me about this vampire business."

"Not now, later on. You have enough information to absorb for an introductory lesson."

"What happens now then?"

"It's nearly morning. You'll feed from me again and then sleep during the day. I'll find someone to feed on, then come back again tonight and we can work things out." He offered up his wrist again, and Shane smiled and bared his fangs.

The sun was just beginning to rise when Connor left Shane's apartment and got into his car. Shane was sleeping, fed and contented, and Connor had made sure all the curtains and windows were tightly closed and the doors locked. Confident Shane would sleep peacefully and unmolested through the day, Connor drove away. In the meantime there were things Connor had to do and people he had to see before he slept.

\* \* \* \*

It was late when Connor returned. He stood for a while, watching Shane sleep. He'd hardly moved during the day and now lay much as Connor had left him, blond hair spread out on the pillow, lips still red from his nighttime feeding, the sheet pulled up to his waist, chest and shoulders bare. He was the perfect picture of a wanton angel. The bites inflicted by Mikhail had disappeared. Connor sat on the bed and shook Shane's shoulder gently.

Shane stirred and opened his eyes, his face lighting up when he saw Connor. "You're back."

"I said I would be. How are you feeling?"

"Hungry."

"Thought you might be. Do you want to feed from me?"

"Yes." Shane didn't wait for a further invitation but grabbed Connor's wrist and quickly made a small nick in the vein with his newly developed fangs, then started sucking strongly.

"You're learning fast."

Shane lifted his head for a moment, smiling brightly with bloodstained lips. "I always was a fast learner. I've been dreaming about you all day."

"Have you now?" Connor smiled and kissed his forehead then maneuvered himself around until he was laying full length beside Shane, wrist still firmly attached to Shane's mouth.

Finally Shane seemed satisfied. The sucking slowed, then stopped. His gentle tongue licked around the small tear in Connor's wrist making him shiver slightly at the sensation.

Shane looked up at Connor and said. "Now tell me about your feeding."

"What do you want to know?"

Everything. It is all part of my 'education' after all." Shane's grin was impish.

Connor smiled back. "That's true," he admitted. "Okay, I caught up with a friend of yours, Julian. He..."

"Julian! You mean you fed off Julian," Shane interrupted, not at all sure he liked this turn of events.

Connor shrugged. "Yes, Julian. Why not? He'd been on a binge and needed a lift. I obliged. He was very...willing."

"Yeah, I'll just bet he was. So, what happened?"

"I took him home and he invited me in. That's something you have to get a human to do, by the way, invite you inside, otherwise you can't enter the house." He paused for a moment. "We got comfortable..."

"Naked you mean?" Shane interrupted again, but Connor ignored him.

"And I fed off him. Just enough for my needs. I stopped before it went too far. Julian won't turn."

"Lucky Julian." Shane's tone was sarcastic, but he carried on lightly enough. "So he didn't get turned, but did he get turned on? Bet he got hard?"

"Let's just say he seemed to enjoy himself."

Shane looked at Connor speculatively, the ghost of a smile playing around his lips.

"What?" Connor said.

"Can we feed together tonight? The two of us? On the same bloke?"

Connor laughed. "I'm not entirely sure what you have in mind, but I think I can guess," he said. "Yes, we'll go hunting; it's time to teach you how to feed on humans. We'll go out later. There are other things we could do together, and this is a good time to talk about them."

Shane leaned forward and nuzzled Connor's neck. "I can think of a lot of things we can do together, and most of them don't involve talking."

"Hmm...that too! But I have a proposition for you. You'll need to know more about vampires first though. Right now it's lesson time."

Shane frowned, but seeing the serious expression on Connor's face, settled back against the pillow, prepared to listen to what he had to say.

"Generally vampires, were-creatures and other supernatural beings keep out of the way of humans," Connor began "It's too dangerous not to. A stake through the heart or a silver bullet isn't a pretty sight, and from what I hear, the agony is excruciating. Whatever else one may say about our bites, they're relatively painless." He gave Shane a knowing smile.

"So, werewolves and ghosts, stuff like that, all really exist?"

"Of course. The supernatural world has grown in proportion to the human one."

Shane absorbed that for a moment. "Makes sense."



“Every so often one of our kind strays over the line and starts attacking and feeding off humans, killing them in the process and making more like us,” Connor continued. “For centuries it didn’t matter too much, especially if the incidents were few and far between, but civilization grew and the world got smaller. The attacks became more noticeable, and humans began to retaliate in force, with more effective weapons. It was getting to the stage where human hunters were everywhere, attacking the innocent as well as the guilty, wreaking their own brand of havoc. So some of the very old amongst us formed a Council to bring some control to the supernatural world and punish those who encroached too much on the human.”

“And you’re one of the Council?”

“Directly under it – an enforcer. It’s my job to find the rogues and either persuade them to obey the Council’s laws or, if they won’t cooperate, dispose of them.”

“Kill them, you mean.”

“Let’s say ‘eliminate’. After all, they’re – we’re – already dead. Sort of. But yes, if that’s the only way to stop them. You have to understand, Shane. You’ve already seen how territorial a vampire can be. The Council was formed in an attempt to ensure the survival of all supernatural species and exert some measure of control within their world. Do you understand the importance of that?”

“Yeah, I get it. Mikhail was a rogue and, by the Council’s guidelines had to be ‘eliminated’. You were sent to do the job.”

“I was sent to confirm that he had indeed turned rogue and to dispose of him if it was true. Unfortunately, I got to him too late to save you. We discourage making new vampires or were-creatures, but when it does happen we do our best to make sure the fledgling knows what to do and has a chance of survival.”

"If I hadn't listened to you — if I had become a rogue, would you have had to dispose of me?"

"The creator of a fledgling is held responsible for mentoring his offspring, but if a creator can't do that for any reason or refuses, the chances of a fledgling going rogue are strong. That's why the Council steps in and appoints a mentor. Disposal of any supernatural creature is only carried out as a last resort. I'm your mentor, Shane, not your destroyer."

Shane sat in silence for a while, taking in everything Connor had told him. "Did you kill Mikhail?"

Connor shook his head. "I didn't have to. Mikhail was responsible for his own destruction. He must have known of his susceptibility to the sun but his greed got the better of him." He went on, spelling out the details. "I'd been watching Mikhail, who seemed to be turning rogue. That's how I came to intervene in your case by accident. Now the members of the Council have agreed that I should continue to be your mentor and guide you through your fledgling process. And there's more."

"Hmm, that's good." Shane nuzzled at Connor's neck again and began to unbutton his shirt

"Don't you want to hear what else they had to say? I thought you'd be more interested," Connor said as his shirt was pushed off his shoulders and an insistent tug removed first one arm from the sleeves and then the other.

"Oh, I'm interested, all right, but there's something else I'm a little bit more interested in at the moment." Shane's hands were at Connor's belt now, tugging it loose and undoing the zip of his pants. Connor moaned as Shane's lips met his in a deep kiss; he moaned again in loss as Shane moved away.

"What are you doing?"

"Shush! Just relax. I intend making some of those dreams I was having come true."

Shane kissed and licked his way down Connor's chest towards his stomach, stopping to take small bites on the way, sucking gently before moving on, enjoying the taste and the way Connor writhed under his lips and tongue. His hands played over Connor's body, touching lightly. When he reached Connor's hips he pulled back quickly and yanked his pants all the way down and off his legs, throwing them to join his shirt on the floor.

With his head bent he took a small nibble at each of Connor's hips, lapping up the drops of blood that welled from the bites. Finally his mouth closed over Connor's erection. This was his prize; he wanted to taste all of Connor—not just his blood, but his essence too, and mingle them together. He sucked, gently at first then as strongly as he had when sucking the blood from his vein.

Connor's hands moved over his shoulders before burrowing into his hair, and his hips pushed up in a rhythm that met the downward motion of Shane's mouth. "Shane..." he whispered, his voice needy.

Shane pushed his tongue into the small slit and Connor's hips pushed harder. The taste was sweet at first then bitter and tangy when Connor filled his mouth with the fluid he wanted. Sucking hard, he milked all he could, taking it all in.

When there was no more to be had, he pulled away. Swirling the liquid in his mouth, mixing it with the blood that still lingered, he swallowed, almost purring at the flavor.

"Come here, greedy one," Connor commanded as he pulled him up for a deep kiss, sweeping his tongue between Shane's lips and taking his own taste.

Then he pushed Shane back onto the pillow and sank his fangs painlessly into his neck, reaching his hand down at the same time to grasp Shane's hardness. Shane almost screamed with the pleasure Connor's mouth, fangs and pumping hand brought to him. Connor moved further over Shane, pushing his knee between his legs. Shane immediately opened wider, allowing access, and

Connor, his cock fully erect again and still slick from Shane's mouth and his own juices, pushed against his opening. Another push and Connor slid easily inside. Shane cried out again, lost in the rhythm of Connor's mouth, hand and hips. It seemed only seconds before his orgasm ripped through him. He coated Connor's hand with his release at the same moment Connor climaxed deep inside him.

\* \* \* \*

Shane snuggled, relaxed and replete, against Connor's chest. The moonlight streamed through the window they had opened to let in the cool night air.

"What else did you do today, besides talk to the Council?" Shane said, licking gently at a bite mark just above Connor's nipple.

"Well, I went to my house and made a few new arrangements."

"You have a house?" Shane lifted his head to look at Connor.

"Yes, why is that so surprising? I have to live somewhere."

"I dunno, I just thought vampires lived in caves or something."

"Caves? Why would we live in caves?" Connor sounded genuinely puzzled. "I've got a nice two story colonial house just outside town. Bought it about fifty years ago and did it up myself."

"How do you explain...? Oh! Never mind, I'm sure you'll tell me more of that stuff eventually. What were the arrangements you had to make?"

"I cleared out a few cupboards, made room in my drawers, told my housekeeper I may be having some company come to stay. Got..."

"Who's coming to stay with you?" Shane interrupted, hoping.

Connor grinned and reached down to pull him up for a quick kiss. "You, silly. If you want to come and stay with me, that is. Of course, you could keep on at this apartment if you wanted to, find yourself something more suitable a

bit later on - the neighbors might get too suspicious if you suddenly become a permanent night owl."

"What about everything I have here, like my job?" Shane leaned on his elbow to look Connor in the eyes.

"Your life has irrevocably changed. As for your job—I suggest you quit, unless you can go on night shifts!"

Shane snorted; there wasn't much chance of that! He thought for a moment, turning everything over in his mind.

"That's the point isn't it?" He said, finally. "I'm not what I was last week, or even two days ago. I'm not human anymore. Hell, I'm not even alive." He threw himself back down on the pillows, staring up at the ceiling.

"Shane, you are part of something else now—a different world. A world we can explore together, if you want." Connor leaned over and cupped his hand to Shane's chin, turning his face to look at him. "There's a lot for you to learn, but as you said yourself, you're a quick learner. And I'll be there to help."

Shane looked into Connor's eyes. "I'd like that, having you there. I'd like to live with you too, and find out what this is all about."

"Good," Connor continued. "Because I have a proposition for you. Council enforcers often work in pairs. I need a partner. Interested?"

"You mean work with you, be an enforcer?"

Connor nodded. "You would have to undergo training, of course." He hesitated at Shane's look of uncertainty. "You don't have to answer me now if you don't want to. Think about it."

Shane studied Connor, seeing someone he admired, someone to look up to. Shane's life up to now had been very ordinary; training as an Enforcer with Connor as his mentor was an attractive prospect. And if he had to be dead, at least the offered employment held the promise of excitement. He knew Connor could easily have eliminated him. In fact, that would have been a far less complicated way of handling the situation. But instead he had looked after him,

guarded and guided him through a terrifying process, had done his best to ensure Shane survived. Another thought came to him. The past two days had been a nightmare and while he couldn't change what had been done to him, at least with Connor he could help prevent the same thing from happening to some other, unsuspecting human.

He looked into those beautiful green eyes gazing into his own waiting for Shane's response. He realized then how much a future with Connor Franklin could hold and how he wanted to be an active participant of this new world.

"That would be cool." He pulled Connor down for another kiss to seal his fate.

THE END

# **Val**

## **Anel Viz**

### **Chapter One**

He was fortunate to have the money to indulge his obsession with pale young men, though he could never find any quite pale enough. He required skin a ghostly white from head to toe. Still, there was powder. A paid escort will cooperate with any of your fantasies for a price as long as they don't put him at risk.

Finding men the right height and slenderness was easy; so many of them had been stamped in Val's mold, and nearly all of them dressed in the same tight jeans. He kept a supply of contact lenses on hand so they would have Val's unnaturally dark blue eyes.

When the hairstyles began to change he had to buy a wig for them to wear, and now he only had them use the easy-to-rinse-out black hair dye on their pubes. No one had hair as black as Val.

On some things he had to compromise, like the scar above Val's upper lip he had so loved to kiss. Nor would he have dared ask any of them to alter their dicks even if it were possible.

His masquerades were sufficiently close to the original to allow him to resurrect the dead for a night. He even managed to get a surprising number of

them to approximate Val's walk, though very few mastered it. Getting the smile right would have posed a problem if he hadn't wanted his Val to look grim.

But the pallor was most important, and their blue veins would not show through a heavy layer of powder as they had through his translucent skin. Not that Val had been particularly pale during the several months their affair had lasted, nor had he been obsessed with him at the time.

Could it have been that obsession is a weakness peculiar to the old, or perhaps their privilege? When they split, they split, and both went on to other men, no hard feelings on either side. They still ran into each other now and then at the bars or the baths, and when they did they'd have a little chat. They talked mostly about mutual friends or the latest gay gossip. They never reminisced about their past together, and neither of them felt any inclination to go to bed with his former lover. They remained on friendly terms, but the personal connection had evaporated and the sexual chemistry had too.

He was less handsome now, though on the whole he had held up rather well. If he weren't so particular about the look he wanted, he could certainly have found reasonably good-looking young men who'd go with him for free. Thinning hair, droopy skin on his face, a bit of a paunch, nothing worse than that. What could one expect of a man who'd recently turned fifty, after all? Not that he had ever thought about it when he was young. It no longer surprised him when he looked in the mirror, or wouldn't have if he didn't have Val's photograph right there on the dresser to compare it with. The photo had sat there for close to fifteen years, almost as long as he'd been paying for sex.

A handsome, in-shape male in his early thirties shouldn't have to pay for a sexual partner, but his casual pick-ups weren't interested in indulging such peculiar tastes though the sex itself may not be particularly kinky, and no long term partner will agree to pretend to be someone else night after night. His last lover had walked out on him for more or less that reason.



How long had he been living with Sid when Val showed up again? Three years? Four? He would never forget that night. "Showed up" is not the right word; he had stumbled on him – literally, walking home from a Chinese restaurant one evening when he'd stayed late at work. Val was lying in the shadows on the sidewalk, clutching a much too thin denim jacket around his shivering shoulders. A drunk, no doubt. Normally, he would not have looked twice, but this time he did.

"Val?"

"That you, Brad? I'm sick, man."

"What the hell are you doing here? Don't you have someplace to go?"

Val just shook his head.

"Look, come home with me. You can't stay here, not if you're sick."

"I don't do that anymore. I don't want to give this thing to anyone."

Only then did I realize what he had. "I didn't mean that. Anyway, I'm with someone now. Been together a long time. You can sleep on the couch. At least you'll be warm there. And you should eat something too."

"Can't eat."

"Can you stand up by yourself?"

"I think so." But he reached out his hand anyway, and Brad had to pull him to his feet.

He staggered a step or two forward into the light of the streetlamp, giving Brad his first look at the deathly pallor and sunken cheeks that had haunted him ever since. Val steadied himself against the wall and asked, "Is it far to walk?"

"We'll grab a cab."

Sid and Brad shared the second floor of a brownstone. He thought he'd need Sid's help to get Val up the stairs, but Val wouldn't allow it. By the time they reached the top he was wheezing, too weak to pant.

"Hello. Who's this?" Sid asked when they opened the door.

"Val, an old boyfriend from long ago."

"You're not going to start bringing them home now, I...Christ! He looks awful."

"He has it." In those days we still avoided calling it by its proper name. "I found him lying on the sidewalk."

"Where's he living?"

"I'm not," Val cut in.

That said it all.

"I told him he can sleep on the couch."

"Not unless he has a bath first. Is he strong enough to stand up in the shower?"

"I'll bathe him. But first he should eat something."

"Something light," Val said. "I have trouble keeping things down."

"Any of your mom's chicken soup left in the fridge?"

Sid shrugged. "When don't we have my mom's chicken soup in the fridge? Go sit down."

"Where?"

"At the table. Where else?"

"I don't see too good anymore. CMV."

Brad hadn't noticed when he walked him to the cab.

He swallowed a spoonful or two, then he said, "This is really, really good, but I better stop. The nausea's coming back." But he managed to keep it down.

"Try again in a little while," Brad told him.

"Fuck! It's gonna go right through me."

Brad rushed him to the bathroom. From behind the closed door they heard him emptying like a cascade into the toilet.

"Shouldn't we move him to a hospice?" Sid asked. "We can't give him the kind of care he needs here."

"At this time of night? We can start looking for one in the morning. Right now I better go help him clean up."

Helping him out of his clothes, he could see Val had become skin and bones, and he also saw the dreaded marks of Kaposi's sarcoma. He forced himself not to tremble as he soaped Val down in the warm bath, but the loathing showed through.

"I wish you didn't have to see these. Disgusting, aren't they?"

"Not so much that as scary, spooky."

They clustered most thickly on his chest and stomach and thighs, but the one that stayed with him was the one he saw first, the reddish blotch next to his right shoulder blade that came to light as he stood behind him and pulled his shirt down over his arms. He couldn't ask his escorts to let him cover them in fake sores, but he did reproduce this one, using reddish brown lipstick. They had no idea what it represented.

He'd tossed his clothes out the door for Sid to throw in the wash. "I'm not going out there naked," he said. "It's bad enough for you to see me like this."

"You can wear my bathrobe."

Sid had laid a sheet over the sofa cushions and brought a pillow and two blankets. "You better get a quilt to put under me if you have one," Val said. "I sweat buckets at night."

Neither Brad nor Sid could get it up with Val asleep in the next room. Brad didn't feel like touching another male body after washing Val's, and didn't think Sid much wanted his hands touching him either.

Instead they talked. Sid asked about his few months on and off with Val a dozen years before and Brad spoke about how beautiful he'd been.

The test had recently become available, they'd both taken it and the results had come back negative, but they used condoms anyway. In spite of that, for the first time they slept with over a foot of mattress between them.

Brad dreamt about Val that night. Someone was fucking him. He couldn't see who it was because the other guy was on top and he had his head buried in the pillows, but he could tell it was Val. No two men fuck you in quite

the same way. He woke up in sticky boxers and knew at once he had cum in his sleep. He hoped Sid wouldn't notice.

They found him a hospice through the intervention of the Gay Men's Health Crisis, but first a doctor had to certify that he was in the terminal stages of the disease, and then it took a good week before there was an opening, though he had immediately been put near the top of the list. By the time he moved in he was blind and often delirious.

The hospice care slowed his deterioration, but clearly he was dying. Brad stopped by to see him twice a week. Then he got a call that he had come down with pneumonia and been moved to the hospital. He found him in a makeshift tent, hooked up to countless drips and tubes and blinking monitors, a respirator shoved down his throat, his unseeing, dark blue eyes wide open and staring straight ahead.

"Can you hear me, Val? It's Brad."

No physical response, but he sensed his attempt to answer and thought he understood. He removed the tube from between his teeth and kissed him on lips. He smiled at back at him for a few seconds before Brad replaced the tube.

Val died that night.

No next of kin had been located. The hospice took care of the cremation and held a small memorial service, attended by Brad, Sid, the hospice patients and staff. As far as anyone knew, he owned nothing besides the clothes he had been wearing the night Brad found him.

In the weeks following Val's death, Brad's conversation turned more and more to the AIDS epidemic. There was nothing surprising in that; they had lost so many friends so quickly, knew so many men who had died or were dying of it. Who didn't? The whole gay community talked about it. Everyone knew the symptoms; no one felt safe. Gay men everywhere panicked at the slightest cough, at a loss of appetite, a loose stool. The air was heavy with morbidity, and people were frightened.

Brad's obsession, however, was definitely peculiar. He didn't show much concern for his health, nor did he speak much about it at home, but when they were out in a bar together his eye would seek out people who looked thin or sickly, and he'd bring his head close to Sid's and whisper, "That guy there – do you think he has it?" Tactless of him, to put it mildly, though it was unlikely anyone else could hear him, and it made Sid feel uncomfortable and conspicuous, for anyone who saw the expression on Brad's face might have guessed what he was thinking.

But there was more. Before long, when they went anywhere together, Sid started glancing around to room to see if anyone there had the telltale signs, and, as far as he could see, any number of them looked suspect, old and young, tall and short, lean and chubby, but Brad ignored them all.

Inevitably, those Brad singled out reminded him of Val, and not just in some vague way. Though Val had lived with them just over a week, Sid had not seen much of him. He hadn't avoided Val; Val had avoided him.

It soon became apparent that this was no passing phase. As time went on, Brad returned to the subject more and more insistently, and the more he said, the more Sid was certain that it was Val, not the disease, that obsessed him. How could he compete with a dead man? He told Brad as much. Brad denied it, but he didn't let up. They argued, and Sid moved out.

That marked the beginning of his fetishistic resurrection of the departed using the bodies-for-hire of handsome young men, at first once in a while, then more and more frequently. He perfected his art. When he had refashioned them in *his* image, he would throw himself on them and devour their flesh, his lovemaking as voracious as his makeovers were meticulous.

Few came back for more, so demanding were his standards and so frightening his enthusiasm for the game, but he found a few aspiring young actors willing to give it another go, either out of professional vanity or scarcity of employment. The second time around never satisfied him. Even when they'd

rehearsed at home and came already dressed and made-up for the part, he at once saw their inadequacies, and imperfections he had overlooked before struck him as glaring.

He dug up an old photograph of Val, a five-by-seven black and white studio portrait, bought a frame for it, and put it on his dresser, where he could look at both of them at once – at Val and, in the wall mirror behind the portrait, at himself. As he watched himself age with the passing years, it seemed to him that the photo, too, changed slowly and subtly, and came to resemble the dying, emaciated lover he had run into and then lost again.

