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IN THE MOON'S LIGHT

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In the Moon's Light

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By

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For all the women who fall for the bad guys.

Chapter One: Rose

Tory opened her eyes. Shadows fluttered across the gray ceiling in the dim light of the full moon. She'd left the window open for the cooling breeze. She turned, fear drying her mouth and drawing goose bumps across her skin. The bed felt warm, safe, but something about the open window called to her. Willow leaves rustled and shook, making the shadows dance faster. White sheers billowed, beckoning her. She pushed back the covers, set her bare feet on the marred wooden floor, and watched the wind change. The curtains sucked backward, luring her to follow.

Her feet moved of their own volition. She wiped the sleep from her eyes and stopped at the sill. Tory pushed aside the curtains, the sweet scent of jasmine strong. She stared out into the night, expecting to see something important. The eerie moonlight glowed across the vacant lawn. Her gaze traveled along the slope to the little, run down guesthouse that bordered the property. A man stood in the yard, his body rigid as he gazed skyward. She decided he must be staring at the moon. The night hid any clear details.

No one was supposed to be on the property, except her, its caretaker. She frowned at the trespasser. "Hey! What are you doing here?"

The stranger turned slowly, as if he had all the time in the world. Tory backtracked her memory to be sure she'd locked the many doors before she retired for the night. The old mansion was eerie enough without a nutcase standing outside in the middle of the night. The man's presence made her angry, but as he walked across the lawn toward the big house, her ire shifted to panic. She was all alone, a college student watching the place for extra money. There was no one around for miles that could hear her call for help. She'd set her cell phone to charge before she went to bed, but it was downstairs, plugged into the outlet by the fridge.

He strode across the lawn, his face lit a ghostly pallor by the silver light. He moved with all the grace of a stalking predator, his hands limp at his sides. His long legs soon carried him to just below her window. Unusual for an old-fashioned town, he wore his hair shoulder-length and loose. In curling, dark tendrils it blew in the breeze, obscuring his expression.

“This is private property!” She did her best to sound intimidating, a difficult task when wearing only a white t-shirt.

He stared up at her as he had the moon. Something flashed in his eyes, a certain light, and she wondered what could be reflecting there. Tory cringed. She backed away from the window. The sheers shifted and puffed. Downstairs, she heard the porch door creak on its ancient hinges. “I locked it,” she whispered. Near silent footsteps trod across the floors below. Tory closed the bedroom door and turned the lock. She glanced around the dim room. The closet was a wide place, but no clothes hung within to hide behind. She ran to the bed, got down on her hands and knees, and slid beneath it, quivering like a frightened child.

She heard him ascend the stairs, his gait a pulse, as steady as a heartbeat. He halted on the landing for an interminable amount of time. His voice drifted to her, soothing as he hummed a lilting tune. The beat of his steps began again. Tory shimmied further in.

The handle on her door jiggled. Metal clinked. Then, as the porch entry before it, the bedroom door came open as if it had not been properly secured. She stared at his shoes, featureless boots that clop-clopped closer. He stood at the edge of the bed for a long while.

“Come out.” The voice had a strange cadence, an accent she couldn’t place.

Tory closed her eyes tight. She prayed. Remaining as still as possible, she hoped he’d go away. Instead, she heard his boots scuff across the wooden floor. Though she didn’t look, she felt his heated gaze searing over her body. An icy hand gripped her ankle. The stranger dragged her from beneath the mattress.

“I said, come out. When I tell you to do something, you must do it.”

She opened her eyes. He knelt over her. The moonlight showed on his pale skin, lighting him like a marble statue. His hand glided over her t-shirt, across her left breast and up to her neck. He felt cold. Fingers traced lines up and down the side of her throat. “You’re beautiful,” he whispered, bending closer. His eyes seemed black in the darkness. “So very lovely and frightened.”

“Please, go away,” she choked out.

A chilly thumb ran circles over her chin. He frowned. “But I’ve only just arrived. We’ve not been introduced. I can assure you that I would like to know you in every sense of the word.” His face moved closer, his fluid movements surreal. His knee poked its way between her thighs as he brushed his frigid lips across her mouth.

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"You're not real," she muttered. "Too cold. This is a nightmare." The realization made sense, and Tory clung to it. She had bad dreams often, haunting dreams that terrified her. "I locked the doors. You can't be here."

He quirked a brow at her statement, lowered his mouth to hers and spoke across her lips. "Then I should get you back to bed. No one wants to wake up on the floor." He drew her lower lip between his, sucking lightly at it. His wandering hand crossed her cheek. Fingers combed into her loose hair. He paused. "Kiss me back." His frown evidenced some inner pain. "Make me warm. I want to feel like you do."

"Nightmare," she said, breathless. The cold of his skin felt wrong. His tender kiss, though, stirred up other emotions.

Full lips pressed hard against hers. He opened his mouth, goading her on with a questing tongue. His hand left her scalp to seek out forbidden territory. A thumb pressed at her nipple through her t-shirt, testing her reaction. She gasped, just the thing he needed to force his tongue inside her mouth. She kissed him back, the temptation strange, an erotic heat sweeping through her body to replace the fear.

He moaned in her mouth. His fingers worked her breast, tugging, teasing, twisting her sensitive bud. Soon he lay atop her, his pelvis pressed to hers. Tory's body relaxed, pliant against his. His fingers drew arcs down her side, leaving her breast behind. He wedged his hand between their bodies, forcing his way into her panties. They slid down her cleft, seeking the hot wetness building between her parted legs.

Stopping the kiss, he stared into her eyes, his fingers exploring her folds. "Are you still scared?" he asked, his voice warm and throaty.

She nodded.

His face hung over hers, a handsome visage with striking features, a strong mouth, lips large and ripe. A wide, prominent nose centered his expression. The stranger's eyebrows arched as he pleased her, dark slashed lines above half-closed, penetrating eyes.

"Be mine," he murmured and lowered his lips to taste hers once more. He spoke through his kisses, mumbling his requests. "Make me hot like you. Let me stay until dawn." His finger centered on her clitoris, sweeping the skin back and forth, working away her resolve, not that she had much left. Then he hummed and set his lips to her cheek, drawing a path to her neck. Along her throat, he suckled and slid his tongue. "You taste divine."

His sharp teeth grazed her skin in a well-placed love bite. Tory sighed. Her legs shook. His tongue lavished across her throat. "So good," he whispered. "Let's get you back to bed." He sat up, withdrew his fingers from her panties and scooped her in his arms. The stranger's strength surprised her. He carried her to the bed, set Tory in the center, and climbed right up beside her.

"Tell me your name." He watched with intensity, no longer touching her in an intimate way.

"Victoria." She turned on her side to stare at him. Most nightmares did not take this turn. Everything about him screamed unreal, not of this world. He resembled a ghost, yet she could feel his touch. "I think you're a good dream."

He closed his eyes, his lips pursing in a sorrowful frown. "Maybe."

"Who are you?" she asked, edging closer.

"Zale." He reached for her hand. "And I am yours, if you will be mine. I can visit you every night and fulfill your nightmares, or your dreams as you wish it." He guided her fingers down to his cock, buried beneath soft cotton pants. He showed her how to stroke it. "Do you want that?"