## Chapter Two

Brad first spotted him from behind in the bar – the straight black hair just below shoulder-length, the slim frame, the jeans and denim jacket. He was already staring when the man turned. It was uncanny. The same long face that seemed longer for its thinness, the same dark blue eyes, the same full red lips that made the sharp points of his teeth gleam all the whiter, and first and foremost the same prominent blood vessels that pulsed with life below a translucent white skin. He looked to be in his late twenties; early thirties at the most.

“What are you staring at, fella?”

Though far from shy, usually quite bold in accosting his potential pick-ups, Brad backed away. He did not so much feel threatened as caught off guard by this unexpected near double of the Val his memory had reconstituted over the years. “Nothing.”

The man returned to his interrupted conversation with his boisterous friends. Brad kept as inconspicuous an eye on them as he could. They all left together soon afterwards.

He saw a few promising could-be Vals at the bar that night, but having seen this one he rejected them all and left alone toward eleven-thirty. The bar was not far from his office, and he decided to walk the three or four miles uptown to his apartment to calm his excitement. The man was waiting for him

down the block, leaning against the wall at almost exactly the same spot he had found the dying Val almost twenty years before.

"What took you so long?" he asked.

"I didn't think you were interested."

"Why wouldn't I be interested? There's money for me in it, isn't there?"

"You don't know what I'm looking for."

"Everything has its price doesn't it? Twenty bucks you blow me, fifty I go down on you. Anal is higher."

"And to go home with me?"

"For the night?"

"For the night."

"Three hundred, plus the cost of the most expensive sex act you want us to do, the cheaper ones thrown in as part of the package. No S&M, no unsafe sex."

"Role play?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Then you're on, and I think I got a bargain."

"I like your attitude. Is it far to walk?"

"We'll grab a cab."

"But you do live in the city?"

"Fifteen minutes by subway. Longer at night. We start the role play now, okay?"

"You call the shots."

"I'm gonna call you Val, if you don't mind."

"Why should I mind? That's what everyone calls me."

Brad stopped in his tracks. "Really? I mean, is that your real name or are we role playing already?"

"For real. Too many guys have the same name as me, and my middle name is Valentine. But I've always hated that. Too swish."



"I'm Brad." And they shook hands.

There was no need to role play that night, no need to teach Val mannerisms that he already had down perfectly. The voice was almost identical. He had Val's smell as he remembered it from the days when they were lovers. He sat of his own accord in the chair Val had taken the night Brad brought him home. When offered a drink, he asked for what Val would have asked for. When asked what he did for a living, he answered, "What am I supposed to say?"

"Whatever you really do. I'm curious."

"Aspiring actor. And successful hustler on the side."

That was right too, except for the hustling. But maybe Val had hustled after they broke up. How was he to know?

When Brad brought his face close to his to kiss him, he saw the same small scar on his upper lip. But was it in the same place? Hadn't Val's been on the other side? He'd need to have a look at the photo to decide. Was it visible in the photo? He couldn't remember. How, then, would he be able to remember?

There was only one small glitch to their evening, a small incident, really. Brad phoned out for pizza, and when Val picked up his first slice the cheese slipped off and left a large tomato sauce stain on his jacket, shirt and jeans. But his reaction, a quick "Eternal damnation!" muttered under his breath, was exactly what the other Val would have said.

Somewhere along the line Val said, "This doesn't feel like role play."

"Let's say it is for me."

He kissed him like Val, he groped him like Val, and when Brad unbuttoned his shirt and slipped it off, there it was – a large, reddish-brown blotch next to his right shoulder blade. Brad touched it tentatively.

"Don't worry, it's not what you think it is. I'm clean. It's just a birthmark. Nothing to worry about. I hope it doesn't kill whatever illusion you're after."

"No, no. It's fine. Just fine."

They stood naked in front of the mirror side by side, the middle-aged Brad and the Val of his imagination, if not quite the Val of his youth. Then Val's eye fell on the photo. "Hey! That looks just like me!"

"Val, a former boyfriend."

Val said nothing, but he must have been thinking, "Shit, this is creepy."

Their lovemaking at once broke and clinched the illusion. Brad had never made love with anyone like that, as it had been with the first Val, but better, more passionate, overwhelming, more completely satisfying. But he was looking for an idealized Val, so why shouldn't the sex they had together be an idealization too?

They necked, Brad's arms around him. His chest filled with love and longing for this impossibly real Val where his body pressed against him. He sought out the places on this man's body which were erogenous zones for him, and the response was immediate. When he placed his lips on his neck just below the chin and to the left of his Adam's apple, Val dug his fingers in Brad's hair and began a writhing rotation of his hips, his eyes rolled back in his head.

Then Brad went down on him and stayed there for as long as his jaw and tongue had the strength to please him.

He started with his tongue in his navel, then worked outwards, closing his lips over whatever little parcels of flesh he could suck up from the firm stomach, inching ever closer to his bush. He felt the man's rod swell and rise below his chin as he munched and licked at the skin at the base of his abdomen. He took it in his mouth, and it leaked sugary precum the whole time it stayed there. He stopped to suck on his nuts and ran his tongue around their perfect ovals while he held them in his mouth. When he returned to his cock it was covered in the sweetest precum he had ever tasted, and he lapped it up until the shaft was drenched in his saliva. He kissed and licked and sucked Val's glans, crown and ridge and slit. He sucked him into the back of his mouth as far as it would go. He licked his nuts some more, and the forking of his legs, and bit his perineum,

and lifted his legs and rimmed his ass, coming up for air when he needed it and for more precum when he hungered for it.

His hands were not idle. They roamed about his torso, and the new Val stroked them sometimes, but just as often he clenched his fingers around the bedclothes. His sighs went on unabated.

When Val's turn came, he made Brad's body his oral playground. Brad fell back, legs spread eagle, and moaned and squirmed and arched his back as his lover's face dug into his groin as in a sandbox, his tongue wrapped around and swung about his genitals as on a jungle gym, his lips raced down him as on a slide, and he seesawed back and forth when he took him in this throat. Every few minutes he'd look up and smile at his partner's pleasure to go back for more with the mad energy of a hyperactive child. Instead of ending with Brad's cock deep in his throat, he closed his attentions as Brad had begun, with a kiss on the neck, zeroing in on the same spot. His kiss was electric, unlike any kiss to the neck he had experienced before. The touch of his lips and his warm breath wafting over his skin had an almost narcotic effect, and Brad felt his brain grow fuzzy.

Then Val's mouth slowly opened, and the light contact of his hard teeth awoke a glow nestled inside between his sacrum and his genitals, which shot up his spine like a flame when the soft tongue crept in between them to press the magic button beneath the base of his chin. His dick gave a little jump and he felt a tiny trickle of wetness on his belly. He folded his arms around Val's shoulders and pulled tight against him, clutching him frantically to eternalize the moment.

Freeing himself, Val sat up and beamed as if proud of how perfectly he'd performed his exercises. "My jaw hurts," he said. "Now fuck me." And he got into position on his stomach.

Brad slipped a pillow under him to get as far into him as he could, but first he wanted to eat his ass some more. He nuzzled into it, squeezing and rubbing his cheeks in circles while he gave the whole hidden valley, now

exposed, a thorough scrubbing of licks and nibbles and kisses, and sucked on his rosebud and probed his tongue deep inside it. Val hummed so musically he might have burst into song.

Eating Val's ass aroused him so, he had no need to play with himself to get ready to penetrate him, and he was more than hard enough when he started. A dab of lube on him, another on his sheathed cock, and in he went. He slid through his whimpers, stopping no more than a moment when they threatened to turn into a yelp, then he'd rotate his hips for a few seconds or pump the passage he'd already opened, shallowly trilling like a hummingbird's beating wings, before he pressed steadily on to reach his goal: to mash the base of his pubes into the yielding buttocks and fill him.

"Oh, my God! You... are... *huge!*"

This was not a complaint: the hands that had lain limp on either side of Brad were now digging into his thighs, and Val's knees bent back and pressed his feet hard against the butt that capped his own.

Then the fuck began in earnest. Brad thrust in and out – all the way in and all the way out. He rutted into him like a pig after truffles, chewing on his neck and ears and slavering on him, while Val kept saying, "Yes! More! Fuck me!" till he took Brad's fingers in his mouth and sucked on them, which effectively muffled whatever he tried to say.

They picked up speed. The slapping of Brad's balls on his cheeks rang loud in the room, and Val flutter-kicked between the legs that bracketed him, his back undulating like a swimming dolphin, while his ravisher never stopped repeating that he loved him.

The body on top stiffened and lay on him immobile while it grasped Val's shoulders and rattled him with the speed of a dog shaking itself dry when it comes ashore after a dip in the lake. He lay dazed, limp and breathless underneath while Brad went on shaking him till he came, at which moment his body stiffened too and remained rigid until the last gush of hot seed had

pumped out of him. Then he suddenly exhaled, his body deflated, and both lay panting till the throbbing member relaxed, went soft, and they drew apart.

When they switched places Brad found bottoming for Val as transcendent as topping him. It had nothing to do with the mechanics of fucking. It was a question of fulfilled desire. Brad wanted to be his thing, and Val took him as he wanted him to, with all the jealousy of possession. His wand woke an orgasm inside him that ran unleashed throughout his body and wreaked havoc on Brad's synapses. He let passion seize him like an epileptic fit and wring his guts the way his love for the dead Val wrung his soul.

Did this new Val suspect how he'd envied him when he sang beneath the storm surge of sex on which Brad rode and the undertow dragged him helpless out to sea? Did Val suspect the man who'd topped him felt envy when, moments before, he lay gasping like a drowned man in the receding eddies of their spent lovemaking, marooned on the island where the tempest Brad conjured had carried him? That Brad had envied him his utter abandonment of self to another man? No, Brad did not want to control his own orgasm; he wanted to control Val's and Val to control his.

As Brad experienced their lovemaking, from beginning to end the impossible occurred.

They floated, pressed face to face. Val lay underneath, Val lay on top of him, Val was in both places at once; they rolled together like a rotisserie chicken on its endless twirling journey.

As in some cheesy and pretentious porn flick, their coupling seemed to move into slo-mo and, his cock deep inside of Val and Val's in him, their haunches melted and fused, and one orgasm seized them both, the mingled juices of their burning passion bathing the single, throbbing vial in which they were distilled. Clutched in the crushing frenzy of their embrace, their mouths melded, twin tongues adhered one to the other, faces wet with the joy of each other's streaming tears. Like a patient strapped to a table for electroshock

therapy, their helpless bodies convulsed, and they exited a stupid, hateful world to come together into another, where wishes need not come true because there wishes *are* truth.

## Chapter Three

Brad woke the next morning to a pair of strong arms around him and a pair of dark blue eyes staring down at him. Even Val's blunt, businesslike words could not break the spell: "So, have I earned my fee?"

"A hundred times over. That was one hell of an acting job."

"Tell it to my agent. But what makes you think I was acting? It was fucking wonderful. You were the one who was role playing, remember? I was just being me."

"I meant putting out so and pretending to enjoy an older man."

"Who was pretending? You're not young, but you're not bad-looking for any age, not by a long shot. In my profession it doesn't take long to learn that age doesn't count for shit. And your abilities as a lover are about as good as any I've come across. Better. Much, much better. Or was that just getting into your role play? I'd like to think not."

"I thought it was you. I'm sure it was you."

"I am me. But now I gotta go. I hope we can do this again."

"I wouldn't let you out of here if I thought we might not do it again."

Brad got up to retrieve his wallet and Val went to dress. When he saw the pizza stains on his clothes he let out a curse. "Piss, fart and corruption! I can't go home dressed like this."

"I'll find you something to wear," Brad said, and he dug out the clothes Val had been wearing the night he brought him home. They had hung from Val's emaciated limbs, but this Val they fit perfectly.

"These are old," Val observed as Brad handed him his soiled clothes in a shopping bag.

"Sorry, but anything of mine would be too big on you. These were Val's."

Val face froze in anger. "The role play's over," he said. "You got your money's worth. It's tomorrow now. I wouldn't wear them if you paid me."

"You should be flattered. They're the only things of his I have left, and I'm giving them to you."

"So I can be him? Why would you think I'd want to be? I thought you were satisfied with me. I thought this Val was good enough for you. Wasn't I good enough in bed as myself? Or is it that no one can match up to him?"

"Sex with Val was nothing like sex with you. We had some good sex, but nothing like what I had last night. Like what we had last night."

"Then don't try to turn me into your other Val."

"I'm not. If anything, I wish could I turn my other Val into you."

"It's the same thing, and it's no compliment. I'm no one's puppet."

"I don't see why you should be hurt."

"Don't you? Because it was so good. Because I thought *I* was giving you pleasure. Me, get it? Not just somebody you picked up to play out some crazy fantasy. If I'm someone else to you it means that for you I'm just a hustler."

And he turned on his heel and walked out slamming the door behind him, wearing Val's old clothes, carrying his own, and leaving Brad's cash on the kitchen table. Brad was too stunned to say a word.

He couldn't believe he had let him go. Then he looked at the situation rationally. It was just a game, really. He had indulged his fetish too long and it had made him unstable. He was making a fool of himself. He needed to take his life in hand, be honest with himself, stick to men his own age. He went and



looked in the mirror and saw a man in his fifties. Val had been flattering him. It wasn't a lie; it was his job. The only lie was paying for sex. Taking the money was being realistic.

But it wasn't long before he found himself playing the old games. Habits are hard to break and the call of sex imperious for men of any age. But the role plays no longer worked.

The young men he picked up did the best they could, but on the rare occasions they came remotely close to succeeding it seemed to him that they were impersonating the wrong Val without his being able to decide which Val was the right one.

He had left the photo lying face down and weeks had gone by since he last looked at it, since they had looked at it together and marveled at the resemblance. He needed to remind himself of the ideal if his hired lovers were to get it right. But when he looked at the portrait it struck him that it didn't much resemble the Val who had once been his lover. It looked like a photo he might have taken the night he brought the second Val home with him.

Four months passed before Brad ran into him again. It was early fall. He saw him in a bar, joking with a group of hustler friends. He was wearing those old clothes of Val's that he'd given him.

Brad walked straight up to him. "I owe you," he said.

"Forget about it. If anyone owes anything, I owe you. The duds I took from you."

"Forget about it. They don't fit me, and I don't want 'em. I want you."

"Forget about that, too. I know what you really want."

"But I don't. Honest. The old Val is dead. You're my fantasy now, and the fantasy isn't good enough. I want the reality."

"No games?"

"No games."

"Prove it."

"I'll prove it if you come home with me. Name your price. Any price."

"I'll be me for free if I'm free to be me."

"I'll kick you out the door if you're anyone else."

They walked out the door together. Val didn't even bother saying goodbye to his astonished buddies.

They ripped off each other's clothing as soon as they got into the apartment, their erections almost painfully distended, their mouths reaching for each other with gluttonous frenzy. Any doubt Brad had that Val was interested in him vanished, for he made it clear that only pride had kept him away, the conviction that Brad's fixation on another Val amounted to a rejection of himself.

Standing naked in front of the mirror, he slammed Val's photograph face down on the dresser and pushed Brad backwards onto the bed. Then he raised his whole body and lowered himself onto him. Val gritted his teeth from the pain and winced, but he felt pleasure too, and pressed firmly down until he'd buried every inch, however many there were, deep, deep, deep inside him, and began his wild night ride.

Brad bent his knees to provide him a back rest. Kneeling, legs splayed above Brad's belly, Val ground down onto the saddle horn while the stallion bucked up into him, and all the while he moaned his bliss and murmured words of encouragement to his mount. Brad squeezed more blood into his dick, and Val's dick grew harder with each expanding throb. He held tightly to it as if to keep his balance and not tumble from the saddle. Brad reached up and held him around the rib cage to steady him further. Both knew he'd feel those saddle sores in the morning.

Riding his lover like a horse, Val was in no way gentle to himself. He dug Brad into him with equal determination and spared himself nothing. He stared down at him, eyes wide open, ecstatic and glowing, while his mouth twisted in pain, and he bounced to beat the band, thumping down heavily to meet the upward thrusts. He cried out less than when he'd lain face down months before

and let Brad do him. No more than an occasional exclamation of how good it felt escaped his lips, but each breath came like a heavy growl in the back of his throat.

Brad stared back at him, delighting in Val's pleasure and tingling with his own. Their souls melded. Brad wished his hips could follow the auger that reamed his rider and disappear into his body, and that the rest of him would follow. He ran his hands over his chest and down his sides, squeezing and caressing. He wanted to press him to his chest, to feel the manly firmness of his muscles and his heart beating against his. He tried to reach around his back and draw him closer, but Val had braced his arms on the mattress to either side and they blocked the path, so Brad fell back on the pillow and let his head roll and passively enjoyed their desperate, frenzied, endless coupling. Brad let him take over, now and then contributing a sudden lift of the hips or pumping fresh blood into the stake that impaled the man astride him, and when he did, Val's eyes glazed over and the ring of his anus tightened around it, sending a fresh shiver through Brad's thighs.

He rode like one possessed. The bedsprings shrieked beneath his ruthless onslaught, and Brad's vertebrae were realigned.

Waking up the next morning, he would see Val transformed in the sunlit room, sleeping face down and gently breathing, the demon of the night before vanished without a trace. His cheeks lay spread apart like a ravine torn asunder by an earthquake, but the pucker at the bottom – which Brad kissed – held tight as ever. He gazed at the beauty of this magnificent man who gave himself so freely, and lust stirred in his Brad's loins, but he had not the heart to disturb his angelic calm.

That would be in the morning. Now it was still night, and their passion raged unleashed. Below him Brad tottered on the brink of orgasm, while he, rocking and writhing above, gave every sign of being orgasm incarnate till he rolled off with a gasp and whispered, "I can't. My legs."

Brad could, though. Val lay to his right with his back to him, knees raised in fetal position. He entered him from behind, as far as his hips could push. It went in easily, though he was as engorged as when Val first sat down on him. With his left hand on his upper arm and his right pressed to his scalp, Brad fucked him, drawing him back on himself with every thrust by the hands that held him.

Val's strangled moans became more articulate. He'd ridden for perhaps forty-five minutes; Brad's pelvis kept up its saber dance behind him perhaps half as long again. When he sensed that the vertigo was about to swallow them both, Brad placed the flat of his hand in the center of Val's chest, pulled him back against his, pushed as far inside him as he could reach, and held there. The top of his thighs adhered to the bottom of Val's; his mouth clung to his shoulder like a leech. He kept tightening his sphincter to propel more blood into the bolt that held them together, and each time he did Val shuddered convulsively.

He finally pulled out, lit them both cigarettes and handed him one, then sat up halfway leaning against the wall and had a smoke, his pole standing tall and proud as ever. The recent hurricane had not been able to blow it down. Val looked at it and said, "You're insatiable."

"I'm satiated. It's just a hard-on. Men get them all the time."

"They don't *stay* hard all the time. I don't think I'll ever stand again."

"I'll be your crutch."

"I have to piss now."

"See if you can get there on your own. If you can't, I'll help."

When he got back, he said as he collapsed onto the bed, "I had to hang on to the wall to support myself." Then he rolled onto his stomach to go to sleep. "Aren't you tired yet?" he asked.

"What do you think? I'm exhausted." He kissed him on the shoulder and murmured, "How I'd love to snuggle up to you and go to sleep! But I'm still rock hard. I'm afraid the temptation will lure me back into your slippery chute."

You may feel okay now, but I've seen that you can hardly walk and I can tell you're going to be *very* sore in the morning."

They fell asleep in each other's arms with Brad's left hand gently cupping Val's sweet nut-sack. When he awoke, he found the penis had stiffened in his hand.

He listened to Val's gentle, regular breathing and decided he would not be getting up for a while, not without intervention. He could think of no more pleasant way to wake up than to the sensation of someone lovingly sucking on your dick. He carefully uncovered him and got his head into position, licked off the few drops of precum pooled at the tip, and drew him cautiously into his mouth. He wanted him but dimly aware of a far-off pleasure spreading slowly across his shaft and rising inside it, and to return to consciousness only gradually.

Only half awake, Val smiled and purred. He spread his legs wider and laid a hand on Brad's shoulder. Brad let his mouth wander as Val became more awake. After twenty minutes or so he looked up at him and saw his eyes open and smiling at him. "My turn," he said.

There in a nutshell you have what they did on that lazy morning. Brad had not shot the night before and the spunk had been building up in him for months. After less than a quarter-hour of pumping, and he blew his wad in an endless ejaculation. He did not go at it with undue vigor because he knew they'd fuck two or three times more before Val left, but he ground in deep and swirled his hips clasp him tight the whole time, and Val pushed back against him. It was lovely.

But Val did not go home. They lay in bed all afternoon till it came time to go out for dinner. Not until then did they put on a stitch of clothing. They'd get up to make coffee or to take a leak, and once or twice the phone rang, but they always gravitated back to the bed. For the most part they just snuggled together and stroked one another. Brad compared the smooth expanse of Val's back with

the thick covering of fine hairs on his two globes to decide which he liked better, and came to the conclusion that the two together offered the best of all possible worlds. They chatted a lot and exchanged confidences, memories and opinions on the sorry state of current politics. They even dared speak somewhat about their fantasies, what they thought about while making love. They dozed from time to time. It was lovely.

They went straight back to bed when they returned from dinner. Brad examined the body that Heaven had dropped into his lap, examined it in detail from top to bottom, as if he'd never gazed on a male before. It was a source of wonderment.

Val explored his lover with his fingertips, then with his lips and tongue. They breathed deeply, inhaling the other's warmth. They spent hours devouring cock and balls. All of these activities were occasionally interrupted for a mutually satisfying fuck, sometimes one topping, sometimes the other. They stayed hard from nine at night until they fell back to sleep in the wee hours of the morning, and woke up hard with the sun. It was lovely.

It didn't take long to discover that they liked it best with the bottom lying face down, a pillow under his pelvis. With each successive fuck they went at it with greater force and determination, and by the last both were taking quite a pounding. Each time the one's low moans filled the room until the grunts of the other's orgasm drowned them out. Each time they had less to unload, but each ejaculation brought on more intense spasms. Each time the active partner lay on top waiting to soften before he pulled out, and each time he pulled out as hard as when he'd entered. It was lovely.

## Chapter Four

Val slept at Brad's every night from then on without exactly moving in. He kept his clothes someplace else and would leave in the morning to return at night. Heaven only knew where he spent his days. He usually arrived very late, often shortly after midnight. There wasn't much time to do anything together except have sex if they were to get any sleep at all, so sex pretty much became how they spent all their time together, but it was fabulous sex, so it was time well spent. It seemed to Brad they were both in a relationship and not in a relationship. When he asked why he didn't come earlier so they could have an evening together, Val answered, "I have to earn my living, you know."

So he was still hustling, but he belonged to Brad.

He often showed up in the faded, worn denims Brad had given him the morning he stormed out. "I thought the role plays were over," Brad finally said. "I thought you didn't like being somebody else."

*"Am I somebody else?"*

"Well, no...But his clothes, isn't it like dressing up?"

"They're mine now. I've stolen you from him. Why shouldn't I keep his clothes as well?"

Brad had no answer for that. But it struck him that the way his answer was phrased meant that as Val saw it, it was he who belonged to Val. He had never looked on a relationship as a matter of owning anyone before, but in this

case it fit. And it seemed to him the ownership was mutual, that there was no dominant partner, or that both were. On the one hand, Val submitted to him utterly. On the other, he was under Val's spell, body and mind. Did he have the same hold over Val? Did he want it?

If you saw dominance in the simplistic terms of top and bottom, they were versatile. Brad guessed that he took the active role more often, but neither saw that as the man's role, nor did he think he preferred being on top, at least not with Val.

Even more curious, Val did not object to the continued presence of his predecessor's photo on the dresser, and when Brad asked directly whether he shouldn't replace it with one of him he answered, "It looks just like me. It is me. Besides, I don't photograph well. You might say I don't photograph at all. I was even going to ask if I could give it to Derek."

"Derek?"

"My agent. Mr. Basarab. It could help me get work."

"We'd have to make a copy of it first, or I'd have nothing for myself."

"Do you really think it looks enough like me? Which Val does it resemble most?"

"I don't trust myself to remember what the other Val looked like. You're my only Val."

"Try to remember. Do we dress alike? Not just when I wear his clothes."

"He didn't have the bracelet. And he wore a crucifix around his neck. You can't see it because the shirt is buttoned, but it's there underneath it."

"No crucifix. God forbid. And I never take off my bracelet."

It was a wide, solid silver band Val wore around his left wrist. In fact, he had never seen Val without it.

In short, they had both made a one hundred eighty degree turn on the Val issue, with the old Val as the pivot. For Brad the old Val was no longer there; but



he was, because for Val the old Val was himself. Whatever else one might say about their relationship, it was certainly different.

Just as every relationship is different, so every relationship evolves and most quickly in the first few years. Even undying love is not static, for people never stop growing, and though habits form and partners fall into roles, becoming set in those habits is also a change. Before long Brad found himself very much the dominant partner, which he had certainly not been at the outset.

After all, Val was the professional. Perhaps he satisfied the aggressive side of his sexuality with his clients and his passivity came to the fore when he was with Brad, so it was more his doing than Brad's that Brad took on the active role. When it came to initiating sex, however, it was impossible to tell who usually took the first step. A look, a smile, and they were all over each other at once. When they got right down to it, neither could be called passive, even if it was most often Val who took the pounding.

In no way could you consider them equal partners. Socially, Brad was a good twenty years older, better educated, and more worldly; he held a steadier, better paying and more respectable job. Sexually, for him and with him Val was no hustler. It did not so much matter who was on top, except that most often it was Brad who had the responsibility for delivering the pleasure to them both. And deliver he did. Neither of them had any complaints on that score. Sometimes they discussed their lovemaking the next morning, and inevitably their discussion was thick with superlatives.

Complaints did come, however. Val was losing weight and growing paler by the day, and he suffered from chronic fatigue. Brad urged him to see a doctor and told him flat out that his hustler's lifestyle was at fault.

"My hustling has nothing to do with it. You're to blame."

Brad's jaw dropped open. He was totally unprepared for that response. "Me? What do you mean? What have I done?"

"You're sucking my life dry."

"You make me sound like a vampire."

"I don't mean it literally, you ass. You're making me into someone else, so there's no real me left inside."

"Into Val? You can't mean that! I only asked you to pretend to be him once, on our first time together."

"But you still pretend."

"I do not. If anyone pretends, it's you."

"To please you. And it means making myself into a dead man."

"Don't be morbid."

"I know what I'm like with other men, and I know what I'm like with you. It's not the same."

"I should hope not!"

"You take charge of me completely. You mold me."

"I don't think that's how it is."

"You're not in charge?"

"I don't mold you."

"Then why am I like I am when I'm with you?"

"It's not my doing. I want you to be the way you are."

"See?"

"I mean, the way you want to be. I thought you like what we do. I thought you enjoyed it."

"Oh God, the sex is wonderful. I just want you to have it with *me*."

"Who do you think I'm having sex with? Val?"

"Aren't you?"

"No. You think my sex with him was anything like my sex with you? What makes you think I dominated Val? Think again."

"Didn't you?"

"No. As a matter of fact, it was quite the opposite. If you think you're pleasing me – which you are – by being like Val, you're wrong. Your role

playing is all wrong if that's what you're after. This nonsense about being Val is just a defense mechanism. If there's something wrong you should find out. Why won't you see a doctor?"

"You're afraid it's AIDS, aren't you?"

"And you haven't considered that possibility? Remember what you do for a living?"

"AIDS is what Val died of."

"That was years after we broke up. You don't have to contract AIDS to please me."

"Go to hell."

Brad was telling the truth. He had not been the dominant partner with Val; he had probably ended up on the bottom at least three-quarters of the time. It had been the same way with Sid. He'd always tended to be passive as a young man. His role as *the* top was unprecedented, and what one might call his "leadership" role even more so. No doubt maturity had something to do with it, but his many years of hiring young men to act a part for him, of telling them what to do had just as certainly influenced his development. In that sense Val was right on the mark.

The more he thought about it, the more he realized that Val's accusations had not come totally out of the blue. Any number of things he had said in their morning-after debriefings of the previous night's sexual performance could be taken as veiled criticism as well as high praise, the more so if Val did in fact feel that he controlled him and hesitated to speak of it directly. He recalled one conversation in particular. He remembered the sex that led up to it even better.

How they had fucked that night, and what a fuck they'd had!—a fuck headier than the fumes of alcohol, a fuck to rend the clouds asunder, an endless fuck, a fuck to bring down the punishment of the jealous gods! How they'd clung together, writhed together, how Brad's rigidity had filled him and refilled him. Val pushed up against him, Brad gnawed at his neck like an animal and

pushed into him with deep, measured, deliberate strokes, over and over until he felt the surge swell up in his loins and pumped wildly for those last incipient seconds. His whole body choked, and the two of them gave one strangled cry. The orgasm thrashed and jerked their joined bodies helplessly about. Val's ring clamped tight around the sex that pulsed inside him, throbbing like a ghetto blaster, while the man above him roared like a brute roars in agony or triumph.

They lay in silence, scarcely breathing in the astonished stillness that had witnessed the abandon of their lovemaking. The quiet spread outward from their consummated union, and both heard the soft pop of a knob kissing a sphincter goodbye. Val gasped and went limp.

They had fucked like there was no tomorrow, but tomorrow always comes. The night was spent, their passion was spent, they were spent, and in the twilight of approaching morning Val murmured, "That was wonderful. You were wonderful. Sex is wonderful."

"You don't hurt?"

"No. I still feel you quivering inside me. My ass is full."

"My balls are empty. Was I an animal again?"

"No, you were a lover."

"I'm always a lover. I'm your lover."

"Sometimes you're an animal. You attack me viciously, rip me apart. The edges of the bones that support my ass cheeks feel battered for days. The muscles inside me remain stretched to your shape. My asshole yawns like a sinkhole."

Brad cast a glance at his post-coital laxity. "It's gaping right now. It looks like a fish that just landed on deck and sucks at the air trying to draw water into its gills. Like this." He demonstrated with a kiss. "It looks like you want me back inside."

"You aren't still hard, are you?"

“Of course I’m hard. I’m always hard when I have my hand on your butt.”

He had his thumb now deep inside his hole, worming its way in with twisting insistence to reach up and brush his twitching prostate, Val squirming with pleasure and breathing heavily. Brad took him twice more before they got up that morning, and they fucked again the next night. He didn’t cum every time, but his orgasms were no less intense and lasted longer.

That was neither the first nor last time Val had called him an animal and insatiable. He had always been flattered by the comparison. He, a man in his fifties, could impress a younger man, a hustler, by his potency. And he meant it too; he wasn’t just buttering up a client. An animal. What kind of animal? Predatory, to be sure.

Val was also right about taking on the old Val’s persona, though he’d got the personality wrong. It was not just his weakness and the AIDS-like symptoms, which were probably due to some other condition. It was the photo. Either he or it had changed, because he now looked more like the photo than the photo looked like the man whose photo it actually was. Either that, or Brad could not trust his memory. It had been taken more than thirty years before.

He eventually wore Val down with arguments and convinced him to see a doctor. On the day of his appointment Brad almost had to drag him there. The doctor performed numerous tests, the first, of course, for HIV, and he insisted on testing Brad as well. Both came back negative. Reassured, Val went along with the rest of the procedures with almost no prodding, though many of them were anything but pleasant.

In the end, they found nothing wrong with him besides a dangerously low red blood count, so low the doctor ordered him hospitalized for transfusions. That returned some color to his cheeks, and he felt more energetic than he had in months, but it was at best a temporary cure. Pernicious anemia, no apparent cause.

They prescribed vitamins, some herbal supplements, a program of exercise (he said lifting weights was not aerobic enough), regular sleep hours (which Val ignored), and a complete change in diet, not just the expected yogurt, fruits and vegetables, but wheat germ, brewer's yeast, no alcohol, no coffee, and – to both men's dismay – raw liver.

“Raw?”

“As raw as you can tolerate. All organ meats are good. Sweetbreads, kidneys, anything with a high blood content. Beef heart, too. There's almost no fat in it.”

Brad was happy that the two of them seldom took their meals together. On one occasion he passed through the kitchen and saw an unhappy-looking Val trying to down what looked like a mountain of raw liver but was probably no more than three ounces. Doing his best not to gag, he took a napkin and wiped the thin trickle of deep cordovan dripping from the corner of his mouth.

Val smiled up at him. “Messy eater, huh?”

## Chapter Five

The first time Val stayed out all night Brad didn't know what to think. He half woke up a little before dawn to the sound of the landlady's Yorkies on the first floor yapping furiously. One hardly ever heard them. "An intruder in the building? And where the hell is Val?" he wondered before sinking back into sleep.

He left for work in the morning and found Val sitting at the top of the stairs, pallid and shivering. "What are you doing out here?" he asked.

"I didn't want to wake you."

"I don't lock up at night, you know that. The security code is protection enough."

"So are the dogs. They made a racket when I came in. But I couldn't get the door to budge. Maybe it was stuck."

"Well, come in. Where were you anyway?"

"The guy wanted me for the whole night. They don't ask for that often. There's money in that, not like the quickies."

"Three hundred bucks, if I remember right."

"More. I was interested in *you*."

He took a wad of bills out of his wallet and thumbed down the corner. There were at least five hundred dollars there. Brad let out a low whistle.

"Count 'em if you like."

"No, those are your earnings. If I'm going to take anything from you you'll have to earn it some other way."

"It's the only way I know, but it ain't an easy profession. You can't imagine what it takes out of you. I feel weak. God, I'm famished." He opened the refrigerator and rummaged around inside it. "Are we out of liver?"

"I thought you hated the stuff."

"Call it an acquired taste."

"Well, I'm sure you can find something else."

Val already had. He was scooping up handfuls of raw beef heart they had ground up for hamburgers and stuffing them in his mouth, gulping it down without chewing.

"Be careful with that. Salmonella and such. I'm not sure you can fight it off that easily, what with your anemia and all."

"Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. I just need some sleep." Suddenly he stood up and raced to the bathroom. Brad heard the sounds of heaving.

"I told you so," he called out.

"It's not that," Val panted, trying to catch his breath. "It's the taste of garlic. You mixed in too much garlic."

"You ground up that batch. Anyway, I thought you liked garlic."

Val reappeared at the bathroom door, wiping his face. He'd splashed cold water on it. "Cooked. Raw, it turns my stomach." He dragged himself to the bedroom, wrapped himself in the covers like a mummy, and was out like a light.

The equinox passed and the nights grew longer. Val began staying out more and more frequently. He'd wander in shortly after sunrise, and every time he came home looking awful. Brad wondered if his all-nighters were all with the same client.

One evening after work Brad stepped out into a blinding sunset. A huge, fiery sun sat on the horizon under a thick tangle of gray storm clouds, searing the thin strip of sky around it blood-red like an angry gash. The night would be



dark. The air was so heavy he couldn't face the subway. Instead, he headed west to catch a bus. Once uptown he'd catch the crosstown bus home. It was a longer ride, but at least he wouldn't be underground.

Walking straight into the glare he caught sight of a silhouette he thought might be Val's loitering among the milling, hurrying throng. He stopped, and squinted to see if it was Val or some stranger built like him.

The sun was sinking rapidly. As the crowd surged past, a man bumped into him, causing Brad to drop his briefcase. He knelt and looked up just as the sun set. A tall, thin figure stepped out of the shadow of a doorway and took the man by the arm. It was Val he had spotted.

Val showed no surprise at being thus approached. He must have been waiting for the man. They stood close together, the man speaking rapidly and intently, Val nodding to everything said to him. They didn't take their eyes off each other. Even at a distance Brad could sense the sexual energy between them.

The jostling crowd took no notice of the two. Their attention was on Brad, and they muttered their annoyance at this kneeling man who refused to get up and impeded their progress. They stepped around him and then closed in front of him, blocking Val from view. When Brad stood up, the two of them were gone.

Val would be coming home late, that much was clear, and Brad didn't feel like going back to an empty apartment, not after having sensed a very real affection between those two. He decided to skip the bus ride. If he waited an hour the subway would be less crowded. He went into a bar – not a gay bar – and stayed there drinking longer than he should. By the time he left for home he was very buzzed and it was raining heavily.

He had no reason to be jealous. He knew Val had clients. This man, however, obviously knew Val well, a "regular", whereas Brad had imagined that except for him all Val's sexual contacts were anonymous. Val had assured him that he never had unprotected sex with anyone else, but perhaps with this

man...If not, might his second Val also have contracted AIDS? He had attributed Val's physical fading to his own growing dominance. Now he was not so sure.

Drunk as he was, he ought to have slept like a log, but he slept fitfully. Val returned long after midnight. He was aware of Val going down on him and sucking him deliciously, but was much too out of it to respond properly. Val throated him so deeply that he felt his swallow muscle pressing midway on his shaft and wondered if his dick head risked getting burned by acid reflux.

Val rolled onto his stomach and waited. He may have been expecting a rimming first, but he didn't get one. Still in a daze, Brad greased up his pole and slid directly into him, all eight inches of him, not suddenly, but not stopping along the way either. They lay there for a minute or two like conjoined twins, then he started pumping, gently at first, then with more abandon, digging his fingers into his arms and shoulders, chewing on his neck, ever more wildly until he was careening like a runaway train, hurtling into his tunnel, breath chugging away, and Val's cries like the long whistle the engineer lets loose at every crossing. While he pumped and rutted, Brad fantasized that he was lying there like Val and being fucked by him. It took him no more than ten minutes to come, and took the two of them hardly any time at all to fall asleep when he'd finished, but it was wonderful, wonderful.

Val arrived late again the next night. He threw himself face down on the bed when he came out of the shower and lay there inert, no words, no blowjob, nothing. Did he mean to let Brad know that it was his turn to be oral? His mouth had worked Brad over royally so often over the past few weeks, but Brad had paid him no attention in bed beyond moaning appreciatively, treating him to a thorough humping, and unloading deep inside him. That had been their pattern for quite a while now, unless you counted the hugs and kisses he gave him outside the bedroom.

At the sight of that lovely ass, Brad's the scepter rose up and imperiously demanded its prerogative, and he staked its claim on it without more ado, and

this time too he imagined himself in Val's place. It was a glorious fuck for both, but Val slept longer than ever the next morning and looked even more washed out when he woke.

Sex was still immensely pleasurable, but Val's ecstasy was undeniably greater. For Brad something was missing. Val's wraithlike submission was total, and orgasms were now entirely in his hands. Brad longed to dissolve in sexual fulfillment as he had in the beginning, when Val, in turn, would take over and, passive beneath him, he would succumb utterly to the strength of the orgasm building inside him.

Nowadays it was only Brad who topped. Taking possession of Val always gave him a feeling of elation, a sense of unlimited power. It was not a matter of a helpless Val recognizing his mastery, but his own awe at having awakened in his lover sensations that no man can procure by himself. That, and his love, born of Val's joy in him. Nor, in the days Val had topped, had he felt dominated. In taking control, Val had exalted his body. They yielded, yielded everything, not to another man, but to passion. For the brief hour of their union one of them, himself or Val, would hand over the reins, which the rider would let fall as soon as his mount, feeling the spur, kicked the barn door open, whinnied, and went careening off over the untilled prairie to take him on a wild bareback ride, a runaway horse reliving the days when, as a foal, it had not yet been broken to the saddle. Freedom and being, exhilarating for horse and rider. Such had been the power of their sexual surrender.

"Tonight he will top me," Brad thought. "I'll make him top me. I'll threaten him if I have to. If I have to beg for it, I'll beg."

On the third night Brad waited outside his office building to see if Val and the tall stranger would hook up there again. They did, and he followed them at a distance. When they stepped into a bar he hid in a shop entrance to see when they come out. He didn't have to wait too long. They came out as soon as the night had turned very dark and continued on their way.

He did not understand the irresistible urge he felt to follow them. Jealousy? Curiosity? The risk of discovery? It was not hard trailing them inconspicuously. There were still plenty of people in the streets.

He rushed to catch up with them when they suddenly turned. Afraid they might see him, he sidled up to the corner of the building and looked down the alley. It was empty; they were not there.

Cautiously, he walked down it. He'd gone only a few steps when the noise of the street behind him was blotted out. Everything fell silent, and it was very dark. It opened into another street, a lonely street, also dark and quiet. Empty too, or so he thought at first, but hidden in the shadows against the walls dozens of young men stood lined up, on the prowl for sex. In this light they all looked like Val.

He walked slowly down one sidewalk, then the other, checking each one out as he passed. No, they were not Val, but they could have been. They had the same long, straight, black hair, the same piercing blue eyes, the same pallid skin; the height and build was right, the tight denim outfits too. Except for their hustler's come-on stare, at once veiled and brazen, a look which any of them would have shed had he brought him home, they reminded him of the dress-up Vals he used to create; not quite right, but right enough. In fact, he thought he recognized one or two among them as his male-for-hire Galateas, but they had all blurred together over the years, and his new Val, the true Val, had effaced their features even more. There was no telling, and there was no denying they were all beautiful.

He approached one of them, at once bold and apprehensive, like a cat with lives to spare. He raised a finger to his cheek, and gently stroked it. "Val?" he whispered.

"Whatever," the man said. "We're all nameless here." And he placed his hands on Brad's shoulders and forced him to his knees. "Undo my belt."

Brad resisted. The hustler held him firmly by the back of the head and pulled his face into his crotch. The sexual scent of his groin and bloated cylinder stirring like a living thing beneath the denim was all the invitation Brad needed. He reached up and opened the man's jeans, admired, and tentatively mouthed, smooth as satin and startlingly cold, what he would have willed himself not to desire if he had the strength to do so. Snarling abuse at him, breathy and guttural, the Val thrust into his mouth and humped his throat relentlessly.

The other Vals homed in on them, stroking their bulges. Through the corner of his eye he saw hands unzipping flies, pants lowered over hips, cocks pulled out and jerked at, and heard obscenities muttered as encouragement by leering lips. He felt the man swell in his throat, then his head was pushed back and the hot spurt splashed against his face and shirt. Though he hadn't noticed any pleasurable sensations in his own penis, Brad felt a sticky wetness in his underwear.

Almost immediately, another pair of hands grabbed him by the hair and yanked his head to the side. "Suck me!" The man pulled him with such violence that Brad banged his face on the hanging belt buckle and cut his lip. Another large cock, cold and silky, slid over his tongue and plunged into his gullet. He gagged, and tears welled in his eyes to blind him. He was dimly aware of other couples forming around them, grinding together, beating off, sucking. He struggled a little, but ineffectively.

He lost count of how many forced themselves on him. He had no idea how long it went on. He lay doubled up on the pavement and listened to their receding footsteps. When he opened his eyes, the street was deserted.

Bruised, disheveled, his nose running, his clothes crumpled and stained, he rode the subway home. The car was nearly empty, but he felt that the few people in it were staring at him. Was he that much of a sight? Did he look roughed up? Or did the aura of anonymous sex cling to him yet like a wax mask?

He stumbled up the stairs and saw Val sitting forlorn beside his door, resting his head in his arms folded in front of him. He'd forgotten he had no key to the apartment. He looked weak, helpless, exhausted, as the first Val had been when he found him in the gutter and took him home many years ago. He didn't feel much better than that himself.

Val sat directly under the hall light; Brad stopped short of the end of the flight, back in the shadow of the stairwell. Hearing the footsteps stop at that floor, Val looked up. "Where were you?"

There was nothing weak about his voice. He sounded angry. Brad ignored the question. "I saw you with someone tonight. A client?"

"Maybe. What did he look like?"

"Tall, thin, dark hair. Graying, I think. He held you by the elbow." He did not say he had followed them.

"Oh, that was Derek, my agent," he said, getting up as Brad stepped forward into the light. "God Almighty! What happened to you? Were you mugged?"

"It's nothing. I fell, that's all."

"Fell, my ass. You've been punched."

Brad put his tongue on his upper lip. There was still a trickle of fresh blood. Val came up to him and licked it.

"What on earth are you doing, Val?"

"Dogs lick their wounds."

"When human beings lick their wounds they admit defeat."

"Only when they lick their own." But the licking had already turned into a kiss.

"Not here. The neighbors." Brad unlocked the door and Val led him to the bathroom to clean him up.