Unsure if he meant his return or the hard erection he sported, she remained silent. His hand cupped hers as she rubbed him through the fabric.

"Answer me." A tinge of impatience lent a pitchy tone to his bass voice.

"Will you visit me tomorrow night?"

He squeezed her hand. In turn, her fingers gripped his penis hard.

"I will if you let me taste you. A little drink. Not enough to make you sick, but you will be weary in the morning."

"I don't understand." His hand left hers. She continued to coax his dick into submission.

"It's little more than a kiss," he whispered, reaching for her mouth with his. "A deeper kiss."

Tory pulled with urgency. Wincing, he grasped her wrist and guided her hand away. "Enough of that." He released her and sought the band of her lace panties, teasing them down over her ass. Zale palmed her butt cheek, curling his fingers into her crack. "Do you want me?"

"If you are a dream, yes." She smiled at him and closed her eyes. The bed was hot now, soothing. It had to be a dream. No one ever made her feel this way, so aroused and ready in such a short span. She didn't look as he sat up to tug her panties down over her feet. He spread her legs with both hands and ran his fingers along her inner thighs. A zipper sounded. Fabric shuffled. He turned her on her stomach.

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“You desire me,” he said. He fingered her pussy, this time pressing inside to tease her. “You’re wet.” He spread her labia and rubbed his hand in her juices. Then he withdrew. She heard slick sounds and felt a sudden pressure against her ass.

“What are you doing?” she asked, trying to turn.

“I want you this way first. Tight and holding me. You won’t get away so easily like this.” He grabbed her butt cheeks, spread them and pushed his penis against her anus.

“Now my taste,” she heard him say. His mouth closed over her shoulder. He thrust into her hard. The head of his penis broke through first. She gasped at the unexpected invasion. Slick with her juices, it still burned when he buried his cock inside her ass. She’d never been taken like this. It hurt and filled her, stretching her channel. The pressure and gentle motions he made while he kissed his way up to her neck caused small shivers throughout her body. He was in charge, in control, and she liked it. Teeth sank into her skin. Tory cried out.

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She awoke on her stomach, her body sore from...the nightmare. Tory rolled over and frowned. “What’s wrong with me?” she wondered aloud. “Maybe I need to get out more. This old house is making me nuts.” She rolled out of bed and tore off her t-shirt and panties. The shower ran cold a long time before it was bearable enough. She washed away the nightmare and the grogginess of sleep. As she soaped her body, she thought of the stranger in her dream. He was not exactly handsome, but more startling than she would expect a dream-man to be. “Must’ve been the pizza. I always have nightmares when I eat pizza for dinner.” Swearing off the Mazzio’s, she ran a soapy hand over her neck and winced at the tenderness there.

Her skin wasn’t broken. She shrugged at her overactive imagination and finished up. Class started in a half hour and the commute was twenty minutes if she hit the lights just right. She dried off, dressed and gathered her book bag. Tory sprinted across the lawn to her white Chevy pickup and froze. Under the driver’s side windshield wiper was a single red rose. She bent over to see if anyone had left a note.

“Weird,” she whispered. She unhooked the flower and tossed it on the bench seat beside her book bag. As she drove into town, she wondered who her secret admirer could be.

Chapter Two: Journal

Zale lay in the darkness of his bed, a wide, down-stuffed antique from an era gone by. No light permeated the cell beneath the guest house on the Gravari estate. The soft touch of velvet enveloped his body. He normally slept in the nude, though sleep had yet to take him. He couldn't stop thinking of the young woman. He wondered, now that morning had arrived, had she left? Had she thought him only a passing dream or nightmare? *It's best if she did.* She was the first he'd approached in a decade without the intent to feed. "Ah, but feed I did." He chuckled. "She tasted better than I remember any human's blood tasting." He'd forced himself to stop.

Something was amiss on the property, this new woman living in it. He'd occupied the guesthouse for nearly a century. The mansion's prior owner had used it as a bed and breakfast. He'd watched her from his usual hiding places among the thick birch trees that lined the rear of the property. She was old in his memory, a silver haired woman that favored crocheting on the wide porch at the front of the manor. Tess used to plant flowers in the brick beds near the steps, new ones in red and gold every spring. Sometimes she'd wander into the woods, humming in her casual way. He could follow her in the twilight hours when the sun didn't threaten his life. He didn't know how or when she died. It was during one of his *hibernations*, as he liked to call them, periods of extended, voluntary sleep. Life often became boring in its eternal darkness.

Zale Gravari didn't keep friends or companions. What lovers he experienced over his countless lifetime were only appetizers before an engorging meal. The previous night's exception made him nervous and curious.

Unable to sleep, he rolled on his side, concentrated and willed the candle to light. He liked candles. The one on his bedside table had been replaced over time atop the same brass holder. The many waxy colors he'd chosen had melted in bubbled lines to the tabletop and down one leg. It gave his meager chamber an eerie, eccentric feel.

The buttery light reflected off the masks that hung on every wall of his room. He liked shiny ones, sparkly golds and silvers, coppers polished to a fine, shimmering hue. They watched him with

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their tribal visages, haunting shamans, or Asian theatre faces. He hardly noticed their presence at the moment, though. The boredom he suffered was broken now. He shuffled through the drawer to find his journal. He'd sharpened his pencil a month ago, and the lead still waited for him to wear it down.

Zale set his pencil to the paper and wrote in his scrawling font. *She thinks I am a nightmare, a ghostly vision come to take her in the night. That's what I am, nothing more or less, but I wonder if that's all I can ever be to this woman. She intrigues me with her books. I saw them on the couch, stacks of books she must pore over for hours. Her eyes are like the night sky, dark, blue and haunted. I should like to stare into them and make love to her.*

He slapped the book shut. Frustrated that he would have to wait through the day to see her once more, he stood and began to pace. His nude body felt warm from suckling her neck. He knew the sensation would waver after a time, but if she ate well and he kept up his will not to kill her, he decided their nightly trysts might prove amusing for a time. Zale had nothing better to do.

You will tire of her and kill her.

"Be silent!" he told his conscience. "I will do what I feel like doing at the moment. No one can stop me. If I want to keep her...I can!" He paced faster, the candlelight becoming a blur at the corner of his vision. He wanted her again, had to have her, feel her tight, little ass or...or even her pussy. *Yes, I want that. I haven't had that in a long time.*

Zale licked his lips. He looked over his home, a simple room with a bed, the side table, the candle and an old bookcase covered in dust. He'd read them all, some more than ten times. "I need new stories," he whispered. "That's what's wrong with me." He paused and reached down to stroke himself, soothing away the increasing tension. "Or maybe, for once, I need to make my own story, a grand adventure, an affair. Yes." He ran his tongue over his teeth, contemplating the possibilities. He drew a thin line of blood, sucked at it and pouted when the slice sealed over. His blood tasted like her, sweet, rich...fulfilling.