The weak had become strong. Val was completely in charge, like a parent with his child. It didn't occur to Brad to protest. He yielded to him in everything.

"I think you may end up with a scar. Don't worry. It won't be much of one."

Weeks had gone by since Val had topped, but that night he took him. He crouched over him in bed, licking, nuzzling, blowing on him, while Brad lay there in a daze. *My Val has more power over me than all the Vals that prowl the streets put together. And that's as it should be.*

He felt his legs being lifted, and as the warm hardness slid gently over the trembling nugget at the center of sensation, he breathed out a weak whimper of acceptance. He had never been that passive before with anyone.

## Chapter Six

Brad woke up with an unnaturally wan and woefully frail Val snuggled against him, curled in a child's fetal position, the confident arms that had taken him the dark of night now pressed against his chest as if in protection against the morning sun. Val stirred, and he kissed him gently and promised that what had happened last night would not happen again.

"You won't disappear like that again?" Val murmured. "You'll be here for me when I come home?"

Home...what an odd word for a man to use who had kept his address — wherever *that* was — and who never had more than a change of clothes in Brad's closet! And who was he to talk about disappearing? But that, of course, was what Brad had meant by his promise to be there. Now that he thought about it, though, he wasn't so sure he had the strength to resist the lure of that street of night-prowling Vals.

"And what if I have to stay late at work?" That was a lie. He couldn't remember the last time he'd stayed late at work. It may have been the night he found Val shivering by the side of the building. "No, I'll make you up a key and slip it in the mailbox before I go to work."

"Don't forget."

"I won't forget."



Brad did not forget about the key, but he forgot the other promise. That evening he found his feet irresistibly drawn toward where he'd met the cruising Vals he had succumbed to less than twenty-four hours earlier.

The sky was clear that night and the moon full, though one hardly noticed it in the busy streets, dimmed and washed out by the lights of the city. It shone clear in the side street of the hustlers, where it cast a lurid glow that illuminated the shadows of the surrounding buildings. Pendulous, it seemed to swoop down at him like an enormous milk-swollen breast, as if it had been caught in a spider web that suddenly ripped under its weight but still held it by a thread.

They seemed bolder this time and advanced toward him as he walked down the center of the street. Perhaps they recognized him. They formed a leering circle around him like a gang of muggers, but each had one hand rubbing his crotch. Their predation was clearly sexual; they were not out to rob him. Still, he felt terrified as he sank to his knees at the center of the contracting circle that closed him in. He was not submitting; he did it of his own free will, not compelled by some outside force. But it was as if his will were commanding him to do what it did not want him to. They unbuckled their belts, unzipped their flies. He clutched his own stiffening dick. His eyes widened in anticipation of the penises they would soon be wagging at him, but his mouth was dry.

Suddenly the section of circle facing him opened to reveal the tall, thin stranger he had seen with Val. His pale face seemed whiter framed by his close-cropped hair, blacker than Val's and graying at the temples. He was impeccably, if casually, dressed, all in black, the crease in his slacks perfect, the three top buttons of his silk shirt open on his bare chest, a large garnet that glowed with its own inner light hanging from his neck and held in a spiral of silver wire.

"Leave him alone," he ordered. "He belongs to your brother."

He shoved both arms out at shoulder height as if to push them away. Though there was nothing to resist this movement but the night air, the gesture

showed enormous strength. The Vals fell back, returned to their positions leaning against the buildings, melted into them, and disappeared.

"Don't you know he loves you?" he asked. "Go home to him. You can't keep him forever. Not yet."

Brad fled.

After what the man had said to him he expected to find Val at home, but he was not. He went to the refrigerator and took out something to eat for supper. When he brought it to the table he saw Val's silver bracelet lying on a sheet of folded paper.

*I have to leave for sake of my health and for yours, too. I expect you know what I mean, or can guess. I will miss you, and if I can beat whatever it is that's killing me, I'll be back. Wear my bracelet as a keepsake. I've taken something of yours with me. Can you guess what? I love you.*

~Val

Numb, he slipped on the bracelet, stood up, and walked into the bedroom, leaving the food he had taken out behind him on the table. He went to bed without supper that night and hardly slept at all.

His not eating or sleeping that night set a pattern that lasted several months, though several days passed before he noticed it. He waited a couple of days to see if Val would return, then made up his mind to go back to the street of the cruising Vals to see if he'd find him there, but at the entrance to the alley that led to it he discovered he didn't dare.

Instead he went to a gay bar to pick up a clone he could dress up in his place. They might have substituted for any of the Vals who had surrounded him in the empty street, but not for his Val, not for either of them. In any case, his heart wasn't in it.

His depression would not leave him. He lost weight; his skin lost its color and hung on his face like a loose curtain. He went about in a daze, was absent-minded at work, and often could not remember how he spent his nights. Every

so often he'd return to the bars with the intention of resurrecting a new Val, but he must have looked frightening – whether sickly or obsessed he couldn't tell – because even the hustlers shied away from him, although they could see he had money and was looking to pick someone up.

He'd stand in front of the mirror and see how he had changed, how he was changing day by day. The split lip from his first venture into the alley of the Vals had healed, leaving the same scar he'd loved kissing on both his Vals. You couldn't see it in the photo, but he knew it was there. He'd bled a lot that night, so if he had become infected it was most likely then. Probably not, though. He had himself tested as soon as the symptoms of depression started – the sleeplessness, the weight loss.

He'd always averted his eyes when they drew blood from him, but now he watched intently as it filled the syringe. It seemed rich and dark, so thick, so warm and vital. He made a remark about it.

The nurse arched an eyebrow. "No, it looks thin, diluted. See the color?"

"Bright red," he said, fascinated.

"As if I tapped an artery."

The test came back negative. It was still not quite six months since he got the cut, but no, probably not. The doctor diagnosed pernicious anemia, as he had for Val. Except to buy himself some over-the-counter multi-vitamins, which he more often than not forgot to take, Brad had not followed up on it. He was afraid he'd have to eat raw liver, more afraid of developing a taste for it. It didn't occur to him to ask for medication to counter his depression.

More and more, he was coming to resemble his Vals. The scar, the bracelet, the wasted thinness and sallow skin, the tired eyes – not the young Vals he'd loved, but an aging Val, what the first Val might have become if he hadn't died young. But he hadn't loved that Val, not for years. He'd been more of a haunting spirit he'd tried in vain to exorcise. He still loved the second, and blamed himself for his departure.

They had had good sex, great sex, but toward the end he had done little more than fuck him like a rutting rhinoceros. He'd taken it like a man. He always took it like a man—how else could he take it, for God's sake?—and in Brad's eyes there was no Val more virile than the Val who lay moaning underneath him, not even the Val who used to fuck him.

Still, after he'd become an exclusive top he felt there was something missing. Surely both of them felt it. He promised himself that if Val came back there would be no fucking, not for a while, just hours of making out and lots and lots of oral. He missed the taste of his ass and how it felt on his lips. He missed the nectar of his precum. He missed the feeling of his arms around him. If only he could be all over him at once he would not need to be in him.

He undressed and got into bed, where he slept restlessly.

*They were making love, but it was not love. It was hand to hand combat and went on for hours, the ravaged bedding like a field of battle. Val lay there, an adversary struck down, vanquished, at his mercy, who surrenders but asks no quarter, and none was given him. Brad fixed his bayonet, straight as a capital I, to the barrel of his firearm, and raised it over him to pierce him through.*

*Brave man that he was, Val fixed his glance on the threatening piece of artillery and waited for the blow to fall, unflinching. Brad pulled apart the flesh where he meant to stab and lay bare his target lying on the floor of the trench, a soft rose color. How vulnerable it looked! How it stirred his rage for conquest! He leveled his weapon, aimed, rushed to the attack. Look out, Val! Defend yourself! This man is a veteran soldier. The muzzle is clean and loaded, the charge packed down. The shot will fire true.*

*A first downward thrust, and the victim's body jerked. The wound appeared deep, but not fatal until Brad flung himself into the carnage; set on him with a vengeance like a sotted hussar in a tavern brawl. Gripped in his death throes, Val no longer suppressed his cries. His heaving chest breathed forth a sigh, he trembled, and his expiring soul vanished in the wind.*

*He dreamed of waking to a gray dawn, blood everywhere, carrion birds wheeling in the silent sky. Once bent on destruction, exhausted from the struggle, an instinct to protect what he had destroyed overwhelmed him, and, shielding the lifeless body with his warmth, he murmured, "No one else shall have you. I alone."*

Was that what their love had been all about — possession?

He got out of bed and went to look at the photo again, naked this time, and compared his wasted body with the healthy, life-filled face of his former lover, now dead over twenty years. A lump rose in his throat, but no urge to weep. He felt not despair, but resignation. He took Val's bracelet from his arm and laid it beside the photo.

How many Vals were there, or should he say how many Vals had there been? The Val of the photo he worshipped; the Val of his memory; the original, living Val; the Val who died; the many Vals he had created over the years before he met the next Val, his duplicate; the old Val the new one had become; the dozens of nameless Vals in the shadows of that lonely street, before whose sexual power he had abased himself; the Val he resurrected after his second loss; the Val he slaughtered in his dream.

For him they were all the same Val, or many Vals orbiting a Val at the center, all part of a progression leading to a single Val. The immortal dead. Would there be other Vals to follow?

He looked at his wrist. It looked as if he still wore the bracelet; the ring of pale skin that till then had lain beneath stood out against his tanned forearm. He turned his wrist over and saw a livid gash. Had he tried to kill himself? He couldn't remember doing anything like that. Had he been living in a daze? For how long?

No, it didn't look like the scar of a slit wrist. It was more of a puncture. Was it infected? The skin surrounding it was puffy, but painless.

He went to the window and drew the blinds to have a closer look. The morning sun came streaming in, unbearably bright. Was he exposing himself to the brownstone across the yard? So what? Fuck the neighbors.

A knocking at the door. He slipped on a bathrobe, the same bathrobe Val had worn to hide his lesions from Sid, and went to answer it.

He had not expected to see Val, but he was not surprised either. He *was* surprised to see how well he looked, fitter than he'd ever seen him, both more youthful and at the same time more mature, a healthy glow to his cheeks, his eyes sparkling with life.

"I'm back. God, you look awful!"

Thoughtful of him to mention it. Brad ignored it. "Have you come to stay?"

"No. I've come to take you away."

"Away where?"

"Away from here, where else? You can't stay here. Can't you see that?" And he dragged him to the mirror.

"I know what I look like," Brad told him. "It's just depression, but now that you're back..."

"I'm not back. I came to get you, not to live here. There's no life for us here, no life for anyone, no life that lasts, only fading."

"I'm fading..."

"And you'll go on fading. But you've faded enough now, and you're ready."

"Ready?"

"Ready to join me and my brothers."

"So you're with them, are you?"

"It's where I belong."

"But do I? An old man? How do I fit in there?"

"Look at me, and remember how I was. Do I look any older?"

“No. Younger.”

“Then won’t you come with me? Your youth is waiting for you.”

“I don’t want my youth. After all those years of trying to hold on to it, I don’t want it anymore. I want you. Show me that I’ll have you, and I’ll follow. Kiss me.”

## Epilog

Brad's landlady was not particularly worried when he was a week late with the rent. He had been a reliable tenant for years. After two weeks she started keeping an eye out for him, but never managed to catch him coming or going. He was never home when she knocked, and didn't answer any of the notes she slipped under his door.

The month went by and another rent check was past due. She decided to have a look for herself. Her dogs followed her up the stairs, but when she went up to his door they started whining and would not go close to it. She picked up the cringing animals, put one under each arm, and opened the door. As soon as she stepped into the apartment they started to howl, and when she put them down they ran out and back down the stairs.

There was nothing frightening about the apartment, though. Every item was neatly in place, the bed was made, the dishes carefully stacked in the draining rack. But his coat was hanging on the hook behind the front door, and he had apparently left his keys on the kitchen table. A thin film of dust lay over everything.

She called the police. They detected no sign of foul play. They contacted his employer and learned that Brad Harker had resigned from his position six weeks before and asked to have his last check deposited in his checking account.



According to his bank, he had withdrawn all his money the next day. No one had heard from him since.

A missing persons report was filed. The police said everything pointed to voluntary disappearance. Case closed. There was no crime scene to investigate and she could rent out the apartment immediately. But she had nowhere to store the furniture. On her lawyer's advice, she left the apartment vacant for another three months and then put its contents up for sale to cover the unpaid rent. She moved everything into the courtyard behind the brownstone and advertised the sale in the neighborhood newspapers.

Sitting out in the morning sun, the contents of the apartment no longer terrified her dogs, who sniffed around the unusual clutter that Brad's belongings made of their back yard, but they ran away when the first customer came to have a look at what was up for sale.

He was a tall, pale man with dark hair graying at the temples. Though the morning was warm and promised to get hotter as the day progressed, he wore a dark trench coat.

The rings he wore drew her attention to his hands, the skin startlingly smooth for an older man and the long, pointed nails. It surprised her to see so feminine a manicure and that much jewelry on a man who otherwise showed no trace of mannerisms in his bearing. The rings, especially the large garnet on the middle finger of his right hand, were obviously very expensive.

She wondered if he might be one of Mr. Harker's homosexual acquaintances. She couldn't remember seeing him around the neighborhood. He smiled at her, looking so intently and directly into her face it made her uncomfortable. Had she been staring? "That's a beautiful ring," she said, in case she had been rude.

"Thank you." Then he wandered off among the items she had neatly laid out. She thought it unlikely she would make a sale, unless that silver bracelet caught his fancy, seeing how he went in for jewelry.

He did come back with it, and surprised her by saying, "I know this bracelet." Surely he meant "one like it".

He'd also picked out a photograph of a handsome, muscular, confident-looking young man her tenant had kept on his dresser.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"An old boyfriend of the owner's, I think. From long ago, before he moved here. I never knew the man."

She had seen him once, though. He didn't look at all like his photo then—ailing, wasted, almost wraithlike. Then Mr. Harker broke up with his steady partner and started bringing home one pretty boy after another. They never made any trouble and in all other respects Mr. Harker's behavior had remained impeccable, so she said nothing.

Distracted by her thoughts, she missed what the tall man had said in reply. "Excuse me?"

"I said, 'he's a good-looking fellow.'"

The landlady pulled a sour face.

"Not your type, I see," he added. "Well, we wouldn't expect some man's pretty boyfriend to be your type, would we? But I only asked because I was looking for him."

"Looking for him? But I heard he died long ago. Oh, you must be looking for Val, that kid who used to be his partner a year ago. He came and went, always at night, and then just stopped coming. It does look a little like him, doesn't it? Not that much, though. Anyone could tell the difference."

"Yes, him," he said with a smile on his face that chilled her to the marrow. He knew that he came here? What else did this stranger know about her building?

He bought the photo and the bracelet, too and left.

She was relieved to see him go. What was it he'd said about the man in the photo? Not her type? No indeed. It wasn't his good looks *per se* or knowing

the man was gay that turned her off as much as that look of confidence, much the same kind of confidence the stranger seemed to have, and one she didn't approve of, the confidence of someone who knows he's attractive, of someone overly sure of his power to fascinate.

What did he want the photo for, anyway? To bring to the police so they could help track the person down? Good luck! What would they care about some vagrant when they'd shrugged off Mr. Harker, a respectable citizen who'd been her tenant for close to fifteen years and then simply vanished?

Or did that sinister man have something to do with his disappearance?

The End

## Talent Scout

Adrianna Dane

You might call me a talent scout. At least that's the role I've been given. But then I'm the younger one, whereas Silas was made centuries ago. Me? I'm still wet behind the ears, so to speak--somewhere around sixty years, give or take, in the making, and I still have a voracious appetite that I find difficult to control at times. Both for blood and for sex. At the same time. It's pure...hell.

I hadn't started out wanting to be a vampire – not by a long shot. But then I'd never met anyone like Silas. When I first saw him I didn't think I'd ever seen anyone as hot, nor wanted to fuck anyone more. He reeled me in slow and easy; I never knew what hit me. By the time I woke up to what was happening, I was already pretty well drained and already sucking up his blood.

He likes the humans, enjoys sampling their warm skin. You might say it's a fetish of his...if vampires actually have fetishes.

You'd think having changed, I'd be free to go about my business of sucking and fucking. But being made by Silas entailed more than that. At least for me. There was no one else for me and he had my vampire heart, situated rather a bit lower than a human's, right by the balls and he knew it.

There was a time when I was human, it actually took some thought on occasion to get hard enough to fuck. Now, it's no effort at all. In fact, I'm hard

all the time. Unless I'm short on blood, then my prick sort of shrivels, a good indication it's time to feed. I'm getting pretty close to having issues now, as a matter of fact. It's just about time to invite my new "talent" home for an interview with my main man.

I remember that first time with Silas, how good it felt. We met on a train and we got to talking. I'm sure it didn't take much for him to realize I was already infatuated with him. When we pulled into the station, he invited me back to his place. You'd have thought I'd realize there was a problem when the big black limousine pulled up and the door opened by itself. At the time I thought it was a gimmick. Thinking back, I should have looked to make sure there was even a driver at the wheel.

I've since learned there isn't.

It's amazing to me how gullible I was then. But I was totally bowled over by the man. He was striking with his long black hair and just one lock that was pure white. I remember thinking at the time he must be a famous musician or actor. His presence was just so overwhelming.

A cautionary note here. Never talk to strangers on a train when you're traveling at midnight.

Yeah, I know, easy to say.

On the other hand, I realize now I'd never change what happened. I worship the ground the damned vampire walks on. Even just thinking about him right now makes my cock hard and needy. He's the man of my dreams. How many guys get to live eternity with their lover? What's a little blood between creatures of the night?

I want to say I was shocked by what I discovered, but I can't. I want to say I was horrified by what he made me. But that would be lying.

He invigorates me. There's not a night that goes by that he doesn't come up with some new little game to play. You'd think after a few years it would get old, but it hasn't yet.

What I worry about is that he'll get bored with me. That's one thing I have to make sure doesn't happen.

He had another vampire lover before me. He's dust now. Took too many chances from what I understand. It's why he made me.

One thing about Silas--he doesn't like hunting alone. He likes company. He's sort of monogamous to some extent.

We did have another join us for a while, but he was a pain in the ass. And I was jealous as hell. But I knew how to please Silas and that jerk, Carver, didn't have a clue, as well as being dickless, I might add.

Silas finally got sick of his whining and kicked him out. Right into noon. Too bad for Carver it was a fine, sunny day. Silas drugged him and then staked him to the iron fence in the courtyard. Poof! He was gone faster than the second hand could reach twelve-oh-one noon on the clock.

He's not one to suffer fools gladly. Too bad Carver hadn't realized that sooner. Too bad for him, but I can't say I was terribly upset. Silas hasn't made anyone else since then. Said he didn't want the trouble of sweeping them up if they didn't work out.

He couldn't just turn them loose. His lovers had a habit of becoming very territorial--even the human ones he kept around. At least with them he could wipe out their memories and send them merrily on their way.

But he'd kept me around. And I was thankful for it. I made it a point not to whine and to show him I could be just as adventurous as he was when the task called for it.

In the world of BDSM he'd have been a top--sure as hell he was no bottom by any stretch of the imagination. But I was and he made me love every minute of it. Yearn for it, in fact. He was my master in every sense of the word.

Who'd have thought I'd have to die to find my truest calling? The man who was able to make my every dream a reality. That's how it was with him.

And he took it all like the noble he was in his past life--assuming everyone was there to serve him.

Well, so be it. It was up to me to find tonight's entertainment. I'd become very, very good at it. Would we keep this one for a night, a week, or a month? Who knew? It would be at Silas's discretion, as always.

I had been watching this particular man for quite some time. He lived off his wits and I had been most impressed by what he'd managed to get away with. He was a hustler of the first order. Accomplished and polished to perfection.

Silas liked them like that. Suave and ready to be dropped to his knees in a way only Silas could do. I liked the features on this man, the deep-set, bedroom eyes, the lush lips. I very easily envisioned that mouth sucking on my rock-hard prick. Probably at the same time as Silas was bugging him or sampling his tasty neck.

Me, I'm a chest man. I love the look and feel of a broad, defined set of pecs. Nothing like them in the world. Muscle a man can sink his teeth into. Oh, yeah. And this guy, with his white shirt plastered to his heavy chest and muscular arms was a feast waiting to be consumed.

Silas liked a nice, tight ass as well. He enjoyed working a man until he was more than ready to suck him in. He was a connoisseur of fine asses.

One thing about Silas – he had the longest fingers imaginable. He could reach places and do things to a man's colon that had him floating over the moon. After all, I should know, he's done it to me more than a few times. Lately, I've spent more nights in space than on the earth. There've been nights when I walk around in a complete euphoric fog because of the things Silas does to me. Which is one of the reasons I would do literally anything to please him.

Silas always takes care that everyone comes away sated from a night in his company. It's one of the things that makes him special.

"I like the look of him, Claud."

My master had managed to come up behind me without me sensing his presence. He was like that. No one ever realized he was close until he decided to make himself known to them. He was such an artiste at his role as vampire. Everyone bowed before him.

"I thought you might. He seems well suited to our...games...tonight, don't you think?"

I could feel Silas's hands on my shoulders, kneading in that magical, rhythmic way he has. I felt the sense of time and space shift away. His hands never failed to move me. I loved having him touch me. I could feel one of his hands slide down my body, around my torso and grip my crotch.

It was always this sense that he had more limbs than a human should possess and they drove a man wild as he seemed to touch so many places without actually doing so.

I have come to the conclusion that his thoughts are a tangible thing and it is those tendrils of thought that drive a body to erotic distraction. That was what he was doing to me now. It was his way of encouraging me to succeed.

"His blood will taste sweet and spicy. I can smell it from here."

"Can you?" I managed to gasp out as his long fingers moved between my legs to knead my balls. God, but I wanted to come right at that moment. I wasn't certain I could wait for the show to begin, once we were back at the house.

I leaned back against his strong chest. What a beautiful, massive thing it was. I remembered well the first time I peeled his shirt back to taste his flesh. Damn, but I could feel my pre-cum dripping from my prick already.

He removed his hands and I was left bereft. I wanted him to take me home and forget about the damn game. I wanted him to fuck me hard, split me with his cock, pierce me with his teeth, suck my blood. I inhaled deeply, not that I had a heart that beat or vessels that truly needed the oxygen. It was habit.



But I needed some way to steady myself so I could complete the task I was set. What the master wanted, the master would have. Or I would perish in the act of trying. This close to midnight, it was doubtful that would happen. Unless there was a vampire hunter close by, but I sensed none of their kind.

He whirled me around and pushed me up against the lamppost, his blazing eyes boring into me. He pressed his lips to mine, driving his tongue deep inside and it felt like my whole body was going up in smoke. I couldn't catch my breath, I could only submit to his possession. As had always been the way between us.

I love it. The press of his body close to mine, the scent of his darkness surrounded and lifted me. His fangs razed across my cheek and he teased the skin of my neck.

"Drink," I whispered as I clutched him close. "Suck me."

His fangs slowly pierced my skin and I felt the heady passion-pain fill me in anticipation of the euphoria that would encompass me. Suddenly I was free and he was standing several feet away, watching me, a small smile on his lips, none in his eyes.

"A sample of what is to come if you are successful. And if you fail--"

He had no need to finish the sentence. I knew what would happen if I failed. I would not fail.

Looking at him across those few feet, I remembered our first meeting on that long ago night and the unexpected feelings he had aroused in me. Again I ask myself, would it really have mattered if I had known his true nature right at the start? It is an easy question to answer. Not one bit.

\* \* \* \*

It was raining and I raced along the damp New York streets that night to catch the last train out of Union Station. It was nearing midnight and I didn't

relish the thought of spending another night in the city. I just managed to make it and after getting myself together I headed for the bar two cars down. With drink in hand, I sat down determined to spend the two-hour trip home smashed.

Marietta, whom I had been dating for quite some time, had settled on another man. I thought we had a very nice friendship going between us and had planned to settle into a satisfactory marriage. She was a pliant girl and I thought she would suit me adequately. She wasn't the type to ask questions and I was certain she would never find out about my other life.

You see, I had never been attracted to women in quite the same way I enjoyed being with men. I'd had a liaison or two, the first back in college. I knew my nature and I knew what my family expected of me and had the youthful confidence that I could meld the two into a satisfactory life for myself without compromising either one.

That, of course, was before my eyes lit on the beautiful, dark visage a few seats down from me. I couldn't help staring. His smoky gaze drew me in from that first instant.

I had never been one to initiate contact with the men I had been with, but the lust that filled me when I saw him sitting there was nothing like I had ever felt before.

I wanted him. Badly.

I saw him rise from his seat, his eyes never leaving my face, and slowly walk toward me. I held my breath in fascination, unable to look away.

"May I?" he asked, indicating the vacant seat next to me. His voice was darkly magnetic fitting the look of him perfectly.

I made room for him and indicated he should sit.

"I see you are alone. Are you traveling home?"

"Yes. I've just spent several days in the city."

"Business or pleasure?"

I shrugged. Technically, I guess you could say it was both. Back then marriage to Marietta would have secured my position in society and it wasn't like I was passionately in love with her. "Pleasure, but it didn't turn out quite as I expected." I took a gulp from my glass.

"Too bad. I hope it wasn't terribly heartbreaking for you."

"Not really. I'm certain I'll live from the experience."

And then my heart stopped as his hand reached out and rested on my upper thigh. It wasn't what I had expected. His hand was cold as ice, yet it sparked a furious blaze inside me. He gazed into my eyes and his hand rubbed against my thigh.

"Maybe I can help make this train ride at least a bit more...memorable for you. Help to take the sting of a disappointing visit away. If you'd like to join me? I have a private compartment. My name is Silas and I hope you don't mind my saying it, but I find you extremely attractive."

Join him. Hell, yes. He was the most gorgeous man I had met in a very long time. And I hoped he had in mind what I thought he did. There was absolutely no thought in my head of turning him down. Not in the slightest.

If I had known what he was, would I have acted differently?

I cannot say I am unhappy with my life. In fact, quite the opposite. I am even more infatuated with him now than I was back then.

Needless to say, when he rose from his chair, I followed suit. He glided, for there is no other word for it, past the bar and into the next car where there were compartments for those traveling longer distances. He opened the door of compartment 13. I remember it well, that number is etched into my brain. I remember the look of the shiny gold numbers tacked to the door. I remember their glare and seeing bits of myself in their rounded reflection.

I didn't remember seeing his reflection as we passed inside. And it was the last time that I saw my own. I remember this in retrospect because at the

time my only focus was on this delicious man who had invited me back to his place.

I entered the darkness of the compartment, the rhythmic rumbling of the train vibrating beneath my feet as it winged its way along the tracks. The steady cadence traveled up legs and into my groin, lulling me into an almost sensually, hypnotic trance. I thought it was taking me home, but in fact, it was leading me to a place far more exciting. Silas turned to look at me from across the small compartment. I know it was small, but in that moment as his mesmerizing gaze attached to mine it seemed a far bigger room than I'd first imagined.

"Close the door," he said, and I could not refuse him.

Once the door was fastened, I remember hearing the snick of a lock and vaguely wondered how it had been accomplished because I certainly hadn't been the one to engage it. Before I could blink he was on me, pressing his lips to mine, driving me back against the door.

My mind was a blur, my cock hard as rock, and I felt his granite length against me as he molded me to him.

I couldn't catch my breath, or did I want to as I sucked him inside me? He was pushing at my jacket and then ripping at my shirt, baring my chest, securing my arms.

He looked down at me as I stood imprisoned by my clothing and his bottomless black gaze. I say he looked down because in that instant he seemed to have grown much larger, dominating me completely. "You're mine, boy. Tonight you belong to me."

I couldn't utter a sound. It was as though my vocal cords had been cut. I felt myself falling, drifting into darkness and I was only partially aware of what was happening, yet helpless to stop it. Even if I had wanted to.

My eyelids drifted closed and my head dropped back exposing my neck, and in a sense I offered myself to him. I no longer felt the coldness of his skin, only the heat of my need to be taken by him.

I felt his wet mouth at my neck, his teeth scored across my skin, down my chest and settled at a peaked nipple, sucking it deep into his mouth. I never felt so consumed as his mouth traveled over my body. I was in a soporific state, a puppet awaiting the commands of the master puppeteer. And I loved it. I was so hot and hard I couldn't stand it.

"Open your eyes, boy, and look at me."

Slowly my lids raised and gazed into his glowing eyes. I should have felt fear at what I saw there, but it was far from fear what I experienced at that moment. Far from it.

"Do you want me to take you? You must tell me. I must hear the words."

Were there any words beyond yes? None were in my vocabulary at this moment.

"Take me, Silas. Fuck me. Let me suck you. Do anything you want to me."

I saw the smile reach the corner of his lips, but extended no higher. His eyes were glittering black diamonds, remote and bottomless and I felt myself falling into them. Dizziness swept through me and I felt the world revolving around me. There was nothing I could do to stop it. This forceful man held me within his grip and was free to do anything he wanted to me. With my permission.

I leaned against the door as he undid my trousers and shoved them down my legs. The brisk air assaulted the heat of my body. He touched me, stroked me, drove my lust higher and higher. Somehow my clothes were gone and I was naked before him.

He picked me up as though I weighed no more than a feather and dropped me onto the bed. I lay there waiting. I turned my head and saw him standing close by, naked; his skin the purest look of white marble I had ever seen. His cock glowed red in the darkness, like the hottest poker stoked in flame.

There was a moment as I looked at him that I wondered if he would burn me alive, or brand me at the least with that thick, glowing member. It was the only part of him that had the look of life. The rest was a stone cold statue of sinful temptation. And still I was not afraid.

I felt the heat of his cock against my groin. Surprising as the sensations of icy cold surrounded me from the rest of his body. But that cock, my God, it was burning.

One moment I felt the tip branding my anus and the next thing I knew he tore home, burying that burning poker in my ass. It almost felt like my heart stopped beating as I absorbed him inside me and he filled me completely.

There should have been agony as there was no preparation, yet there was not. How had he done it? Was I hypnotized? Had my body been turned numb by some mind process he had used on me?

I had no way of knowing and frankly didn't care because the sensations were fantastic. The lust inside me burned brighter, hotter with the intensity of a living volcano about to erupt.

I wanted more, I couldn't get enough. And then he moved in forceful, demanding thrusts, burning a path inside me. He lifted my legs and ripped them apart, farther than I thought possible, yet he did it. The pleasure that consumed me was immense as he hammered away with that rigid red staff.

I knew without a doubt he was branding me as his, placing his mark inside me where only he and I would know who owned my soul. I arched up wanting more, needing to be taken by him. At that moment there was nothing in my world beyond this powerful man laying claim to my body.

He shoved deep inside me again and I swear he had grown even larger. All of me was consumed by his cock. There was not a part of me that I could claim as my own.

"Who owns you?" he asked as he rose above me, making me feel no more than a tiny vessel for his use lying beneath him. He was magnificent and consumed all the air and space that surrounded me.

"You," I managed to gasp out.

He leaned forward and I felt his teeth at my neck. He began to move his hips, his cock driving inside me, and then his hand was wrapped around my hard dick. The sensations were too much as they overpowered me. I came because I couldn't hold back a moment longer. His fangs sank into my neck, drawing my boiling blood from my body.

His branding orgasm fill my colon, burning its way inside me. The sensations were wicked, and hot and devouring. And they went on and on and on. Until there was nothing more of me to give and I blacked out.

When I came to, my brain was fuzzy as to what was real and what was not. He stood over me, dressed in his fine suit, gazing down at me. He didn't appear quite as white as he had before and there was some measure of color in his face. By that time I was completely and madly in love with him. And there was no going back.

"You should get dressed," he said. "My stop is the next one."

I remember feeling devastated that I would never see him again. My ass felt like it had been reamed but good. The tingling that spread through me told me I had been used well. The contentment told me I had been pleased immensely. With sluggish, sated maneuvering I managed to dress. When I was done, I straightened, unsure what to do next.

He was next to me and I hadn't seen him cross the room, but suddenly the palm of his hand was against the column of my throat and his eyes again bore into me.

"Would you like to come home with me?" he asked in a quiet tone, an intimate, mesmerizing quality to it.

There was no other answer, nor had there ever been from the first moment I saw him.

"Yes."

He leaned down and captured my lips. His taste was different, but I couldn't quite say what it was that had changed. Then he levered away. "Then so you shall."

That was just the beginning of a long, lustful night that culminated in him making me a vampire, one who belonged only to him. And tonight we would find another to play the game.

\* \* \* \*

I studied our new talent across the street. I wanted to approach him at just the right moment with my proposition. I watched him suck in the nicotine from the cigarette and then exhale the smoke in a long chain of o's. He was trying to impress the young girl who stood talking to him.

It wasn't strictly for Silas that I planned to approach him. It was for me as well. I liked the look of his shoulder-length sandy brown hair streaked with blonde. It glimmered under the glare of the street lamp. My cock was swelling already at what the night would have in store for us.

Nice narrow hips, firm ass, but, oh, that chest. His silky shirt stretched across the breadth, the pearl buttons hardly able to contain the material. Just the kind of chest I loved and couldn't wait to sink my teeth into. And his expanse looked particularly delicious. The muscles in his arms bulged brilliantly against the cloth of his shirt.

My gaze moved downward admiringly, centering on the thick, impressive bulge at the front of his pants. Nice. Very nice. Long, lean legs, thighs with enough bulk to wrap and hold nicely around thrusting hips.



I could imagine him naked and the ripple of muscle that would be set in motion as he responded to our attentions. He was strong enough to hold up no matter how intense the game got. That was one of the main things I looked for in talent. Stamina. And I could tell he had a lot of that.

My attention turned as another young man, about the same age as the girl, strutted up to him. He obviously asked for a cigarette because our young man offered him his pack.

What the others didn't seem to notice, but I did, was how his gaze narrowed lustfully on the boy, more so than the girl. I, of course, had watched him long enough to know he seemed to have a preference for men, but it made me hotter to watch him as he weighed his chances of getting the pretty boy into bed with him.

There weren't many nights that I had seen him fail to get what he wanted, whether it was a man or a woman. They all seemed naturally drawn to him.

I enjoyed the thrill of the hunt just as much as the next vampire. It added to the pleasure of the capture. Watching him now, knowing that later he would be ours, I felt my body coil tighter and tighter. My fangs pulsed, demanding to feed.

I liked stepping onto the edge of the cliff and hovering there, poised to fly.

I could simply force him to my side, but where was the fun in that? A little mind nudge to make him aware, but I didn't like the forceful demands some used to lure their...talent...to their side. Where was the adventure of the hunt?

Silas had taught me to appreciate and enjoy the challenge which was so much a part of the aphrodisiac, to snare them without the trance lure. In his opinion the vampire aura alone could draw the prey to your side. Overkill, so to speak, wasn't really necessary. There were vamps, he said, who were just too damn lazy to play the game.

Silas liked to allow me the freedom of the capture. He had taught me well in my years with him, although I had been an apt pupil and eager to please.

He had gone back to the car to await our arrival. I thought the time was finally ripe to net our new talent. Even though the pre-show had been entertaining, it was time for the main event to begin. Silas was patient, but not *that* patient. He wasn't going to wait all night for the show to begin.

I began with a little mind nudge, just to make him aware. I saw him stiffen and then he looked up. I made myself visible for him alone to see. Silas liked the intimacy of that approach--make ourselves known only to the talent we pursued. I enjoy the power of control in unveiling my presence only to those I choose, and when I choose.

It offered a certain specialness to the relationship. There were many who didn't appreciate our softer touch. They liked to instill the fear first and take with aggression. Such a tactic wasn't our way.

Small steps of vampire seduction with a special lingering touch of intimacy that Silas liked to add. It was his way to make the talent beg to be taken, beg to be used and drained. I can't remember a time when there hadn't been a smile on the talent's face as the last bit of life was consumed by us. There was always the look of bliss on their faces at the very end.

Silas never failed to enjoy the challenge of making that happen. He didn't want their fear; he wanted their complete submission at the very end. He wanted them begging to give their blood to him.

I was always awed by that moment.

Invariably I wondered what had made him choose not to take my life, but instead bring me into his dark world to share it with him. He never gave me a straight answer. I stopped asking long ago. It was enough to remain with him.

I saw our young talent stiffen and then search beyond his sweet, young companions. Then his curiosity encountered my stare across the distance. When our gazes locked, I knew he was mine.

He tossed the cigarette away and although his companions continued to chat away at him, I knew his attention was no longer focused on them.

I had him completely. I saw the interest in his eyes, the sly assessment of what I might be worth, the knowledge that by the look of me in my expensive, dark suit and cape, that I was worth the effort. All of that was right there in his eyes, in the expression on his face.

I watched him sum people up before while I weighed the value of his talent over the last few days. It was all there in his eyes, the wisdom of street experience in quickly summing up his mark with a glance as he stared at me, calculating my worth.

He dropped the cigarette and crushed it with his heel. He said something to the youngsters he was with, and then he took the first step that would bring him to me. I saw the looks on the faces of the others. Poor things, they were crushed by his lack of interest in either of them and their gazes curiously followed him as they followed his abrupt departure. Yet within seconds they had turned and walked away arm-in-arm.

He waited for traffic to pass, careening taxicabs, a city bus, confused tourists all halted his progress until finally the light changed to glaring red and he crossed the street in a swaggering gait meant to exhibit his superiority, his bravado. How sweet. How enjoyable this night was going to be.

"Hey," he said as he pulled to a halt in front of me. "I saw you from across the street. Looking for a little action tonight?"

"What kind can you give?" I asked, deepening my voice to the hypnotic tenor so familiar with my kind.

I saw something flicker in his eyes as he absorbed the cadence, altering the vibrations of our budding association. Suddenly there was uncertainty in his expression. He was afraid his fish would wiggle away. Inwardly, I smiled. Little did he realize I was the bigger fish and he just a tadpole in the huge ocean of our existence. And I was going to swallow him whole.

I waited patiently for him to answer. He was nervous; I smelled it. He licked his generous lips, reached in his pocket for his cigarette package.

I placed a cool hand over his. He looked up and into my eyes. His fingers released the package and it dropped to the ground with a whisper of abandoned sound. The light crinkle of destruction touched the night as I ground my heel into the discarded nicotine fix he would not miss tonight.

I didn't control his mind or movements. But the look in a vampire's eyes--well, it did things to a human. It made them compliant without understanding why they were. They just got this overwhelming urge to acquiesce and there was nothing anyone could do as long as the vampire held their attention.

I meant to hold his attention a very long time tonight.

Then I remembered Silas waited.

It was time to reel in this gorgeous talent.

I released him and he got his voice back. He blinked rapidly as though coming out of a deep sleep. "I can give you any kind of action you want, man. You say it, I'll play it."

"I have a friend. There are two of us. He's waiting in our car around the corner."

A look of wariness crossed his face. As it should.

"Two of you?"

He was trying to gain time. I obviously threw him off his game a bit. "Do you like money? Lots of it?"

That calculating look came back into his expression as he again tried to size me up, to see into my soul. How amusing, for I had none.

"Well, yeah, doesn't everyone?"

I whipped out a fat wad of bills from my pocket and flashed them before his eyes. I saw the dollar signs reflected there. Then I returned the bills to my pocket. It was enough of a carrot to gain his rabid attention.

"Come with me, my friend is waiting."

He didn't hesitate as I thought he might. It was almost too easy.

When we reached the car, the door swung open. Ah, how I remember my own first night when that had happened. I thought he might question it, but he didn't.

He leaned down to peer inside, studied Silas for a moment, and then turned to look at me. "You wanna do it here?"

I shook my head. Foreplay in my mind didn't count as "doing it here."

"No, this will take us home. We can be more comfortable there."

"Home?"

"It will allow us to get more comfortable with each other. The car is a rather tight space, don't you think?"

I'm sure he'd performed in many a vehicle, but tonight his performance would far outdistance any. Of that I was certain. He still hesitated.

I pulled out the wad of bills and handed him a couple of hundreds. He grabbed them and shoved them into his pants pocket.

"There's more where that came from. If you're good."

He took that as the challenge I intended. I saw it in the set look on his face.

"I'm so fucking good you'll wanna come back for more." He grinned and stepped into the car.

My, how surprised he would be. I had a feeling it would be he who begged for more before this night was over.

I leaned down after he got in and looked at Silas. I wanted to be certain he approved. After all, he hadn't seen our lad close up.

I knew he didn't have the hard features of a veteran hustler, nor the stink of dissipation of a drug addict. His scent was cleaner than one might have anticipated, but then I expect that was why he was so in demand in his profession. It was why I chose him for tonight's performance. He knew his way around, yet he didn't look or smell as though he did.

He was that mixture of clean and used I found tantalizing. It's what made him such a challenge to...break. When those final words would be uttered from his lips, when he begged to be consumed by us, it magnified the power of his blood for us.

And he would beg.

Of that I was certain. He might think he was the one in control and that was fine. For now. But he was about to learn what control meant. And what giving it up would cost. Those few dollars now fitted nicely in his pocket was hardly a fair price for the foreplay about to commence, let alone the main entertainment.

Silas smiled back at me and nodded.

I licked my lips in anticipation, ducked, and entered the confines of the car. The door closed behind me, locking us safely inside. The evening's entertainment was about to begin.

\* \* \* \*

The interior of the car was extremely roomy. The dark window separating the driver's seat from the backseat allowed for complete privacy. Although I knew there was no driver, our young talent did not. That would come later.

I scented he was nervous, but he displayed an interesting bravado on the surface. I sat back to watch Silas make the first move. His gaze stroked over our new friend and I personally knew what that gaze could do to a man. The sound of increased breathing was loud to my ears. I glanced down at his crotch and noted the heavy bulge beneath the clothing. He was already aroused. Excellent. It was going to be an entertaining night.

They stared at each other for a long time, sizing up the level of challenge and expertise the other would demand. Silas leaned back to study him with a

lingering gaze that journeyed over every shadowy dip and rising contour of our newly-acquired talent.

At last he broke the tense silence. "What's your name, boy?" he asked softly.

Our "boy's" shackles tangibly rose in the atmosphere and he stiffened his spine, sitting up straighter. "I'm no boy," he responded testily. "I'm a man. And you're sure as hell going to be able to find out how much of one tonight."

He gripped his crotch lewdly as he made the brave challenge.

Both Silas and I liked them cocky like this one. Their blood had a special zing to it by the time we got them so fired up they were begging. My prick throbbed in anticipation of tasting him. Even now I could scent the heat boiling inside him.

"Your name," Silas repeated, his eyes going granite hard, burning straight through the man sitting between us.

"Bobbie," he finally blurted as though he couldn't hold the name inside him any longer.

Silas reached out to stroke the side of his face with a long, elegant finger.

I remember how that touch alone had me melting at his feet. As I think back, I was such a push over. But back then, there weren't too many like this strutting rooster. They were either dissipated with drink and morphine or diseased and pock-marked. Especially in Bobbie's profession.

But this one was not only clean and sober, but a veritable god among his kind. A young one, still beautiful.

Damn, I wanted him. I wanted him begging for me to take his blood. But I had to wait my turn. Silas liked to toy with them a bit first. Make them realize who was in charge, who was in possession of the strings in this marionette's dance.

"Well, Bobbie," Silas was saying, "tell me what you like."

Our Bobbie was mesmerized by Silas's voice and eyes, this much I could see. I had to smile because I loved watching Silas at his game. With a sense of foreplay that was simply artistic, it was always a pleasure to witness his seduction.

"What I like? What's that got to do with anything? You're paying, tell me what you want." He lifted his head. "I'm up for anything you can dish out."

Still trying to hold on to his illusion of control. That would soon crumble and, oh so easily.

Silas leaned in closer. "Throw at you? Hmmm, an interesting challenge. Do you really think you're up to taking both of us?"

"Man, I've taken on a hell of a lot more than two queers before. I can handle anything you've got."

Silas cupped his neck and pulled him forward, their mouths almost touching. It looked like a ventriloquist with his puppet and he drew his mouth to his, their gazes locked in battle.

Then his mouth clamped onto Bobbie's and I could feel the searing heat of possession from where I sat on the other side. Bobbie's shoulders stiffened for one second as he fought for command, and then I witnessed the shattering of his stiff control as his resistance melted beneath the onslaught of Silas's possession. As Silas pressed the kiss deeper, claiming him thoroughly, and I knew our Bobbie's illusion of authority was fast crumbling away.