"I will take her each night, in different ways, any way I want to. I'll make her do it. She'll beg for me, and each morning, she'll wake and think I was a dream." The plan sounded like wicked fun. He saw no end for it, just night after night of sordid romping, fucking and releasing with the blonde-haired beauty in his father's old house. He'd not felt driven to do such a thing since his teenage years, and that time had long passed with the beating of his heart.

He didn't want to remember the night he'd been changed into what he was. Zale only wanted to feel the rush of growing desire. He placated his body by masturbating. Stroking his thick

cock harder, he eased away his thoughts. His mind cleared and he closed his eyes, imaging her hand held him instead of his own. *She'd do it the way I tell her to.* Zale moaned. He decided he'd teach her how to touch his balls, how to tickle the soft skin between his sac and his anus. He liked the feel of fingers there. She had come when he took her blood and screamed a piercing word.

His vivid memory echoed her voice. "*Zale!*" One syllable, his name, bursting from her throat with wanton lust.

His orgasm exploded too fast. Doubling over, he fought to catch his breath, marveling at the state his mind swam in. "She has bewitched me," he whispered. He stumbled to his bed, drew the velvet over his naked body and fought the desire to stay awake, determined to save his energy for the night...for Victoria. His muscles shook beneath his skin. He shivered, lonely, not for the first time, but it pained him nonetheless.

He'd found others like himself, evil beings that raved and killed without discretion, often tearing their victims apart like bloodthirsty animals. He didn't want to become that. His mind drifted toward the void. He tried to reach it, grasping with his will. Then the old memory trapped him and he ran through birch trees at twilight, chasing the blonde temptress, the slutty wench that had settled his fate so many years ago. She'd lured him there to her private hunting grounds, tore away his clothes and pushed him to the ground. He'd thought her beautiful in her fair way, her skin a milky color. She had brown eyes and a lilting laugh, though she was careful not to smile. He knew why now. He knew she'd been hiding what she was until that moment.

"Stop," he told the memory, but his mind turned on. There was little else for it to do. He'd not gone among the city for too long and his thoughts often turned to the past, to the loneliness of being forgotten and thought dead.

He'd been to his own grave three times. The headstone was cut from white marble, a great pale, weeping angel mourning for all time beside it. His father used to place flowers on the grave. His mother, mad with the voices she always heard, had no understanding that she'd lost him, or that she'd had a son once.

"Stop it now," he told his mind. "I cannot think of her now, not this night. It's a new beginning for me, a new chapter, a new start. I'll make something of this chance, this...woman. She is different." He grasped his pillow and clutched it against his body. The tremors overtook him, some odd form of a vampiric anxiety attack. He held the down-filled linen close and wished it were Victoria. "I won't kill her," he promised himself. "I don't want to be alone..." The darkness clouded over his mind. He drifted into the state between living and sleep.

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Bullfrogs croaked out in the swamp. Zale rolled over. He heard them even though they were a good night's walk to get to. A confused bird sang across the darkness, thinking to find a mate in the pitch of night. "That's what I'll do," Zale vowed. "Find my mate tonight." He rose up from his bed and left it, climbing the stairs without the aid of light. He saw well enough without it.

Dressed in pants and nothing else, he left the guesthouse from the servant's entry and paused to stare up at the moon. Still round and pregnant with light, he studied her craters and shadows. She was his sun, his mark of time to follow. The stars glittered above. He glanced over the constellations, impatient, but slowing himself on purpose. He had to maintain control. If she was to be his toy, and he was to keep his promise, he had to be able to slow his instincts. The thought of doing so to success pleased him.

The back door was locked as it had been the night before. He turned the metal with his mind. Stepping into the mansion rent him with faded memories, some childish, many of his father and the arguments they'd shared. He bypassed furniture draped in dustcovers, pale ghosts that didn't frighten him. Zale wandered up the staircase, paused on the landing, and peered at her from her open doorway. He guessed she'd chosen his old bedroom out of fate.

Victoria lay sprawled across the bed, a book beneath her right hand. A pen rested close to the edge and would fall off at any moment. Her face looked serene. Her mouth ajar, she snored softly. Her thick lashes moved when he walked in. Her breathing hitched. Zale memorized her pose, determined to place her back exactly as he'd found her when he was done. It was all part of the game.

This night she wore a nightgown, thin and pink, it hugged her curves with satin. As she'd slept, she'd tossed or turned and the skirt of the flimsy fabric had hiked up, revealing her shapely thighs. He strode to the bed and stared down at her. Her eyes rolled beneath closed lids.

She moaned. Her voice caught, and she started to whimper.

She's dreaming, he realized. Zale bent over and kissed her cheek. "I'm here, Victoria." He touched her upper arm, trailing his chilled fingers over her hot skin. "Wake up. I have plans for us tonight."

A tear streamed down her cheek, startling him. Her breathing became raspy as she wept in her sleep. "No...no..."

He licked the tear away, tasting the salt of it. It wasn't her blood, but nevertheless, the taste was hers, unique and intoxicating. "Wake up," he murmured, finding her soft earlobe with his lips.

“Wake up to your fondest nightmare.” He nuzzled her ear, sucking in the skin with gentle nips.
“Victoria...I want you.”

She cried out and awoke, startled and still haunted by her dream. Her blue eyes widened as she focused on his face. “Make it stop,” she whispered. “Please, make it stop. I don’t want to see it again...”

Chapter Three: Irony

Zale stared down at her with wanton lust in his dark eyes. Tory gasped. "It's you," she whispered, relieved. The previous nightmare that she'd escaped lingered in her mind, Jake's scarred face leering. "Oh, thank God it's you." She sighed and closed her eyes as she circled his neck with her hands. "Zale," she murmured. "What will you do to me in this dream?"

He chuckled above her. In a hungry way, he lifted her from the bed. Tory looked up and watched his face as he carried her from the bedroom. The house was dark and cold. It felt real, not like a dream, but her night visions were always like that, too vivid. *A man could not lift me so easily and carry me across the hall without a harried breath. A real man can't look like Zale does, with his pale skin and striking features.* "I hoped you'd come back."

"Every night. I'll fuck you every night until you grow tired of me." He stopped. Setting her down, he moved in and pressed her against the wall by the bathroom. "You should sleep naked. There's no one to see you except me."

"And you're not real." She cringed when he crushed his hips into hers, revealing the thick bulge in his pants.

"Do I feel real to you?" He bent his head, his mouth curving in a sinister grin. "You want what I have?"

She nodded.

He kissed her mouth, harsh and harried. His tongue found hers, pressing and twirling, seeking out her passion. Tory reached down to feel the hardness of his ass. She ran her palms over his butt cheeks, pulling, urging him to thrust against her. The small dance began, a teasing thrust here, a torrid kiss across her cheek, clumsy, passionate and misplaced. His mouth tested her neck. She felt his teeth drag across her skin. He moved on to her ear.

"Let's take a bath," he said in a guttural moan. "I want to feel you slick and wet above me." His fingers caught in her panties, forcing them down. They fell atop her feet in a silky mass. He

stood back to pull her nightgown from her body. “Mm,” he moaned, appraising her nudity. “Go and run the water for us. Hot. I want it hot.”

She nodded, out of breath. Tory bypassed Zale and entered the large bathroom. She flicked on the light out of habit. The old style with its marble counters and tiles seemed dated and nostalgic. The last owner had put up a fanciful fabric curtain with gaudy burgundy and green print across it. She pushed the curtain aside, reached for the dull chrome handle and turned on the water. Behind her, the light switch ticked off.

Moonlight filled the room, casting an eerie silver glow on everything. “In the dark,” Zale explained, his voice smooth. “I like it that way. Mysterious.” Tory looked over her shoulder. His skin glowed in the gray light as it had in the first dream when he stood on the lawn watching the sky.

She rose and screwed the cap off a bottle of bubble bath. As it dribbled into the water, the scent of vanilla filled the room. He stepped up behind her to embrace her, teasing her with his hardness. His hand came between them. He cupped her butt, kneading it. “You liked what I did to you before?” He slipped his finger along the crack of her ass, reaching lower to find her tight, little hole. He ran the tip around her anus. The pressure still startled her.

“Yes,” she whispered. A thrill ran through her body. Tory held still, staring at the cream-colored tiles that lined the bath wall. The tub was an old clawed foot variety, worth quite a bit to antique collectors. He teased her, slowly slipping his fingertip inside. Then he withdrew. Her pussy contracted, moistening.

Zale changed his approach. His hands embraced her from behind to rove over her breasts. He circled her areolas in unison with slow strokes. Tory closed her eyes, letting out a pent up breath. Fingers pinched her nipples. He twisted them gently until she whimpered. A hot voice whispered against her ear, “Take off my pants.” Goosebumps spread over her arms.

She wriggled free and turned to face him. When she leaned in to steal a kiss from her nightmare, he turned his face, denying her. “Take off my pants first. I told you before, you must do what I say.”

She nodded, excited by his domination. Tory knelt before him, running her hands over his hips along the way. The fabric felt like brushed cotton. She unlaced the tie and tugged his clothing away. He wore nothing beneath. Staring at his erection, she froze, startled by his immense size.

“Stand,” he ordered.

She reached up to touch the tip of his penis, curious about the shadowed phallus. In the gray moonlight, it appeared huge. Her fingers graced the soft head. He let out a held breath.

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“Stand. I’ll show you how to touch me.” Zale’s lips parted in a waning smile. He swept his fingers over her hair.

Tory looked up, studying his pale face. The moonlight strained past the frosted glass in the single bathroom window, lighting his features. Wisps of curly, dark hair hung in his eyes. His smile widened, and she noticed his lengthy canines. She gasped. Stumbling backward, she tried to escape.

“Get back here,” he said in a hoarse voice.

She skittered like a forlorn crab trying to escape a predator. Her arms and legs shook as fear bit into her nerves. “Get away,” she whispered.

His fluid movements set him atop her with incomprehensible speed. Zale hauled her up, pinned her arms high against the cold tile wall and held her. Mist rose up from the hot water, hazing the air in the moonlit room. “It’s only a dream. A dream, Victoria. You said yourself, I’m not real.” He nipped at her mouth, his teeth flashing. “What is there to fear from a dream?”

He kissed away her frightened breathing, his lips warmer this night than the one before. Their skin touched, her breasts heaving against his muscular chest. His dick slid against her pubic mound, thick and tempting. She parted her lips and let him delve deeper with his tongue. The firm hold he kept over her wrists slackened.

“A dream,” he said, parting from their kiss. “Your dream. Is this what you want?”

She swallowed and pursed her lips as she stared into his eyes. “M—my dream.” Tory stole a small kiss against his chin. “They are never mine. I only have nightmares.”

His eyebrows furrowed, two slanted black lines over a porcelain face. “What do you dream of?” He placed his arm over her shoulder and led her to the bath. “Tell me.”

“Bad things. Memories...” She glanced at the water. “It’s high enough.”

“Yes, yes it is.” His fingers rode down her arm until he held her hand with a firm grip. He bent over and shut off the water. “Tell me what you dream of.” He lifted her and stepped into the tub. Zale sighed as he eased in.

“I—I dream of an old lover.”

He sank to his knees, slinking into the hot water. Bubbles foamed over their skin as he laid back, drawing Tory across his body. “And this is a nightmare? To dream of an old lover?”

“You’re my dream,” she whispered. “I’d think you know what else goes on in my mind.” She rested her cheek against his chest, letting the tension melt into the heat. His right hand traced her spine up and down.

“Not all dreams are the same.” He nudged her with his dick. “Sit up and touch me. Do it the way I tell you.”

Tory sat back between his parted legs, staring down at his shadowed face. The bubbles made a fizzing sound as they popped. He grasped her hand and forced it to his abdomen.

“Gently,” he ordered. “Like you’re touching yourself. Not hard. I like a soft caress.”

Her fingers passed over the wet curls of his pubic hair. She looked down, but the frothy bubbles, gray in the dim light from the moon, revealed nothing of the treasure beneath. His cock moved when she held the tip.

Zale let go of her hand. “Trace it. Explore.”

Excited by his request, she ran two fingers over the slit on its head. Down she ventured, touching the ridge around it, circling the sensitive skin and testing the thick shaft. She felt every vein, every variation in the muscle all the way to the end where his penis met his body. He moaned, his eyes closed, and his face froze in a transfixed display of bliss. She reached lower, curious about his balls. She cupped them and rolled his soft sac in her palm.

“Yesss,” he hissed. “That’s good.”

His moan of delight turned her on. She’d never held a man like this. Tory was curious about what touching him would do, how it would make him feel. She fondled Zale until he told her to stop. “Lower,” he ordered, his voice serene. “Play with the empty patch behind my balls.”

She thought it might tickle him, that he’d buck away or laugh at her efforts. He simply sighed and twisted a bit to adjust. She touched him in the sensitive spot and continued until he asked her to straddle him. “You’re a selfish dream,” she said.

He opened his eyes, one brow rising. “Am I?”

“So far, yes. You care only for your own release.” She took her position above him, the tub cramped and small for both bodies. His dick stood at attention, the tip at her clit. It was difficult to fight the urge to thrust down. She was wet from the water and slick from thinking of him.

“Take me inside you.” He grabbed her hips, forcing her down. His cock bumped along her wet labia and found purchase, catching at her entrance. With a swift tug, he penetrated her. “We are responsible for our own orgasms. I tell you what I want, and you do it. That’s the way this dream works.”

“Oh?” She leaned down to kiss his lips. His dick filled her, tight and thick. She liked the sensation of him buried so deep. With both hands, he held her ass so she couldn’t move. “I think this is my dream, and I should get what I want.”

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“And what is that? What do you want me to do to you?” He nipped her chin. His teeth grazed the skin, too sharp to be human.

“I want you to hold me all night, to be my only dream. Make the others stop.” She stared into his eyes, serious about her request.

Inside her body, he tensed his cock. The length of it moved. A thin smile parted his lips. “Make me cum inside you now, and I’ll do that. I’ll hold you every night for all eternity. If you have nightmares, I’ll wake you and kiss you until they go away.” He pulled at her body in a jerk.