His hands flapped in the air as Silas framed his face and held him fast. I licked my lips, wanting a taste of him as well.

Silas released him and Bobbie fell back, dazed by the experience, drops of blood scattered across his razed, puffy lips. I looked over at Silas and watched as he licked several drops of blood from his sensual lips and smiled at me. "Very tasty," he confirmed. "Very tasty, indeed."



I couldn't wait, I had to sample him. Dropping forward and pressing my lips to our young, dazed prey, I sucked at his reddened lips for all I was worth. Bobbie groaned and pressed himself closer to me, surrendering to my claim.

I tasted his blood, so delicious, so sweet, yet spicy. Silas had been right about that flavor. What a precious cache of enjoyment our talent would be tonight. My veins cried out to be filled with his heady essence, but not too quickly. Gorging ourselves on him right now would defeat the game that would continue until dawn's first light.

My mouth tasted his, my tongue venturing inside to explore his moist depths. So damned sweet an exploration. Each foray was like the first and I took my time with him, swallowing his moans, his unspoken cry for closer contact.

I pressed a hand to his crotch, kneading the impressive, hard dick clothed there. I felt his heat, I sucked at his mouth, I scored with my fangs. I tasted paradise.

When I finally drew back, there were more drops of blood on his lips than before I had possessed him. I brought my hand to my mouth and wiped at my lips with a finger then sucked the residue of the blood from the digit.

Silas leaned forward and licked at Bobbie's lips, cleaning the remaining droplets from them, then over his chin, catching every last hint of coppery flavor that might have attempted escape.

Bobbie was breathing hard, his eyes dazed, yet dilated with desire. His hands fisted and opened repeatedly. Silas and I looked at each other, unspoken acknowledgement between us.

We would give him one last chance to leave us.

"Bobbie," Silas said. "Look at me."

Bobbie turned his head slowly and gazed at my master, although I'm not sure he grasped the enormity of his situation. There was a dreamy look in his eyes and a small smile at the corners of his vibrant, crimson lips. His skin had paled ever so slightly, defining his tempting mouth, a contrast of colors, the

engorged, bright slash cutting into the blackened interior of the car. The smell of his young blood flavored the intimate atmosphere as I awaited his response to the question Silas was about to ask.

"Do you want to stop now? Do you wish to get out of the car?"

"Stop? You mean leave?" he echoed with a wisp of sound.

"It will only get more intense. Do you want to back out of our deal?"

Silas challenged him and even through the fog cloaking his brain Bobbie seemed to understand that. For one moment, his vision cleared. He licked his puffy lips, and I am certain tasted his own blood.

Then he paved the way to his own descent into our dark passion.

"Bobbie Sandoro don't back away from nothin'," he responded in that hard, hustler voice.

I smiled at the rebelliousness I heard. I had the feeling our Bobbie had been quite a handful for his parents. He wasn't a boy to listen to any of the rules that the established authoritarians wanted to set down for him. Because of it he'd ended up on the street, hustling for a living.

Our Bobbie thought he'd seen it all and could handle whatever came next. Yet I doubted our young talent had come upon anything quite like us. After all, I doubt he'd played much with the dead. And the dead could play quite hard.

"So, you'll come home with us, is that what you're saying? You want to play in our little game?"

I saw the dreamy look descend over his expression once again. Silas was massaging his wrist, ready for the next bit of foreplay.

"You know it," was Bobbie's thready reply.

To my gaze his lips seemed to engorge with even more blood, making him seem all too tasty and hard to resist. It was going to be a gluttonous night.

"Does that mean yes?"

Silas had always been insistent that he needed to hear the exact words of permission before he would continue the game. There are rules, you see, very specific rules to our games.

Bobbie nodded his head. "Yesss."

"Yes, you want to come home with us. I want to hear you say it."

In my mind there was no doubt whatsoever. Was there ever when Silas wanted something?

Bobbie's dazed gaze locked with Silas's demanding black eyes and he repeated the words, like a mannequin for its human manipulator. "Yes. I want to come home with you."

A satisfied smile spread across Silas's face. It was enough.

"Excellent, Bobbie. That's exactly what I wanted to hear."

Within seconds, Bobbie was shirtless and Silas lifted one of his arms, beginning to massage the veins in his wrist. I was so right--he had a wonderful chest and I couldn't wait to sink my teeth into it, to taste his flesh and his blood. But that was the main event and saved for later.

I lifted his other arm and massaged the purplish vein in his joint, just as Silas was doing. I looked down and saw the bulging, deep bluish web of life giving passages. Excellent. They were so close to the surface and pulsing with rivers of blood.

As though on command, both Silas and I dropped forward and pulled a wrist to our mouths. Like fine wine I inhaled deeply the bouquet of fresh plasma pulsing through his veins. I swirled a tongue languorously over his flesh. My fangs throbbed wanting to penetrate deeply. But not yet.

Like the expensive wine, he must be savored slowly, tastefully, leisurely. There was no hurry. To rush the seduction, the taking, was to cheapen the experience. And Silas was never one to enjoy a cheap date.

There had been a time a few years back when we had gone without for quite some time because of the hunters. Finally, when we had been able to

surface we gorged ourselves. Silas hated to talk about that time. He had not been at his peak then. Silas was a gentleman, a nobleman once, centuries ago. He retained that aura and for him to be reduced to feeding like an animal was not something he enjoyed remembering.

I teased at Bobbie's veins with my teeth, pressed and released, watching the blood flow constrict, and then rush on. I liked this part of the game, the titillation of the impending penetration. He was such a succulent morsel.

Then I nipped the vein. Just a tiny puncture, enough to sip and sample, to send the heat of his blood coursing through me. The taste left me with the ache of want for more and sent my libido roaring to life.

I glanced over and saw Silas licking sensually over the forearm of our prey. Sweet temptation.

Looking at Bobbie, I noted his eyes were closed and his mouth agape. He was already deeply entrenched into our game.

The car began to move. Silas had given it the order to take us home. The drive would be a long one, providing enough time for us to sample to our heart's delight. Then we would be ready for the game to begin in earnest.

Good talent was so difficult to find. And I had a feeling Bobbie was going to give us a great show. Well worth the time and effort spent in waiting for just the right moment to reel him in. And tonight have obviously been the perfect night to accomplish the deed.

I turned back to my task, moving up his arm to the juncture of his elbow, a most erogenous spot on the body. I felt him shudder as I licked across the veins there. Then I sank my fangs, opening him for my pleasure. His taste was so heady. Quickly I closed the twin wounds and moved on. I kept my attention to his arms, though my gaze kept wavering to those prominent, delicious pecs that soon would be mine as well.

The rise and fall of his chest, the slack look on his face, all told me he was already into our blood sport and had fallen into that subspace of passion, where only a master vampire could lead him.

\* \* \* \*

Bobbie remained in that stage of floating between reality and a dreamlike state as we guided him into the house and down the stairs to the lair we had prepared. The upstairs rooms were mainly outfitted for show in case curious humans happened to gather the courage to peer inside during the day when all self-respecting vampires are buried far below the earth.

I unlocked the thick, steel door. It was well-oiled and opened smoothly with a slight push. Any human with their wits about them would have been hesitant about stepping into the darkness, but our young talent was already beyond that point and entered our domain without complaint.

We had outfitted our playroom with care and deliberate attention to quality in choosing the equipment. The walls were soundproofed. The 1pièce de résistance to the room was the sturdy black wrought iron bed draped in red velvet pillows and bedding to the right. It was an immense, swirling, hand-crafted creation decorated with iron rings and lengths of gold chain at various points for convenience. Buried into the gold-speckled black granite floor is the iron-ringed escape access, leading to a maze of tunnels far below the earth. No vampire's lair would ever be complete without a solid avenue of escape upon discovery.

Silas moved behind the wet bar at the other end of the oblong room and I relocked the outer door. Unwanted guests interrupting our play gets Silas very surly. It doesn't occur often, and it's not a pretty sight when it does.

I turned back to gaze upon Bobbie who sat on the edge of the bed waiting. His gaze was unfocused and fixed. Silas has prepared a reviving drink for our young man, a combination of full-bodied red wine, often a woodsy Chianti which is a particular favorite of mine, a taste of blood, and several herbs that will enhance his flavor and pump up his vitality.

Silas learned about herbs and whatnot a century or two ago when he accepted a witchy woman into his sphere for a time. The relationship was short lived, but he learned some interesting things from her.

Since then he has been interested in various remedies and treatments and dabbles with herbs and minerals on occasion. When we are near a wooded area, such as where this house is located, he concocts potions and we acquire test subjects on a more regular basis. I am learning from him slowly. I don't seem to have his talent in that direction.

My talent seems to be in acquiring...dinner. It has always been my special gift to know people, even when I was human. But my ability has become more enhanced in my vampire life, a good thing, because I can scent a hunter more quickly than even Silas. Maybe it's part of the reason he keeps me around. Sort of a watchdog with benefits.

It's time to finish unwrapping our Bobbie. Unlike, Silas, I still like to do it the human way, removing each piece of clothing slowly to reveal a delicious new hint of flesh. On occasion I've been know to shred a shirt or two using my fingernails, sometimes my teeth. Slow tears to prolong the anticipation, until the garment hangs on our talent revealing tantalizing strips of bare flesh, before the item is tossed away. Ragged breaths of anticipation clinging to the air. Games. How I love our games.

As I walk toward the bed, I see Silas circle around the side holding the goblet. We descend upon our young man together.

Silas holds the glass to his lips and Bobbie drinks down the potion. I will wait to undress him as I want him fully cognizant of what is happening.

The hazy look dissipates and Bobbie is back with us. His eyes widen as he gazes around, taking in the look of the room, the dim, flickering torches on the walls. I see him swallow in trepidation. Silas has left us, taking the empty glass with him.

I looked up at Bobbie as I unsnap his jeans and pull down the zipper on his fly, revealing the fact he was bare beneath. How delightful. I scent his fear tinged with arousal. And I liked that, too. His cock springs out as though with a life of its own. I'm eager to taste him, to bring him to orgasm for the first time tonight.

Instead of taking him into my mouth, I leaned down to remove his boots and then his socks, tossing them to the side. Leaning back up, I took one of his arms and stroked over the superficial marks Silas and I decorated him with, finding them erotically inspiring. Then I turn to look into his face.

I wasn't touching his chest but I sensed the frantic beats of his heart. I pushed into his mind forcing his attention back to me. It didn't take much. He turned his gaze to connect with mine as I continued massaging his wrist.

"Where is this place? I don't remember how I got here. Did you hypnotize me or something?"

"Passion does that sometimes, you know." I pressed the palm of my hand against his pulsing veins and slid it up his arm. "Are you afraid, Bobbie?"

That phrase was obviously a challenge to him because he sat up straighter and tightened his jaw. "I told you, I'm not afraid of anything."

I reached for the waistband of his pants. "Let's get these off of you. Then I'm going to suck you until you come. Would you like that?"

I saw him lick his lips when I told him what I was going to do. Now the games would begin in earnest.

Silas and I had a wager, about almost everything. It was how we entertained ourselves. How long would it take for our young talent to come the

first time? How long before he realized what we were and begged to be relieved of his precious supply of blood?

My guess was that it wasn't going to be long before he climaxed for me. His cock looked ready to spume now. He was a man who liked to play the edge and there was no one who was ever going to take him closer than Silas and me.

The pants were gone and tossed across the room. I pushed him up onto the bed and spread his legs. Within seconds my clothes were gone and from the corner of my eye, I saw Silas climb onto the other side of the bed. I smiled and he smiled back, two men eager for sex play to begin.

I looked at Bobbie again and realized there were now manacles around each of his wrists--Silas's doing. And then his arms were stretched out by invisible hands and the bracelets snapped tautly to the rings in the iron headboard.

"How did you--" his words were silenced as my vampire lover claimed his lips with fierce possession.

I heard Bobbie groan. I then proceeded to engulf his prick with my mouth. Human warmth and the exotic taste of his pre-cum filled my senses. I could even feel the beating of his heart as I consumed him. I swirled my tongue over the broad tip and along the slit, savoring and enjoying him. He arched upward and buried himself deeper.

Silas still had his mouth imprisoned and all he could do was make passion-filled noises deep in his throat. I went to work on him in earnest, my tongue bathing him, working him, my mouth sucking his balls deep. He shuddered and jumped, dancing the dance of lust. From this point on, he would never hit the ground until we were finished with him and had wrung every ounce of passion dry.

I was right. It wasn't long before he was spurting his seed into my mouth and I sucked it down. I heard the lengthy muffled scream, which was



immediately stifled as Silas's tongue snaked deeper into the opening of his throat.

His cock grew flaccid and I released him with a pop. I heard him gasp for air as Silas freed his mouth. When he had relaxed, I stroked his cock until it was half rigid and then Silas and I switched places. I licked my way up Bobbie's body, gnawed at his nipples until they were hard little crimson beads. Silas dragged one of the pillows down and shoved it beneath Bobbie's hips, elevating him for the next part of our play.

Bobbie's lips were red and swollen from Silas's attentions. Small beads of blood decorated his lips. I licked them clean and kissed his beautiful mouth, then swallowed his groan as Silas prepared his anus.

"Time for you to suck me, Bobbie," I whispered in his ear. "Will you do that for me?"

He was getting that glazed look in his eyes again. He stiffened and gasped.

I glanced back to see Silas sucking at his inner thigh as his fingers worked Bobbie's asshole.

Our young human lover's body was now in constant motion, his fingers curled into fists as we played with his body. Finally, I straddled his shoulders, ready to get some real attention.

"Look at me, Bobbie. Look at my cock."

His gaze tracked downward and then his eyes widened. "Jesus! What the hell is that?"

I fisted the glowing red shaft, readying it for his attentions. The white pre-ejaculate contrasted sharply with my crimson dick. "Open wide, Bobbie," I said just before splitting his lips and shoving it deep into his mouth.

Again, he bucked and I knew Silas had penetrated him as well. I waited for Silas to lead.

"He has a fucking great ass," he said as he built into the rhythm. He folded Bobbie's legs up and I grasped them with my hands, rocking my hips as wave after wave of pleasure consumed me. This boy had a real fine mouth and his sucking action was wonderful. I felt myself as close to paradise as a vampire is gonna get.

I looked down at Bobbie as his cheeks hollowed out and his tongue swirled over the tip of my red-hot prick. It was now a deep burgundy, his lips stretched around it and me spiraling fast, my balls tightening, drawing up close to my body.

The bed creaked with Silas's forceful thrusts. I'd had that huge cock of his reaming my ass more than once and I knew how fucking good it could be.

I felt Bobbie's weight shove forward and heard Silas's triumphant groan as he spewed into Bobby's rectum. It ignited my own orgasm and as I exploded the look on Bobbie's face was one of ecstasy.

"He's coming, dammit," Silas said with some surprise.

It usually took more than that to get them high enough to come again. This boy liked what we were doing. I looked down at him as he kept sucking my now softened dick, trying to bring it back to full erection. I marveled that he'd surrendered to us so quickly.

*Yeah, baby, just keep sucking.* Now that the urgency to come had passed, I closed my eyes and enjoyed his work on my cock. This was so fucking great.

I heard Silas get off the bed and unwillingly opened my eyes. My cock was hard again and it was time for the next act. I reached up and pulled Bobbie's arms down, the cuffs now gone and massaged them as I pulled my wet dick from his mouth. It had now reverted back to the earlier crimson hue.

He licked his lips as he looked up at me with something akin to worship in his eyes.

"I've never been with anyone like you before. Are you some kind of fuckin' alien or something?"

I smiled as I got off the bed and pulled him up. He raised a hand to his head. "Damn, I'm dizzy."

I looked up as Silas walked over with another goblet in his hand. "Drink this." He held out the cup. "It will help with the lightheadedness."

Bobbie looked at it and then back at Silas uncertainly. "Are you sure?"

Silas nodded. "Very. It'll give you that extra buzz you need. It's going to be a long night, my friend."

Without another word, Bobbie gulped it down and handed the glass back to Silas. Letting him catch his breath for a moment and allowing the "power drink" to take effect, I petted him, stroking his cock back to full erection and kissed him lovingly.

He responded more rapidly than I expected. His eyes gleamed and a flush of color came back into his cheeks. A bit of his former alertness returned. Yes, he was definitely ready for the next act..

Within seconds a black collar was around his neck and a chain stretched out, the end held in Silas's hand. "Your turn, lover," he said to me.

I stood up, eager to fuck this new, amazing talent. "On all fours on the floor, Bobbie," I said in my authoritarian voice. He hesitated, just a fraction, and Silas yanked hard on the chain.

"On the floor, boy. Now. You can suck me off."

Immediately, Bobbie was on hands and knees. I kicked his legs apart and fell to my knees. He was ready for me, Silas had seen to that. His mouth was now filled with Silas's cock. Without preamble, I drove my stiff prick home and heard him grunt. Silas was right. He had a fucking nice ass.

The three of us eased into a nice steady rhythm, none of us urgent to come. I smoothed my hands across the curved, hard muscles of his ass. And then I brought my hand down across his fleshy cheeks. He jumped and his anus tightened. Yeah, that was nice. I did it again and again and his rectum kept hugging and kissing my cock.

Silas pulled his penis out of his mouth, stepped back and pulled the chain. He fisted his cock and aimed it at Bobbie. "Come get it, boy," he wagged his cock in his face.

One suck and he Silas stepped back and jerked the chain, causing Bobbie to follow him across the room.. With each suck I followed, rammed my cock home in his ass and slapped his buns. The muscles of his cheeks flexed and I was fascinated by the flushed and sweaty gleam of his body. So very human, so very mortal.

Suddenly my hunger rose to consume me.

Silas stopped his game as we reached our destination and I hammered into Bobbie as he sucked Silas's rigid length. Knowing what came next, I exploded inside him, burying myself deep.

When I opened my eyes, my gaze locked with Silas's satiated look. He had sipped sporadically at our prey's blood, but I had abstained, waiting for the main course.

I looked behind him at the cross. The platter to hold our meal.

\* \* \* \*

Silas and I stood back, glasses in hand, and studied him as he hung on the cross. His flesh was pale, the marks of our attention vivid on the landscape of his body. Silas had been so pleased with him, he'd pulled out the bat clamps and attached them to his nipples. There were dark circles under his eyes and red welts across his body, memories of the whip Silas had wielded moments ago. I saw the marks where my fangs had slashed across his chest as I fed for the first time not an hour ago. His taste and the warmth of his blood still lingered inside me, like a nice afterglow.

He lifted his head and looked at Silas. "Make me one of you," he begged, just as we knew he would. "I know what you are now and I want to join you."

He had lasted longer than many before making the final plea. Silas set down his glass and walked over to him. "One of us?" he said as he lifted his chin with the knuckle of his hand.

"Yeah. A vampire. I know that's what you are. I never believed in them before, but I do now."

It was time for the finale. It wouldn't be much longer before the sun would begin to rise and we had to be finished before that happened.

I set my glass down and moved up next to Silas. Bobbie really was a beautiful young man, and he'd actually enjoyed his evening with us. He'd been aroused by what we offered right from the beginning. He liked it hard and rough. He'd been made to entertain us. And he had done it well.

"Make me like him," he was pleading with Silas.

"Him? You think you're like him?" He stroked a hand over his neck as I released the clamps and Bobbie hissed.

Silas leaned forward and licked his neck, preparing him. I sucked at his broad, muscular chest.

"You're nothing like him. There could only ever be one Claud at my side. You haven't what it takes." Abruptly he sank his fangs into Bobbie's blue-veined neck.

I was taken aback by his words. He'd never said that about me before, not in all these years. And then my appetite got the better of me and I sank my fangs into Bobbie's breast, feeding on him, taking my fill of his succulent blood.

\* \* \* \*

We watched from across the street, a block from where I had first found our new talent. Once we had fed our fill and the curtains closed on the entertainment, we took him back to the city, propped him on a bench, cleared his mind, and waited. Within moments one of his numerous acquaintances found

him and shook him awake. We could hear the exchange from where we stood in the shadows. Not that anyone would have seen us anyway, but it was habit.

"Hey, man, where the hell have you been?" the stranger asked, seeming a bit put out by Bobbie's disappearance. "I thought you were going to party with us?"

Bobbie, still groggy and weak, squinted up at his friend. "Huh?" Then he looked around. "Shit! How the hell did I get here?"

"Man, that must have been some party you took off for."

Bobbie, ran a hand through his hair and felt inside his pocket, bringing out a wad of bills. His gaze widened. "I guess so. Must have been some good shit, 'cause I can't remember a thing."

Silas and I blended back into the darkness and headed for the car. The door was open and waiting for us. Bobbie would be asking even more questions when he saw the marks littered all over his body. Silas and I both had decided we wanted him back to entertain us again one evening.

We sank back into the soft leather as the car pulled away. I turned to look at Silas. "Did you mean what you said?"

"When?"

"You told Bobbie I was one of kind and couldn't be replaced. Did you mean it?" It was the closest he'd ever come to admitting he cared about me in any way and I wanted to hear it again.

"Did I say that?"

I leaned back a bit deflated. I had expected to wait for eternity to end before he'd admit that he loved me. I thought this time, he might just say it.

When we arrived at the house, the first gray threads of dawn were upon us and we hurried through the door and down past the lair to the caverns below. I moved toward my coffin.

"Claud?"

I looked at him as he sat in the frothing bed of white satin. I halted in the act of raising the lid of my own "bed." "Yes?"

There was a long pause.

"Join me." He remained expressionless, studying me, waiting. His pale, chiseled countenance would never fail to move me, his lips deeply blushed red after our satisfying meal.

If I'd had a heart that beat, it would have stopped right then and there. He'd never asked me to join him in rest before. There was never a thought of turning him down in my mind. I smiled and closed the lid of my coffin with a snap.

"You bet." I climbed into the mahogany coffin to settle beside him.

His powerful arms enfolded me. I guess I didn't need the words after all. I thought earlier in the evening I was as close to paradise as I was going to get, but I was wrong. Silas was my passion and I would never regret him seeking me out on that long ago night and making me his.

Bobbie's blood thrummed through my body after a hard game well played. I did not regret the loss of my humanity for even a second. I was eager for the new talent search that would begin tonight and another game would be played at Silas's choosing. To please my masterful vampire lover and secure eternity at his side I would do anything.