Tory let out a drawn breath. “It’s a deal then.” She kissed his mouth hard, so roughly that his teeth nipped her tongue. Blood lingered in their mixing saliva. She started to ride him, thrusting up and down, her breasts sliding across his wet chest. The pace quickened. Tory rose up, crashing against his rigid length. He clung to her, a desperate expression lighting his eyes. His fingers bit into her soft butt cheeks as she leaned back, still pumping. She reached behind her, past his balls to stroke his perineum.

Zale came in a burst of shivers. He choked out a harsh gasp, slammed up as she slammed down, and his dick twitched inside her as he released his seed. Tory remained still, watching with delight as he groaned. “Deal,” he moaned. “Let me taste you.”

She leaned down against his chest, the softening pulse of his dick still buried between her legs. He kissed her mouth, her cheek, and moved on to her neck, straining to reach a tender place. He bit her in a teasing fashion, nipping, twisting a catch of her skin between his teeth.

She clutched his head, her fingers tangled in his thick hair. Zale bit harder, the tips of those nightmarish fangs breaking her skin. She whimpered from the shock and held still. He withdrew and sucked at the wound, drinking away the pain. Lightheaded and unsatisfied, she rubbed her body into his, urging her own climax. He responded with light thrusts from beneath, his fingers clenching against her ass. The gentle rocking eased her, sent her into a swooning, hypnotic state. Even as she grew faint and the rhythm of a slow orgasm caused her to buck, he drew blood from her. She knew what he was doing, but there was nothing to fear. *None of this is real.*

Tory moaned. Her soft voice echoed in the small room. She blinked a few times, trying to stay awake, but the darkness consumed her dream, and she drifted into the place of sleep where no thoughts stir, a black void.

Chapter Four: Daylight

Her alarm kept going off. She slapped at it until she managed to hit the snooze button. Tory rolled on her back and opened her eyes a crack. The bed was warm, comfortable, and only moments ago, she swore she'd felt her nightmare's strong arms wrapped around her body. Zale brought her reprieve from the usual dreams of Jake. She didn't like to think of her ex-boyfriend. Everything about him was wrong. All her life she'd picked men that had a dark secret or a shady past.

Aching and unwilling, she rolled out of the bed. Tory stretched her arms high, arching her back like a cat. Her panties were missing. She turned back and rifled through the bedsheets to find them balled at the foot of the bed. Her pussy felt wet, a little sore, and she guessed she'd been masturbating in her sleep. "Great. Just great. I'm turning into a man." She tossed the panties into the hamper, made her bed, and picked out clothes for the day.

Showered and dressed, she ran down the steps of the house, rounded the corner and stared at her pick-up. Her admirer had come in the night once more. Two roses were pinned beneath her windshield wiper. She glanced around, a little worried now. No one should be out here wandering around the property. She freed them, tossed both onto the bench seat next to the wilted one and frowned. "Maybe I better get a dog."

As she drove into town, she wondered why she felt so tired. Her neck ached, her inner thighs pained her as if she'd gone to the gym and done squats. Her thoughts turned to the dream she'd had, and immediately, she went wet. The man that ravaged her in her sleep made her horny, that was for sure. "Too bad he's not real."

She started the engine and drove along the hilly road, thinking of Zale. Tory finally pulled in to Mirabelle's Bookstore lot. She touched up her lipstick in the rearview mirror. She smiled, checked her teeth, and shrugged. "A little extra money won't hurt. Besides, Tory, you really need to make some friends around here."

The sweet smell of new books wafted around the old building. She liked the store from the first moment she'd come inside, two weeks prior. Tory hurried to the back to find the time clock.

In the Moon's Light

Waiting by the register, she found Mrs. Pellings, the owner, a small woman, bordering on being a midget. Her hair was cut in a butch-like fashion and her frilly pink dress contradicted it. She pushed her wire frame glasses higher on her nose and peered up at Tory. "You're three minutes late." Her red lips formed a tight line.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Pellings. I overslept. I was up late studying and I..."

She wagged a finger. "No excuses. Don't do it again, or I'll have to let you go."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"You know what to do. I told you last time. The books in the back, I want them catalogued and shelved. The paperwork is on the table by the boxes." She narrowed her gray eyes. "And don't cut yourself with the box knife. The last one I hired was an idiot. He butchered his hand the first day, and I had to pay worker's comp." She shook her head. "The fool."

"I'll be careful," Tory answered. She watched Mrs. Pellings amble away. She only had to work for three hours, but by the time her shift ended, she was exhausted. Zale kept entering her thoughts, something hot and exciting compared to shelving almanacs and planting guides. Lindenborough was a small community mostly made up of farms. The usual patrons were farmers. Tory broke down the last box and set it in the recycle bin. She punched out and found her boss.

"Mrs. Pellings, do you know where the local pound is? I'm thinking of getting a watchdog."

The little woman rubbed at her chin. "That's a fine idea. That Gravari place is haunted, you know."

"Oh? I hadn't heard." Victoria fidgeted, sorry to have asked anything from the strange, older lady. She was eccentric to be sure, but that she believe in ghosts surprised Tory.

"Oh yes. It happened several generations back. The Gravari heir went off into the swamps after he fought with his father. They say he was a wild thing, a womanizer that carried on with the whores and the widows in town." She quirked a bushy, gray brow.

"The father was a womanizer?" Tory didn't care much for gossip, and to say such things about people long dead bordered on ridiculous.

"No, dear!" Mrs. Pellings frowned. "The heir. The son! Now what was his name?" She shuffled her feet, her mind turning.

"I don't believe in ghosts, Mrs. Pellings. Should I look up the pound in the phone book?"

Her face contorted with impatience. "No!" She clenched her fists and let out an exasperated sigh. She obviously wanted to tell a ghost story. "The dog pound is on down the way by the Lehman's place on Main."

“Oh, I know where that is. Thank you, Mrs. Pellings. I’ll see you on Wednesday.” As Tory took her leave, a cold feeling crept up her spine. The bell at the front of the store jingled. A patron entered. She glanced at the tall man that approached, her memories seeping in, striking fear into her consciousness. *It’s not him. It’s not him. He’s in jail, in Kentucky...*

The man waved at Mrs. Pellings. “You got them catalogs yet?” He had a thin crop of blond hair atop his head. His face was squared, like a badly molded G.I. Joe action figure. He wore overalls and a stained white t-shirt.

Jake would never wear that. Tory forced a smile and left.

* * * *

She found the local pound, a run-down portable building with cages in the yard behind it. Dogs howled and barked, their voices echoing when she entered the office. A teen looked up from her romance novel, smiled and nodded toward the open door that led to the rear kennels. “You can go on in. Lemme know if you see anything you want.”

Tory walked slowly, her heart still beating fast over the man in the bookstore. Jake haunted her dreams, and often she thought she saw him in other people. She had to remind herself that he’d been caught. The trial was scheduled in two weeks and her lawyer had assured her that she needn’t appear. What he’d done didn’t concern her.

She ran her fingers along the chain link fence, hardly noticing the dogs. When she reached the last cage, she stopped. Anxiety gripped her, old nerves and fear rising like bile. “I have to put it behind me,” she murmured to herself.

A cold, wet nose pressed through the fence and touched her knee. The dog snuffled out a heavy breath and whined. Startled, Tory noticed him. She took a step back. He looked half German Shepherd and half...wolf. His eyes were two icy, blue-white orbs and they fixated on her. His body was lean, and the animal looked intimidating. She swallowed.

“Hi, puppy.” She bent down and studied him. The dog wagged a bushy tail and turned his head to the side. “What’s your name?” She glanced at the info sheet tacked to his clipboard. It read: Rex, neutered, turned in by owner. Dislikes other dogs.

She pushed her fingers through the cage and the dog sniffed. He licked once and wagged his tail hard.

“You want to come home with me, boy?” Tory stood up and memorized the number on his info sheet. She hurried back to the counter. “I want number forty-six.” The girl glanced up and

nodded. Wordless, she produced a clipboard and set it down. Tory started the adoption paperwork. The teen popped her gum and went back to her book.

"Do you know why his owner turned him in?" Tory signed her name and passed the paperwork across the counter.

"Nope. I only work on the weekdays before and after school." She shrugged. "He came in on Sunday. He don't like other dogs. You saw that, right?"

Tory nodded. "I don't have any other dogs."

"That works then." The girl shrugged and took Tory's money. She counted slowly and placed it in a beat up register. "You get a leash and a goodie bag." She smiled and plopped a plastic bag on the counter. "I'll go get him for ya. He's a pretty one."

Tory was now the proud owner of a wolf mutt. He strained at the leash, half dragging her outside. She hurried to her truck, trying to get the passenger door unlocked. Rex jumped in, crushing the roses under his large, white paws. She shut the door and rounded the front. On the windshield, another rose waited, this one wet with drops of water. It had come from a flower shop; it was too perfect, unlike the others.

Worried, Tory scanned the gravel lot. No other cars were parked nearby. Eucalyptus trees lined the east side, obscuring the Lehman property. She thought she saw someone standing in the shadows near a tree trunk, but she couldn't be sure. Her cell phone rang. She jumped and fumbled in her purse for it.

She answered and forced her key into the lock. "Hello?"

"Is this Miss Greene? Victoria Greene?"

She turned the key, the cold feeling edging up her neck. Hairs rose as instincts and fear kicked in. "Yes, this is Tory—Victoria, I mean. Who is this?"

Rex leapt against the driver's side window, startling her. She jumped back, dropped her phone and cried out. "Shit!" The dog wagged his tail. He licked the window with long swipes of his pink tongue, leaving wet trails.

Tory scrambled for her phone, hoping she hadn't broken it. The little plastic device lay on its side, closed. She'd hung up on whoever had called. "Oh, damn." She grabbed it and opened the truck door. Glancing over her shoulder, she scanned the trees a final time. No shadowy figure loomed there. "I think I need a shrink." She pushed her new pet to his side of the cab and settled in, buckling her seatbelt and pressing the autolock button.

The phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Miss Greene?”

“Yes, sorry. I dropped my phone. We were disconnected.”

“I see. This is Detective Bergin from the Kentucky State Police. You remember me, don’t you?”

“Yes.” Tory couldn’t breathe. Something was wrong. Everything was wrong.

“Well, I’m calling to inform you that Jacob Ballard has escaped our custody.”

“Wh-wh-what do you mean? No! He was extradited. He’s in jail!”

“He managed to escape, Miss Greene. Now, I can’t go into details. I just thought you should know. If you come into contact with him, if he calls you or anything like that, you call 911. Understand?”

She nodded and remembered he couldn’t see her. “Yes. Of course, yes.” Rex nuzzled her thigh. Tory looked down at the dog, glad she’d gotten him. “Can you tell me when he escaped?”

“Three days ago. Most criminals don’t get far, Miss Greene. I assure you we’re looking for him. It’s doubtful he’s crossed the state lines. But...” He cleared his throat in a series of coughing gags. “Sometime men like this try to find someone they trust. He might try to find you.”

“All right, Detective. I’ll be careful. I’ll let the local police know if anything happens.”

She slipped her phone back into her purse and closed her eyes. “This can’t be happening.” Tory laid her head against the steering wheel and cried. Rex snuffled at her cheeks, whined, and forced his big face into her lap. The scent of the crushed roses permeated the air, musky and sweet.

Chapter Five: Dreams

Something smelled different. Zale breathed in the air inside his father's old house. It was a bitter stench, like wet dog. He walked in slowly, the dark and shadows eerie to him this night. The door closed behind him, locking as he willed it to do. He stared at the dust-cloth covered furniture, wondering if anything remained from his family's possessions. He doubted it. The last caretaker had redecorated with a country flair. He didn't care for such worldly possessions in his little basement chamber, just the necessities.

Lurking up the stairs, he noticed the scent became stronger. He eased across the landing and peered into his old bedroom. A pair of pale eyes caught his, and a low growl rumbled in the beast's throat. The dog sat atop the bed, ears pricked, eyes wide and fixed.

A dog? Why would she get a dog? Zale crinkled his nose, remembering his father's Irish Wolfhounds, ugly, trompy things that barked at every stray sound. This animal was not one of those. It looked like a wolf.

"Victoria?" he called in a soft voice. He reached out with his mind, a trick he rarely enjoyed. He slipped into her slumbering thoughts. Her dream overwhelmed him in vivid color. A man stood over her, his chunky face stern, unyielding. He glared with malice. Sunlight shined off his bald head in the nightmare as he reached for her. Victoria ran, racing across a wide hall, desperate to escape...

The dog jumped down, his tail lowered. He stalked Zale, one tiny, guarded step at a time.

Frozen in the mind bond, Zale tried to sever the tie he'd made. He called to her in her dream, *Wake up. I'm here. Victoria!*

She kept running. Her scream echoed in the hall as the man chased her. Swept up in her emotions, the icy touch of fear itched along Zale's spine. He took a step backward. Sweat broke out on his forehead and he swiped at it, slicking his hands with the bloodstained fluid.

The growl deepened.

“Victoria!” he shouted. He didn’t want to startle her awake, but he couldn’t let go of her nightmare. It swindled its way into his mind so much that he felt the man chasing him, the ache of hopelessness that he could never escape, could never get away from...

“Jake!” She sat up. He glimpsed her face, pained with desperation. His gaze angled lower. She wore nothing this night. The moonlight glowed against her skin. “Go away!”

The dog lunged.

The grip of Victoria’s nightmare released Zale. He fell backward. Jaws clamped onto his throat, tight, unrelenting, vibrating with the dog’s agitated voice. He hadn’t barked.

He gripped the animal’s neck, his instinct to snap it to the side.

“No!” Her voice silenced the dog. Its tagless collar rose against its throat. Victoria jerked him backward. She held the beast there, her eyes wide with concern. “Zale?” She dragged her pet a few steps farther. The dog growled once more, hacked out a hideous gasp and snorted.