Anything.

THE END

## Redhead

Jack could tell from the way Patti was walking that she was still pissed off with him. She stalked away from their table towards the toilets, her hips swaying, her shoulders swiveling angrily from side to side.

Jack had been passed over for promotion, again. Patti thought it was his fault, and he supposed it was. Instead, it was his friend, Willem, who had become department head, and therefore Jack's boss and Jack suspected that their friendship would cease.

Willem had been fun—kind, witty and discreetly silent when he'd seen Jack's eyes flick toward good-looking men. He hadn't minded when he noticed that Jack found him attractive, and had endured Jack's half-arsed flirting with tolerance, even affection.

"You're useless, aren't you?" Patti'd said, when she found out. "Are we supposed to live entirely on my income?"

It wasn't as if they couldn't afford to—she was a senior executive with the biggest national bank, and earned as much in a month as an average family in a year, and a fair bit more than *he* earned in a year.

Unlike many female executives, she didn't have to come home and do housework. Jack did the laundry, the washing up, the groceries, the vacuuming. He thought that perfectly reasonable—she worked much longer hours than he



did. Sometimes, when she was in a good mood, she'd talked to him of her hopes, the first senior position, then later on, the seat on the board, and now, perhaps, chief executive. Her salary package would soar into the millions if that happened. He knew she could do it, and if she got the job, she would do it well. Her staff always came up to him at office functions and told him how nice she was, how efficient, how sensible.

He remembered how they'd met. He'd been playing guitar at a pub near the university, with a group of friends. He stopped for a moment, surprised at the memory. He'd forgotten what having friends was like. These days they only knew couples, dull people who were all executives or senior managers, half of them from the bank, who talked about holidays in Ibiza and Tuscany and New York, house prices in Toorak and Prahran, and the share market. He was convinced they secretly despised him for not being the breadwinner in the marriage.

After the concert was over, she'd come up to congratulate him. She was drop-dead gorgeous – a perfectly curved voluptuous figure, glorious cornflower eyes, and thick chestnut-blond hair. She was witty, clever, empathetic and – most of all – great fun. He had fallen for her right there, his enthusiasm obvious to both of them. They'd gone straight home to fuck, and the sex had been sensational. He and she had lived together for a year, and had then gotten married after he graduated. Jack sat staring at the wine glass, reliving happier times, wondering why it had gone wrong.

He felt eyes on him. He turned his head a little. A man sitting alone at a table in the corner was staring. Hair the color of copper wire, a creamy Celtic skin dusted with freckles, cobalt-blue eyes, a strong neck and shapely chin, shoulders straining his T-shirt, a washboard stomach. He didn't look much over twenty-five. He caught Jack's eyes for a minute, and his own darkened to indigo as the sooty shadows of his pupils expanded. Jack quickly looked away, glad he was wearing briefs not boxers.

When Patti returned, they ate their dessert and drank their caffè lattes in silence. Patti paid, casually handing over her platinum American Express card. As they left the restaurant, Jack avoided looking at the redhead, but he could feel his stare. Why someone as handsome as that would ogle a paunchy middle-aged man was beyond him. He had no vanity left, no foolish self-confidence. He knew he was plain, unlovable, and a failure.

Naturally, they'd come in Patti's Mercedes coupé, but she'd had too much to drink, and without speaking, handed over the keys. At home, they lay on either side of the bed, and fell asleep, separated by two feet of perfect Egyptian cotton sheets, and years of armed hostility. It had been weeks since they'd made love. He thought of the man at the restaurant, and rolled over so that his hard-on faced away from his wife. He knew she wouldn't be interested. The last time he'd started to caress her in foreplay, she'd said, coldly, the lie obvious, "I've got a headache." He wondered if there would be enough time to pull his wire in the shower in the morning. It might not be particularly joyous, but it was better than being unfaithful – not that anyone would look at him, anyway. He smiled wryly to himself. Easy to be faithful when no one fancied you.

The office Christmas party was the next day. Jack hadn't wanted to go. Patti wouldn't be attending. She had something on at the bank.

"You must go," Patti had said. "It's because you don't network that you don't get promoted. Go and be nice and intelligent with the bosses. And maybe *next* year you'll get promotion." But Jack would rather crawl than suck up. And, anyway, he knew why he wasn't promoted – he wouldn't have promoted himself, if he'd been in charge. Networking wouldn't help.

At the party, Willem had come over to talk, and then given up, driven away by Jack's morose sullenness. Jack knew he was being churlish and stupid, but couldn't help himself.

In the end, bored and depressed, he headed for the door. He felt a hand on his shoulder. "A few of us are going to *The Duke of Cumberland*. Come with us." It was Willem.

"No. Can't. Got to get back." Jack shook off the hand. "See you tomorrow, Vil." He gave Willem a small smile. "Sorry I'm so grumpy, mate. It's not you...it's just...things are bad right now. Enjoy yourself, mate. I'll see you tomorrow."

It was still pouring – a not untypical Melbourne summer. The newspapers were full of the usual inventive headlines – 'What's for Christmas? Wet dreams!' being one of the better ones. The rain was peculiarly depressing in the summer twilight. The clothing shops were complaining that no one was buying summer clothing.

*Consume or die*, thought Jack bitterly. The roads were busy – evening shopping, office parties, bedraggled Father Christmases in red velvet, glad not to be sweltering. At the traffic lights just before their apartment (Patti never called it a 'flat' – that wasn't grand enough), Jack stopped just in time to avoid a woman dashing across the road as the lights changed. But, distracted, he didn't see the man who was crossing at the same time on the side street. He wasn't going fast, but you can still do a lot of damage with two tons of steel and alloy.

"Oh God! Are you hurt? I'd better call an ambulance."

"No!" It was the redhead from the restaurant.

Jack cradled his head, his gaze meeting the redhead's dark blue eyes.

"No," the man said again. "I'm not hurt. Just a little. Perhaps you could take me home. I'll be all right then."

Jack shook his head. "It's unwise. Someone should look at you, see if there's any hidden damage. Whiplash – or something." He didn't know what, but was sure it would be dangerous not to be checked out.

"Please," begged the man. "Just take me home."

The desperation in his voice startled Jack. Was he some kind of outlaw?

"All right, then." He gripped the man's arm, and helped him up. The concerned bystanders decided the drama was over, and scurried off. The rain had kept away all but the most curious. Both men were soaked through. The arms and lapels of Jack's jacket were stained with the redhead's blood.

"Turn right, here," said the man. Then, after a minute or two, "It's that house over there."

It was an Edwardian terrace, small and pleasing, wisteria and jasmine thickly twined around the veranda posts. They were only a block or two away from Jack's home. They climbed the three steps up to the tiny veranda with the redhead leaning heavily on Jack's arm. Jack felt distinctly uneasy. The man was clearly much more hurt than he was pretending to be.

"I really feel I ought to call a doctor." Jack was worried. Young men could be so needlessly macho. He'd been, once.

The man was panting a little. "No, I heal quickly." And he gave Jack a sudden smile that set Jack's pulse racing.

Inside, the house was tastefully but inexpensively furnished. There were bookcases and piled books and a good CD player, pictures and posters, flowers in a vase. In the corner stood a music stand with sheet music on it, and the brass of a saxophone gleamed invitingly. Shabby, comfortable armchairs and a sofa were drawn up in front of an empty fireplace.

He dimly remembered the Red Cross first aid classes from his boyhood. A person could die from the shock of an accident. You had to drink sweet tea. "You'd better have some tea or coffee," said Jack firmly.

There was no answer. Jack turned to find the redhead prostrate on the sofa, his eyes half closed, looking pale and sick. "I'm calling a doctor," Jack said, suddenly determined.

"No doctor." Insistent, almost angry.

*Why am I bothering?* was Jack's first irritable thought. *Because I am responsible.* There had been an undercurrent of fear in the man's tone, too, and Jack responded to that rather than the tenor of his words. He went over to squat in front of the redhead.

"Why not?"

"I..." The man looked at him.

Again Jack felt an electric shock run through his bones as his own eyes met the other's. The man swallowed convulsively. Jack couldn't stop glancing at the silky column of his neck, at the brush of red-gold fur at the throat of his shirt.

"I can't. I..." The bloke paused again.

Without being conscious of it, Jack had taken his hand. The man looked at their hands. Jack had beautiful hands, big, and strong, with long fingers ending in blunt square tips.

"What would you do if I was a criminal?" He smiled a little as he spoke. Jack wasn't deceived.

"It depends what you'd done," he replied, wondering what in fact the other man *had* done. "What's your name, mate? I'm Jack."

"Samuel."

"Well, what have you done? It can't be that bad." He was still holding Samuel's hand. "C'mon. Tell me."

Samuel shook his head, and looked down.

"I won't harm you." Jack was looking at him with mild surprise.

"I'm afraid."

The simple words fell into the soft susurrations of the rain on the roof, the gentle insistent tick of the grandfather clock. Jack cocked his head to one side.

"I need help." Samuel's eyes were fixed on his, hope and anxiety clear in the dark blue.

Jack let go of Samuel's hand. "Try me," he said, as quietly as the other man.

Samuel looked down for a moment. He raised his eyes again to Jack's. "I'm a vampire." He said it flatly, without inflection, waiting for Jack's reaction.

Jack stared into the indigo of the redhead's eyes, lost himself in the sculpted hollows of his cheekbones, the gold stubble on his chin, the intricate folds of his ear. "What?" he asked, his mind clutching at the mundane, unable to credit what he'd just heard.

"You know – Nosferatu, all that stuff."

"They don't exist."

Sam's steady gaze unnerved him. The blue eyes bored into his. "You're serious!"

Samuel continued to look at him, his expression solemn and hopeful.

Jack stared back, his pulse racing. "Now what?" he asked.

"We heal quickly." There was a tense quiet. "But I need to feed."

"Shall I cook you something? Or order takeaways?"

"I was speaking...You know...blood."

"Oh."

Jack felt faintly ridiculous. The rational part of his mind simply couldn't accept that Samuel was a vampire. Some part of him rejected this as fiercely as his Eastern European ancestors would have devoutly believed it. Yet he was unaccountably convinced that he could trust the other man, not just that what he said was true, but that he wouldn't hurt him. He could not have explained *how* this knowledge had come to him, yet when he looked into Samuel's face, he knew deep in his bones that it was so.

He considered. It was his fault Samuel was in trouble. He had to offer help – the other man could scarcely go looking for someone to feed from in his condition. "Wrist or neck?" he asked, staring at Samuel, his voice trembling, all at once deeply afraid, despite his trust. It struck him that perhaps Samuel would need all his blood, that he would end up a grey shriveled husk.

Samuel looked at him, and then smiled, his slightly mocking expression acknowledging Jack's thoughts. "Wrist."

A moment's hesitation.

Jack wondered whether Samuel knew just how frightened he was. Maybe vampires could smell fear, like dogs. And maybe, like dogs, it made them more aggressive.

Samuel smiled at him, and Jack realized that the other man knew he was afraid, and wanted to set him at ease. He held his wrist up to Samuel's mouth, his arm trembling. He watched as Samuel brought his mouth down to the soft skin next to his palm. He felt warm breath, and then warm lips, and a sharp sting, no worse than the prick of an injection needle.

Then, bliss. Ecstasy. The slow thrum of his heart. A smoky joy, better than dope, better than sex, better than a perfect gig. Time slowed and stopped. Welling waves of delight and enchantment. An orgasmic flood of fluids inside him, a steely swelling in his groin.

Dazed, he fell, and felt strong arms grabbed him and held him close. Gradually time restarted. The slow drumbeat of his heart renewed. Heaven withdrew. Sam licked the small incision on Jack's wrist, and it healed as Jack watched.

Jack lay back against the sofa, as weak as if he had just climaxed, panting a little.

"Is it always like that?" he asked in wonder.

Samuel gave him a sly grin, the smile of a mate teasing someone he was fond of. "I took a fair bit more than I would normally do. I needed it." He stopped smiling but his eyes still held a trace of amusement. "Sorry." Then his expression abruptly sobered. "Are you okay?"

Looking into the dark blue globes, Jack felt he'd known Samuel forever. "Yeah." He shrugged. "Did it help?"

"Look." Samuel pulled off his shirt, and showed him a cut on his side, already healing, the two fleshy halves knitting together as they watched, the skin around still stained with blood. They sat in silence for a few minutes. Then Samuel leaned over and kissed Jack.

"Don't!" Jack rasped out, sharply, jerking back. But he didn't move away from the seat next to Samuel on the sofa.

"Why not?"

"I'm married." Jack was unable to meet the other man's scrutiny.

"You want it."

"Yes. So what? I'm not an animal, to follow my lusts. And I take my marriage vows seriously. What we've just done is..."

Samuel stared at him for a minute or two, then, to Jack's surprise, nodded a little, and said placidly, "Tea?"

"I thought vampires could only live on blood?" Jack was trying to joke about what had just occurred, to make the extraordinary everyday.

Samuel smiled, his sharp white teeth feral, frightening. Erotic.

"Unhealthy stuff, really. I quite like a nice salad, myself."

"So what's with the blood, then?" Jack was genuinely interested. Samuel looked well again. Jack knew that something had made Sam better. What else could it have been but his blood?

"Don't know." Samuel was silent for a moment. "But it has to be the blood of a sentient creature. Maybe it's a kind of mind-meld, and the blood acts as a sort of focus, allowing one to tap into the infinite. Perhaps it's a fusing of energy fields or auras, or something." He shrugged. "Who knows?"

"So dogs or horses are no good?"

Sam shook his head. "It's *reputed* to be best with elves."

"Do they exist?"

"Would you have said vampires exist, before tonight?"

"So werewolves are also real? And ghouls? And wizards?"



"And bi men who are faithful to their wives?" He gave Jack a quirky smile, gentle, kindly, accepting.

Jack all at once liked him immensely. He felt the urge to chuckle. No one would believe what had happened to him. He felt released, free – a happy strangeness, a sense of anticipation. But he also felt he had to stop this bizarre flirtation before it went any further. " 'For better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish and obey, till death do us part'."

He regretted the words as soon as he'd spoken them. They seemed unbearably pompous and stiff.

"Obey?" Samuel waited. When Jack didn't speak, he said, wonderingly. "You know the words."

"I've often had cause to think of them. To remember what I promised." Jack gave Samuel a crooked grin. "I'm a man. I have a man's needs and weaknesses. I'm attracted to people – men *and* women. But I promised. And promises must be kept. It would hurt Patti if I slept with others. So I won't. Simple."

Samuel got up and went through to the kitchen. He put on the kettle.

"I must go." Jack was afraid of what might happen if he stayed.

"You can't. I've taken a lot. Even if *I* don't have sugary tea, *you* should. Basic principles of blood donation. Anyway, you ran me down. You can't just go away, until you see whether I'm all right."

Jack could hear the smile in Samuel's voice. Sam had already recovered. He was not so sure about himself.

They drank tea from supermarket mugs. Jack had expected bone china. "How do you feel?"

"Better. Fine. And you?"

"Bit woozy." *Like after drugs and sex*, thought Jack, disturbed.

"Come and see me again."

Jack considered him for a moment. *You're too beautiful. It would be hard to resist you, to stick to my vows.* "I can't."

"Even if I promise to do nothing to you?"

"Even then. You can't control my heart. And when one is tempted by evil, one must get away from the temptation."

"Evil?" Hurt and angry.

Without stopping to think, Jack reached out and squeezed the other man's hand. Letting go, he said, "Sorry. I didn't mean that. There's no evil in you."

"You'd know, of course."

"Yes." Jack's flat certainty was curiously comforting and absolving.

"Please come. We can be friends. I won't make passes. It's lonely being...someone like me. And you're lonely, too."

"How do *you* know?" Jack's tone was defensive. He didn't want another man to see so deeply into him.

"I could see it in the restaurant."

"I'll come again, I promise. Next week, after Christmas." He sighed, because he was afraid of what Samuel would do to him. All the same, he knew he had to see him again.

When he got home, Patti was back. "Where've you been?" she asked. e had expected suspicion, but she was simply curious.

"I was at the office party. Networking." He didn't want to be lectured about his driving, so he was silent about the car accident, and Samuel. If he had another motive, he tried not to think about it.

"You're in a good mood."

"It's what parties are supposed to do."

"You're drunk." To his pleasure, she was smiling.

"Just a little woozy. Come to bed, let's make love." *Like we used to*, he thought.

To his surprise, she did, and they did. As always, the moment he entered her he experienced an epiphany of exquisite sensations, a feather-touch of ideal pleasure, a sense of rightness and perfection. He tried hard not to think of copper hair and creamy skin, and blood-induced ecstasy. Afterwards, Patti lay in his arms, snoring gently, in the way that made him feel tender and protective towards her.

*Maybe it might still be okay,* he thought, hope a traitor in his heart.

After Christmas, he started visited Samuel frequently. These days, Patti was so senior that she often had to go on business trips, to regional offices in Sydney or Perth or New Zealand, and she would be away for the night, sometimes for the week. Jack found his old guitar, and strummed along to Samuel's sax. He hadn't played for a decade.

They never touched, except when Samuel fed, yet there was a kind of unity and resonance in their playing that comes from a spiritual or emotional tie. Sometimes Samuel would feed, and though Jack never felt the same bottomless intensity of that first time, it was a rite that bound them. Despite everything, he found it profoundly erotic. He knew he was wrong to allow it. Yet he also knew that Samuel struggled to find willing sources. Jack liked him too much to allow him into danger, with strangers. And being with Samuel made him happy. Samuel was always pleased to see him. Samuel admired him. From time to time Jack caught that look on his friend's face which hinted that inexplicably, he found Jack desirable and attractive.

Jack started to go to the gym again.

When Samuel found out, he teased him. "Aren't you handsome enough already?"

"Jeez, Sam, I'm forty-one. I'm ten kilos overweight. I've got a paunch and love-handles."

"Some people don't care about paunches and love-handles. Some people care about the inner man. Some people care about integrity and courage and loyalty. Those people don't notice the paunch."

Jack colored. "Stop it!" he growled.

Sam just grinned, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

Willem noticed that Jack was happy. To Jack's glad surprise, they were still friends, and he had to admit to himself that that was mostly Willem's doing. Few straight men were easy with his sexuality.

"You've found someone, haven't you?" asked Willem during a quiet moment at Friday drinks.

"Well. Not really. I won't be unfaithful to Patricia." Patti wanted to be called Patricia or Pat. 'Patti' was so eighties, so student. Jack only called her Patti to himself, now.

"Whether you fuck him or not, you've still found someone."

" 'Him'?"

"Think I'm blind? My brother was gay."

" 'Was'?"

"He killed himself."

Jack was appalled. Without thinking, he hugged Willem tight. "Oh, Vil, I'm so sorry."

Willem gently disengaged his arms, then looked him full in the face, holding onto his shoulders with both hands. "Don't let it happen to you. We'd miss you."

Jack was warmed by the other man's concern. It saddened him that he got more affection from people in the office than he got at home. "Patricia does love me..."

"Maybe long ago. Now? I don't think so. You don't fit the new image."

"She means well," said Jack defensively.

"Hmm," said Willem, unconvinced.

Patti noticed, too. She was suspicious. "Where do you go so often?"

"I visit my friend Sam."

"Yeah, right." It was clear that she thought he was up to something.

The crunch came when Jack came back from a session at Sam's. They'd been playing jazz and swing, for a change, and the music had been perfect, in the way it sometimes can be, when you know what the other player is going to do, without a word being spoken. Afterwards, they'd looked at each other with a mute joy, a perfect communion. Then, Samuel had fed, and for the first time since the accident, Jack let Sam hold him, as he recovered his breath.

Jack knew he was in love. He'd fallen in love with a few guys before, but they'd always been straight. Once he'd been in love with a woman in the office, a lovely Vietnamese. But she was so much younger than he that it had been easy to keep control. He knew he wasn't even remotely desirable to someone as young and as beautiful as she. So far, he'd always been able to subsume his feelings into friendship, and he'd never let anyone know what he felt. This time, though, he knew that the emotions were reciprocated, that he'd only to ask and Samuel was his.

Even if nothing ever came of their friendship, he was happy. Silly, really. Unrequited love was supposed to make you miserable. But he felt joy, exhilaration, contentment, for the first time in years. Here was someone who loved him, as a friend first, but probably much more, even if they never actually made love. And they never would, no matter what he felt. He'd promised.

When he came through the front door, Patti was pacing the floor. "Where the hell were you?"

"At Sam's." Even her anger couldn't spoil his mood.

"Don't lie to me. You were with a woman. You smell of...sex." He didn't actually. But he smelt of *something*. God knows what pheromones were released by feeding.

"I have *never* been unfaithful to you. Never. And I haven't been with a woman. I was with Samuel." He closed his mind to the erotic bond created by the feed. It wasn't true sex, whatever it felt like. He knew he was deceiving himself.

"You have the look you get after sex."

Jack was angry, made angrier by her being right. "Yes. It's called happiness. Only, I haven't had sex." Jack took his guitar and stalked off to the study. Patti followed him, the heels of her shoes striking an irritable beat on the flooring.

"Sam makes you happy?" Her voice was disbelieving, almost contemptuous.

"Yes. He admires me. He listens to me. He doesn't tell me I'm useless."

"Well, why don't you fuck off, and go live with him, then?"

Jack inspected her through narrowed eyes. "Okay. I will," he said softly.

This was it. The end of twenty years. The end of all his hopes. He'd believed that marriage was for keeps, that he'd found someone he would always be happy with. He'd gone on believing in the two of them, in their bond, long after the ties linking them had frayed and stretched and broken. Now he had to admit to himself that their marriage had been a corpse for ages. It was time it was buried. He went to the bedroom, and started packing a suitcase.

Patti followed, and glared at him. "You *have* got someone, haven't you?"

Jack refused to answer that question. Instead, he said, "You don't love me any more. You despise me. You think I'm a failure, a sook. You want to move on. You have for ages."

*And someone else does love me.* He brushed past her to get his suits. He folded them carefully, and put them in the suitcase. He folded some shirts, a few ties, socks, boxers, briefs, jeans. "I'll come and get the rest later," he said, lifting his suitcase in one hand and his guitar case in the other. He looked at her.