“You were dreaming of a man.” The statement ought to hold some weight with her, he hoped. “You were running from him. Why?” He reached up and drew his finger across his fang, hiding the action between his lips. Dabbing the healing droplets of blood across the bite marks he felt on his throat, he hoped she wouldn’t see his wounds in the darkness before he healed them.

“I always dream of him, unless...” She guided the wolf-dog toward the stairs. “Unless I dream of you.”

“Put the dog in the garden.” He licked his lips. Staring at her shadowed breasts in the moonlight turned him on. He wanted her tonight, every night for as long as he could keep from falling prey to his urges. The dog would have to go. She moved down the stairs like a sleepwalker. The dog followed, albeit unwillingly. Zale listened to her unlock the door to the garden. She had to coax him, but the beast finally went out.

Anxious, Zale sped down the stairwell in silence. He met Victoria just as she turned from the lock. “You’re naked for me,” he whispered, one brow rising.

“Why is my dog in my dream?” She regarded him with the gaze of a disbeliever. With both hands, she reached up to touch his face. “And why are you so cold? So pale? What madness makes my mind create these things?” Her eyes welled with tears.

He wanted to tell her the truth, to explain what he was, that he was no dream at all, but a real being. The overwhelming desire to confess pressed at him so much that he kissed her to stifle his need to speak. Anxious to rid her of her fear, he held her body tight, crushing her backward against

the door. Every soft curve, every sensation of heat she put off eased into him. This time, he didn't want to wait. He wanted his taste now.

She balked at first as his kiss deepened. Her breathing caught. She curled her fingers in his hair, her nails grazing his scalp. Her curious tongue sought out the sharpness of his teeth. He turned his head.

"What are you?" she asked, her voice throaty.

"You know what I am." He lowered his lips to her neck. "I'm your nightmare." Her pulse thrummed next to his mouth, teasing, tempting. He hesitated, wondering how long he could stave off the urge to feed. He traced the sides of her body with both hands, sweeping his fingers over her smooth skin. *Zale nibbled. Just a taste, a small amount...* Her heartbeat sounded in his ears. Her skin smelled clean, sweet like lavender. He bit and drank in her essence. *I wish I could be lost in her, that this moment would never end*, he mused. The beating slowed to a calmer state.

Fingers found a path into his pants. She held his ass. The light moan that passed through her throat made him falter. Drawing blood from his tongue, he sealed her wound. "Are you all right?"

"Mm hmm." She slumped against him.

You'll kill her. You kill everyone you touch. It's your nature. As soon as you were born to this lifeless death, you destroyed. You killed your maker. This one is no different.

"Be silent." The voice in his head irritated him. He lifted Victoria and carried her back up the stairs. "She's not dead," he said to himself. Her eyes appeared glassy. Her lashes hung over her pupils, and she swayed as he walked. Crossing the threshold into his room, her room, he heard her wolf-dog growling out in the garden. Zale placed his prize across the bedsheets. He climbed in beside her and sidled as close as he could. He shimmied his pants off so they could lie skin to skin.

Her blood flowed through him, and her heat comforted his loneliness. As he touched his lips to hers, he wished he were not a vampire. His whole life had been a series of mishaps, frivolous chases that led to more chases. Woman after woman he'd bedded right under his father's nose. He guessed it had something to do with his mother, his need for her to acknowledge him. She never did.

"Zale?" Victoria began. "I want you to be with me in the morning. I want you to stay. He's coming for me. If you stay, maybe he won't find me."

"Why is he looking for you?" He knew she meant the man in her nightmare.

"He thinks I love him. Jake killed them. He killed five. It was only a matter of time before—"

“Who is he?”

“He was my boyfriend. We were engaged to be married next month.” She closed her eyes. Her breathing steadied until she snored softly, obviously weakened and weary from the loss of blood.

“I should have waited,” he whispered against her lips, hungry to taste them. “Now I’ve gone and spoiled the night.” Zale stroked her hair, humming to himself. “Don’t worry, Victoria. If he shows his face around my house, I’ll kill him for you.” He chuckled, tangling his legs in hers. “I’ll make a meal of it.”

The night wore on and she slept, leaving him alone with his thoughts. He didn’t shiver with anxiety or long for the dreamless sleep he often slipped into after feeding. Zale didn’t understand the odd peace he felt. He knew only that he wanted to remain in her bed, beside her.

Outside, the dog was silent. Zale listened to the lonely song of the same sad bird, calling for a mate at the wrong hour. “I have mine,” he whispered.

Victoria stirred, mumbling in her sleep. “Did you bring me the roses?”

His brows furrowed. He ran his lips along her silken ones, hoping she’d wake. “You want roses? I’ll bring you anything you desire.” He traced her cheek. Her eyes were rolling behind her closed lids. He didn’t want to peek into her mind a second time. It was not a trick he liked. Too many variables, and if he could see inside her thoughts, he wondered if she could see his. He didn’t want anyone to know him that well.

“On my truck...in the morning...”

“Mm. I’ll leave you dozens of roses, any color you ask for.” He kissed her forehead and closed his eyes, basking in the warmth her body put off. Zale let his mind wander. He drifted between sleeping and waking. It felt heavenly to be close to someone. The urge to feed hadn’t returned.

Out in the night, the wolf-dog growled louder. It didn’t bark, but Zale heard it shuffling around in something, probably the garbage cans. *I’ll tell her she has to get rid of it. I don’t want that animal attacking me again.* He nodded to himself, satisfied.

The night waned and Zale awoke. Angry for having fallen asleep, he sat up and ran a hand through his thick hair. Victoria reached for him, and her arm hit the pillow. Twilight lit the window behind the sheer curtains. He stared at it, longing to watch, to walk about in the day. He’d tried once and had been burned for it. Years passed before the scars healed over. His hunger had pained him then. His body needed more blood than usual to sustain him through the healing. He licked his lips,

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remembering the easy pickings, the migrant workers that waited on the corner of Main and Chelsea in a band, so much like a herd of cattle. They returned there every morning so the farmers could load them up to pick crops in the field. They came early, two hours before dawn.

The wolf-dog let out an errant howl.

Zale twisted off the bed. He padded out of his old bedroom and down the stairs. "Might not have enough time to make it." The thought of crawling back into bed with Victoria made him hard. "Yeah. That'd be nice. Wake up next to a pile of gray ashes. No more nightmare, no more midnight fucks."

You're foul as the words that slither out of your mouth.

"Shut up." He hissed at the memory of his father's voice. "I'm not hurting anyone. I never was. I didn't ask for this."

Something crashed along the garden wall, followed by that incessant howling. It was too late, or rather, too early to investigate. Zale opened the door and stepped into the hazy light before dawn. His skin itched. He padded across the lawn toward his hidden chamber, willing the door to lock behind him.

Just as he stepped onto the shadowed side and opened the door that would lead him to his musty hiding place, he heard something different...a man's voice, low and garbled. He turned his gaze to the front of the house and made out the figure near Victoria's truck. His eyes narrowed, and he growled.

The sun lipped over the horizon. Zale squinted at the intruder, a man, tall and thick of build. The vampire couldn't make out full details because morning obscured his vision. He backed into the worn guest house, anxious and useless.