She looked sad, her anger gone. "I didn't want it to end like this," she said, her voice trembling, on the brink of tears.

He noticed that she didn't try to persuade him to stay.

He put down the cases and hugged her, remembering what she'd been before she became a top executive, the fun, the humor, the sex, the companionship.

"Me neither," he said, kissing her gently, wanting to cry. "I'll be in touch."

Straightening his shoulders, he walked out of the house. It was late, but the night was warm, still high summer, two months after the wettest Christmas ever, and scented with summer smells—jasmine and geranium, garlic, roasting meat, coffee, exhaust fumes, hot bricks, summer lawns.

Samuel opened before he rang. Jack had gotten used to his supersensitive hearing. He wasn't surprised that Sam knew he was there. Sam looked at Jack, and at the suitcase, then without a word, took it from him.

"Can I sleep on your sofa?" asked Jack, not meeting his eyes, his sorrow still carved into his face. When he looked up, he saw that Samuel's face was compassionate, understanding, loving. There was no gloating, no unseemly joy. Jack knuckled away the tears.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I couldn't think of anyone else." It was a humiliating admission.

"Sokay," said Samuel. "You'll always have a place here."

"Don't say 'always'. Always is a long time. Especially for you."

"I meant it. You don't need to sleep on the sofa. There's a spare room, with a spare bed. Let me go and make it up for you, then we can open a bottle of red and talk."

Jack lay on the sofa and Sam sat in the armchair and they drank a bottle of cabernet sauvignon between them. When Jack woke in the morning, Sam's bedroom door was closed, and Jack let him sleep, not sure what vampires

needed to do during daylight hours. At work he told Willem what had happened, and Willem asked if he wanted the day off. But Jack knew that work would be the best painkiller. He threw himself into his tasks and when they were done went round to see what else he could do.

That night Patti came round. Jack took her to his bedroom. They sat on the bed. "How did you know I was here?"

"I knew where Sam lived." She looked down, shamefaced. "I followed you here once."

Jack looked at her with compassion. "Do you want me to come home?" he asked, knowing the answer, but having to ask anyway.

"You love him, don't you?"

"Yes." Jack admitted it for the first time.

"I hope you'll be very happy." She was crying. So was he. He took her hand, and passed her a T-shirt from his suitcase to dry her eyes. It was all he had.

"I love you Patti, you know that."

"Yes," she said, "but it's not enough any more, is it?"

Jack shook his head.

Patti sighed. "It wasn't working anyway. I'm sorry I was so..."

"Patti, I have enough love in me for both of you."

"It wouldn't work." Sensible, practical, intelligent Patti.

"If you can stop despising me, it could."

"You deserve better."

Jack was silent. It was true.

She got up, and kissed him. "Goodbye, Jack."

"Goodbye Patti, love."

After she'd left, he wiped his eyes on the T-shirt, and went through to the kitchen. He put on the kettle, and set out two mugs. When Sam came up behind



him, Jack said, without looking at him, "It's lonely in the spare room. Can I sleep with you?"

He turned to look at his friend. Sam gave him a tiny smile, the corners of his mouth quirking up, his eyes warm and loving.

"I keep strange hours."

Jack put his arms round him. "No matter." He kissed Sam, his lips warm and firm, sending shivers down Sam's neck. "I think I'll get used to it."

\* \* \* \*

They quickly settled into a routine. It was an odd arrangement, as if Sam was a night worker. Jack would get home at about six p.m., catching the tram up Swanston Street, and as he got in he would make tea for both of them. He would go through to their bedroom where Sam was still in bed. By this time of the year, March, the evenings were drawing in, and Sam was starting to wake up when Jack got home.

Contrary to all the stuff Jack had read and found out about vampires, Sam wasn't completely comatose during sunlight hours. But he was very sluggish and sleepy, as if drugged. When Jack brought him his first cup of tea at quarter past six, he was often staring at the ceiling, his eyes unfocused, apparently awake, yet not quite there. But Jack's appearance never failed to bring Sam back from wherever it was he went.

Like a dog welcoming home his master, his entire face would fill with pleasure. His eyes would sparkle, and his lips would curve up in a joyous smile. "Lo, Jack!"

Jack would kiss Sam, but more as a brother or friend than a lover. They still hadn't made love. Although they shared the same bed and spooned against each other and put their arms around each other, somehow neither had had the nerve to initiate sex.

Jack would often see a look on Sam's face that showed that he desired Jack; that he was much more than just a dear friend. Jack was shy, and well aware that the world as a whole didn't think him attractive. In some basic way, he felt that he was damaged goods, and that Sam, if he could, would have chosen someone else. And he still grieved for his marriage; for all the unrealistic dreams he'd had, of a happy home and children and growing old together; for the marriage vows which he couldn't help feeling he had broken. If he hadn't met Samuel, maybe he and Patti might have made it work.

One night Jack awoke to find the bed next to him empty. He spent the night tossing and turning, watching the clock radio's red digits slowly mark off the minutes and hours till morning. When Sam came back shortly before dawn, smelling of sex and feeding pheromones, Jack didn't speak of it. His chagrin must have showed in his face, because that night, while Jack was sitting on the bed as they drank their tea, Sam said, "You know I have to feed, don't you?"

"Yes." Jack didn't want to discuss it. He avoided Sam's eyes.

Sam took his hand. "I love you Jack. You know that, don't you?"

Jack turned to look at him. "Yes." He thought he himself would die of love for Sam. He loved Sam whether or not Sam loved him. The fact that that Sam loved him didn't reassure him. He mistrusted his luck, doubted that it would last. "Yes, I know."

"If I only fed from you, I would take too much. I would eventually make you sick."

Jack nodded numbly.

"Oh, Jack." Sam, taking his hand. "I love you so much." He sighed. He lifted Jack's hand and kissed it, so softly and tenderly that Jack felt stupid that he had been so concerned. "But I must feed, my dear, and the best way is during sex. They don't know I've fed if I do it while we're making love."

There was a silence in the room. Outside they could hear the distant rumble of the trams, the ping of their bells, the muted roar of the traffic, a dog barking, snatches of music.

*I wonder if this is how the wives of bisexual men feel.*

Jack wasn't bitter, or even hurt, but he felt the certainties of his world overturned. He knew in his bones that Samuel loved him, very deeply. It had been every day revealed in a hundred small actions and words. All the same, he was shocked. He knew it wasn't rational, and that somehow made it worse.

"What about disease?" He hadn't meant to ask this. He felt a fool as soon as he had spoken.

But Sam must have divined the source of his discomfort, and he simply smiled a little, not in a knowing or smug way, his face filled with infinite kindness and care, and he said, "I'm a vampire. We don't *get* diseases. Only complete dismemberment—or full-on sunlight—can kill us."

Jack's horror and fear must have shown in his face, because Sam pulled him into a hug, and Jack's tea spilled, and the moment passed in a muddle of cloths and paper towels.

But later that night, at eight or nine, after they'd played some music together, and shared a bottle of wine, Sam came up to Jack.

"May I?" he asked, putting his arms round Jack, and resting his forehead against Jack's.

Jack nodded dumbly, his heart racing. *Yes, oh yes!* his mind cried out, his throat too tight to speak.

Sam kissed him. He bit Jack's nipples gently through his t-shirt. His hand cupped Jack's face. He leaned in to kiss him again. His lips were cool. Jack thought, inconsequentially, *he doesn't feel undead*. But then he hadn't in bed either. Jack rubbed his face against the other man's hand. His beard stubble scratched Sam's skin.

"I love you, Jack." Sam's eyes were dark with emotion.

Jack nuzzled the sculpted muscles of Sam's neck column, rubbing his head against the curve where the shoulders begin. He pressed his mouth against Sam's skin. *Nip*. "You too, Sam, mate." *Nibble*. "So much." *Bite*. "So fucking much."

Sam gently pulled Jack's head up. Keeping his own eyes fixed on Jack's warm brown ones, he pressed his lips against the other man's. His tongue probed Jack's mouth. Electric prickles fled from mouth to groin. It hadn't seemed possible, but Jack's cock got even harder. He wanted to push himself into Sam, to delve into his body with his dick, to feel Sam's buttocks under him, the creamy flesh submitting to his sex. He wanted to pound Samuel into the mattress, to possess him, to ravish him. Instead he thrust his tongue into Sam's mouth, exploring, tasting, relishing his maleness.

It seemed to him now that he had wanted this the first day he'd seen Sam in the restaurant. Perhaps he had, unconsciously. Yet it was deeper than that. It was if he'd been waiting for this precise moment all his life.

"Come," whispered Sam, and taking Jack's hand led the way through to the bedroom. A brawny arm pulled Jack onto the double bed, and drew him close, pressing their bodies together. Sam knelt over Jack's body, his eyes lapis lazuli smudged with indigo – intent, purposeful, bent on love. Sam's tongue lapped against Jack's neck then moved to tease the hollow at its base. He undid the top buttons of Jack's shirt, nibbled his nipples, and shocks of ecstasy shivered down into Jack's crotch. Jack uttered an inarticulate plea of desire, his hands tangled in Sam's thick copper curls. Sam moved lower, undoing more buttons, nibbling and pulling at Jack's thick dark body hair with his teeth and lips, following the treasure trail into the secret richness of Jack's groin.

He loosened the top button of Jack's Levis, and gently bit the soft skin underneath. He undid more buttons. Jack's cock poked through the flap of his boxers. Sam licked the crown. He grazed the shaft gently with his pointed fangs. Jack jerked in pleasure.

Impatiently, he pushed Jack's jeans and undershorts down his legs, and nibbled at the base of Jack's shaft. He cupped the soft crumpled skin of his sac, and gently sucked the delicate eggs held within. Jack gave another incoherent mumbled cry as Sam lifted his legs and his wet tongue slathered the delectable ridged rosette of his ring. While Jack writhed in ecstasy, Sam pushed his tongue into him. He breathed in the rich musk of Jack's buttohole, the abounding complex luxury of his inmost odor.

Jack pulled Sam's T-shirt off, and bit down on Sam's nipples. Sam gave a growl of pain and pleasure. Jack grabbed Sam's cock through his track pants, and squeezed it. He yanked the pants down and they slipped over Sam's bare feet and pooled onto the floor. Underneath his pants, Sam wore nothing. Jack took Sam's cock in his mouth, and swirled his tongue round its crown. Then he flipped Sam over so he was face down on the sheets. The other man growled appreciatively, raising his buttocks into the air.

Jack knelt behind him. "Lube?" he asked, gruff with emotion.

"In the drawer."

Sam felt the cool tickle of oil against his pucker. Jack's hands grasped Sam's hips, pulling him close, and his moist steel and silk rod pressed against Sam's hole. Sam opened to him, overcome by sensation, pressing back abruptly against Jack's hardness so that Jack slid into him in one smooth flow, until his balls were tight against Sam's sweetly curved buttocks. Jack pulled back a little, then thrust again. Each stroke caressed the bump of enchantment and pleasure deep inside Sam.

"Oh, God, oh fuck, so tight and warm, so good, Sam." Jack bit Sam's neck and shoulders, the intense sensations created in his body as he moved in Sam unbearable.

Sam pushed back in rhythm with each thrust taking him as deep as possible, as thoroughly as possible. Sam cried out in ecstasy, his seed bursting

from him in a flood, even as Jack also whimpered and his cock thickened and jism squirted deep into the snug heat of Sam's body.

They collapsed to one side, spent for now. Jack's arms went around Sam. He drew Sam back so that his lover's back was against his chest. His rough breathing flowed over Sam's ears and neck. Slowly the pounding of their hearts abated. Sam turned to face Jack, his eyes dark, filled with love and desire. His palm smoothed Jack's nipples, then twisted them. He put his mouth against Jack's neck. Jack drew a sharp breath as he felt Sam's teeth at his throat. This was the first time Sam had fed there. The small sharp pain burned through him, filling his whole body with a delicious fire.

Jack blindly caressed and held the hard muscles of Samuel's chest. He wanted to go on experiencing this piercing, intense, flawless ecstasy for ever.

"Again," he groaned, "oh, God, again, Sam."

Sam smiled, sweet and direct. "Again and again, now and always."

He pulled Jack down for a kiss, more passionate, though they had just come; more intense, though he had just fed. Jack rose above him, his rigid cock dripping oil and jism and pre-come. He bent forward to kiss Sam, slower and more thoroughly this time. He kissed his way down Sam's torso, more measured this time, more thorough. He kissed across Sam's chest and stomach, tracing the ridges and hollows of Sam's muscled belly with tongue and teeth. He swallowed the head of Sam's shaft in his mouth. He sucked on it, relishing the flavor of Sam's semen.

"Oh, God, Jack, you'll make me come."

Jack grinned at him, warm and happy, filled with trust and love. His eyes locked on Sam's, he raised Sam's legs and kissed and mouthed the copper-furred thighs and calves, all the time flicking his gaze back to his friend, who watched every movement. Jack lifted Sam's feet over his shoulder and pressed them back. He kissed the instep of each foot, and ran his tongue through Sam's toes.

"Fuck me again, Jack." His desire was urgent.

Jack nipped the heel of Sam's foot. "Oh yeah, Sam. Oh yes."

He drizzled some more oil on Sam's crack. Sam curved his butt up, and Jack's adamant rod pressed against his hole. Slowly, purposefully, Jack filled him completely. Languidly at first, then gradually speeding up, he moved inside Sam.

"Faster. Fuck me faster. Harder. Faster. Please."

"I'll be longer this time!" Jack grunted.

"Yes!"

Jack rammed into him, forcefully. Sam grunted and cried out continuously now, his head thrashing from side to side, his neck arched back, his creamy skin flushed. It did take longer this time, but their climaxes when they came were all the more intense.

"Uhhh! Jack!" Sam's come spurted across his stomach.

"Sam." A tone of possession and satisfaction and fulfillment. As their heartbeats slowed, Jack added, "It's been twenty years since I did that."

Sam pulled him down, and kissed his brown eyebrows, his eyelids, and his nose, and finally gently bit Jack's chin, which he'd liked from the first day they'd met.

"Was it as good as you remembered?"

"Better. Definitely better."

Jack lay down next to him. Sam sighed and put his arm around Jack's waist, spooning up behind him.

After a while Jack brought Sam's hand up to his mouth. He softly kissed Sam's palm, sucked each finger in turn. Sam's quiescent member awoke. It grew hard against Jack's arse. Jack twined his legs back around Sam's, pressing harder against him. He reached for the oil bottle and passed it to Sam. Sam dribbled oil onto his fingers and rubbed it into Jack's butt. Jack arched in delight as his finger stroked Jack's bump. Samuel applied some lube to his own cock, then pressed the tip against Jack's opening. He hesitated.

Jack turned his head questioningly toward him. "What?" he murmured.

"You haven't had a man in you for a long while, my love. I don't want to hurt you."

Jack's brown eyes were warm with trust. "You could never hurt me, Sam. Never."

"I'll be gentle."

Grasping Jack's hips, as they lay spooned up against each other, Sam pulled Jack onto him, slowly, stopping each time Jack's ring tightened involuntarily. He felt Jack yield and open to him. Jack had felt a few moments of discomfort, but then he remembered how good it could feel – realized how good it felt *now* – and he reveled in it. He had forgotten the sheer satisfaction and fulfillment of having a man inside him, this utterly rewarding feeling of fat full firmness spearing the depths of his flesh, this fusion of two bodies in the most intimate of all embraces possible. He was glad that they had both already come twice, that this was not the first time. He wanted to make the sensation last.

Sam moved slowly and easily in him at first. Sam's hand snugged Jack's dick, and moved up and down in sync with each of his thrusts. Jack came before he did – a long moaning incredibly intense orgasm, his prostate and cock stimulated beyond endurance, an internal explosion of erotic joy that spread through his body and left him limp. Sam responded to Jack's climax by speeding up his thrusts, and, his prostate exquisitely sensitive, Jack was shaken by repeated aftershocks of pleasure. Then it was time for Sam to come. Growling out Jack's name, he arched his back and pressed himself deep into Jack, the pleasure unbearably close to pain, but utterly, unendurably satisfying.

They lay exhausted in each others' arms. Tenderly, Jack took Sam's hand, still cupping his flaccid organ, wet with the fluids of love, and kissed it.

"That's another thing I haven't done for twenty years – coming three times in one night," he said.



Sam felt the quiver of his breathing and his speech through his own body. "And the night is still young," replied Sam dryly.

Jack chuckled, a warm buzz against his lover's skin. "Hey, I'm an old man."

"Yeah, right. Didn't see much evidence of that tonight."

"You make me feel young. You make me feel desirable and sexy and..."

"You are those things. My love, my dear love. You are a wonderful, sexy, absolutely erotic man. Oh, and you won't have to wait another twenty years for more."

"Oh good!" he said with a trace of irony. "Just so long as I can sleep *now*."

His heart filled with contentment, Sam watched over his man as he slept, savoring every small intimate movement of his body, the soft rise of his ribs as he breathed, the warm tender layer of fat at his waist, the small unconscious movements of his lips as he dreamed, the sweet mounds of his buttocks, the darkly furred muscles of his thighs, the slow pulse of his heart.

He had been so long alone that he had forgotten what it was he was missing from his life. He knew now for sure. He was home at last.

\* \* \* \*

Nearly a year later, a week or so before Christmas, Jack saw in the newspaper the announcement that Patti had been appointed CEO of the bank. He phoned her up to congratulate her. "Well done! I always knew you would do it."

"Thank you. Actually, *I* wondered a lot whether it would happen."

Jack was silent. It had been a long time since Patti had doubted herself, at least openly.

"Are you happy now, Jack?" she asked wistfully.

"Yes," he said, careful not to gloat. "And feel pretty well, too."

He'd lost ten kilos, his eyes shone, he looked five years younger, he felt twenty again. He suspected that the feeding, or perhaps the licking as Sam fixed the incision, slowed or even reversed his aging, though he had no proof. Maybe being in love had something to do with it, too. Once he would have thought that the daily – twice daily – sex would have given him bags under his eyes and grey hairs, but it seemed to have the opposite effect. Which was nice, really. "And are you happy?"

"Yes," said Patti firmly.

But Jack could tell by the tone of her voice that now she'd reached the pinnacle of success, she felt lost, disappointed that the money and prestige hadn't filled the hollow inside her. They'd been together for a long time. There wasn't much he didn't know about her.

"I'm glad." Even though she was not fulfilled, Jack *was* glad that she'd reached her goal.

"Oh, Jack." She sighed, a little sad. "Jack, don't be angry. I've asked the lawyer to make over the flat to you. I know you didn't want anything from me...."

"Thank you, Pat." He could barely speak for the lump in his throat. He would be rich, not nearly as rich as she would be, but more than enough for him. "It's...you..."

Patti interrupted with, "Gotta go. Got a human resources committee meeting in ten. See you sometime, Jack."

"Go well, my darling," Jack said to the dial tone. For a long time he sat quite still, staring into space, musing about their past. Would she have done things differently if she had known? Would *any* marriage have survived the stresses and separations of a high-flying career? He wondered if she believed that the position was worth it if her heart and world were now grey and wounded.

He took Sam to the staff party. He wanted to flaunt him, to show that a middle-aged man with a paunch could still pull somebody gorgeous. It was shameful, really, made worse by Sam knowing exactly what Jack was doing. Jack could tell by Sam's ironic grin when Jack put on his best jeans and the utterly perfect second-hand leather jacket he'd bought for twenty dollars from the op shop in Sydney Road, and insisted Sam wear the same.

It was hard and potentially dangerous for Sam to be out in the bright light of a midsummer evening, and he wore dark glasses and sunscreen, jeans and a long-sleeved shirt under his jacket, for protection. The windows of his car were tinted, and they parked in an underground garage in the building where the party was being held. He would be safe enough inside; and by nine or ten, when the party ended, it would be almost dark.

There was a pause, and then whispers when the two of them walked in. Jack noticed several staff members and their partners staring at Sam admiringly, but he didn't see how many glanced at *him*, attracted by his surprising good looks – the weight loss, the new muscles from working out, the way his face drew you in with its quiet joy. When Jack touched Sam briefly on the arm, to ask him something, Sam turned and gave him a dazzling smile, love and lust and the need to feed all combined into a blast of erotic lightning that instantly gave Jack a highly visible erection.

Willem watched the exchange with an ironic glimmer in his eyes. “*Very* hot. Why don't you just strip off and fuck right here?”

Jack grinned at him, and pretended to punch him. “I thought you were straight.”

“You mean you noticed? But *that* exchange made me wonder what I'm missing!”

Willem had been promoted again. Their friendship had survived the year when Willem had been Jack's boss. Jack had made other friends. He and Sam had joined up with some other musicians to form a band. Alice, a lesbian from

marketing, had started coming to their gigs. Mark, one of the admin clerks, had seen Jack and Samuel at a concert, and had started talking to Jack in the office about music and groups, and then moved on to life and his girlfriend and eventually partners and sexuality.

At home, Sam opened a bottle of merlot, and poured them each a glass. They stretched out on the sofa, Sam nestled into Jack's shoulder. "Happy anniversary, Jack!"

"Today?"

Sam nodded. Copper strands tickled Jack's nose. "Will you marry me, Jack?"

Jack shifted so that Sam was more comfortable. "Yes. But not because you're beautiful. Not because you are the best fuck in town. I would marry you even if you were hideous, and hopeless in bed. Because you've made me feel worthwhile and real. Because you make me happy. Because you care. Because I love you."

"What other reasons are there? My love, I'll take you, 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish and obey, till death do us part'." Jack's eyes filled as Samuel spoke.

Samuel smiled up at him, joy filling his face, his mouth turned up in his characteristic quizzical smile. His azure eyes sparkled and his creamy skin glowed with happiness. He pulled Jack's head down for a kiss, his lips strong and cool and silky. "Don't you want to know why I want to marry you?" he asked.

"Because I'm incredibly handsome?" Jack said gruffly, still struggling with tears.

"Because you don't mind what I am. That first day, you just accepted me, as if it was the most natural and normal thing in the world."

"You mean I'm *not* handsome?"

Sam tightened his grip, threateningly. "Most people would have been too frightened."

"I *was* frightened."

"I know. That makes it even better." Sam kissed him again.

"So we'll live happily ever after?"

"I'm something from a fairy tale, and so are you, my handsome prince. So why shouldn't we?"

THE END

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