Chapter Six: Rex

Rex howled louder. Tory rolled in her sleep, fighting to open her eyes. She felt exhausted, like she hadn't slept all night. Worse, her body ached. She wore nothing and she couldn't remember letting the dog out, but obviously, he was out, howling at something, or...someone. She cracked her eyes open. The sunlight hurt. Groaning, she forced herself out of bed, pulling the sheet with her. "I have to get to class," she murmured.

Metal clanged, and something in the garden fell. She guessed it might be the little tin shed by the gate. "Aw God, that dog's gonna make a mess." She hurried down the stairs, grasping the banister in one hand. When she reached the landing, she stopped. The room spun. Tory blinked away the dizziness. "Whoa."

She edged to the porch door and leaned against it to peer outside. Her dog hung over the wall by his forepaws, his ice blue eyes intent on something at the front of the house. He howled and snarled, his white teeth flashing.

Tory turned her attention to where Rex watched. She squinted. All she could make out was the bed of her truck. "He's out there," she whispered. Fear slipped across her skin in a cold rush, the same fear she felt in her dreams, the same she felt when she found out what Jake had done. She dropped to the floor, terrified. Crawling toward the kitchen, she stared at the little, red light blinking on her cell phone. Every muscle in her body tensed with fear and fatigue. She reached the tiled floor, slumped on one side and fought to keep her eyes open.

"Have to ca..." She reached for the charger cord and closed her eyes, the weariness too strong.

* * * *

Tory awoke on the kitchen floor. The old mansion was silent. Rex was silent. She grasped the cabinet knobs and pulled herself up. The sheet fell away. Standing naked, she braced herself, clutching the counter. Her legs shook. She stared down at her cell phone. 12:01. "Missed accounting," she muttered.

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"I think I need to see a doctor." She pulled herself along the counter to the fridge, opened it, and lugged out a quart of orange juice. Tory sank to her knees and unscrewed the cap, thirsty. Drinking back the tart liquid, she wondered if the dog howling had been part of another nightmare. Breakfast on the kitchen floor consisted of bread and jam, and half the orange juice. Still shaky, she managed to walk up the stairs to the bathroom. She sat in the tub while the shower pounded down on her, feeling drained.

After she managed to get up the energy to get dressed, she sat on the edge of the bed and combed out her long hair in slow strokes. Her dream kept flashing through her mind, the dog, Zale, his lips against her mouth, against her neck. She set the comb down and touched her skin, just above her jugular. The same lingering soreness made her flinch. *Is this real?*

Tory made her way down the stairs and unlocked the door that led to the porch. She hurried to the garden gate and let Rex out. He bolted across the slats and bounded around the corner of the house.

Following cautiously, Tory peered around the corner at her truck. Rex ran circles about the vehicle, sniffing the earth, his tail down. He stopped on the driver's side, jumped up, his huge paws slapping against the door, and peered inside the window.

Tory glanced at the windshield where, sure enough, roses waited for her. "Shit," she whispered. Goosebumps rose on her skin. She turned her head, expecting someone to be lurking nearby, and her gaze settled on the old guesthouse. She patted her leg, and the dog came bounding toward her. "Come on, boy."

The sun had warmed the air. Shadows clung to the high willows that grounded the lines of the property. The guesthouse appeared ancient, run down. She wondered how it stood at all, given its state. Tory reached the door and turned the little brass handle. It squeaked and caught, but didn't open. She groaned. "This is ridiculous. There's no one in here." She checked her watch. "Half an hour 'til marketing."

She took Rex by his collar and put him back in the garden. Securing the gate, and still uneasy, she strode to her truck, removed the roses and tossed them with the others inside. No note, no hint at who they might be from. She sped out of the old Gravari mansion and headed on down the road, anxious to get near civilization.

* * * *

Marketing class normally interested her, but today, she sat in the back, leaned her chin on her arms, and during the video, she battled to keep her eyes open. The words blurred together. The

image faded, and Tory slipped into dreams. The place she emerged in appeared to be a gray world, a long hall with the only light filtering in through the open doors that dotted its length. Someone was coming. She heard his footsteps echoing behind her. Tory glanced over her shoulder. His shadow loomed where the hall turned.

“Zale?” she murmured, hopeful. “Is that you?”

The man stopped at the end of the hall, his face blurred, but his shape recognizable. Jake was a big man, tall and muscular. She’d been attracted to that, the fact that he looked dangerous. In their relationship, he’d never treated her wrong. He was distant and quiet at times, but loving. The scar on his forehead stood out in a red line as he approached. She stared at it, a gash sliced across his face by one of his victims. Jake raped and killed five women...five was all they could prove.

She spun on her heels and started to run, realizing her feet were bare. Tory sprinted past hall after empty hall, wondering if this was the math building, or art. They looked the same in reality and in her nightmares. She lost her footing as she turned to run up the stairs. Behind her, he gained, his footfalls a dangerous, pounding beat.

“You’ll never get away from me!”

She crawled up the steps, bumping her knees on their sharp edges. Tory scrambled and clawed, but couldn’t get up fast enough. His meaty hand clenched around her upper arm, and he pulled her backward.

“You’re mine, Tory!” He turned her around, and she stared up into his face. Blood spattered his cheeks and his eyes were wide with frenzied rage. “Mine! Forever!”

She screamed and woke.

Everyone in the class stared at her. The lights came on, and Mr. McNeary strode across the row. “Ms. Greene, are you all right?” His kind gaze swept over her as he appraised her state. “You look ill.”

She ran a hand through her hair. Heat rose in her cheeks as she flushed with embarrassment. “I’m so sorry. I dozed off and had a bad dream. I apologize.” She gathered her books up and clutched them to her chest. “I—I haven’t been sleeping well.”

“Please, Ms. Greene, go home and rest. You have the assignment already.”

She edged along the row, avoiding her classmates’ piercing stares of curiosity. Tory opened the door and stood in the empty hall. It could have been the hall in her dream save the iridescent lights above. She closed her eyes, breathed in and out, steadying herself. “It was just a dream, just a dream.”

In the Moon's Light

Footsteps echoed at the other end of the hall. The scraping sound of wheels followed. She glanced up and watched a janitor tugging a mop and bucket at the far end of the building, his back to her. His body looked just like Jake's. Tory swallowed the huge lump in her throat, turned and walked as slow as she dared toward the exit, fearful of drawing the man's attention.

Safe in the cab of her truck, she stared at her face in the rear view mirror. Her eyes were bloodshot with dark circles beneath them, and her skin appeared pale. "God, I look so tired." She left school and headed for home, having nowhere else to go.

Late afternoon tinged the sky with hints of clouds. Rain would come, and Tory dreaded the power going out. She drove slow, her head nodding every so often as she tried to keep her attention on the road. "Who's leaving me roses?" she asked herself, trying to figure it out.

There were a few men in her accounting class, Marcus, maybe Rob, or that chunky guy whose name she didn't know. "They don't know where I live, though." She tried to think if anyone had come into the bookstore. She tended to keep to herself, to stock the books and mind her own business.

Tory mulled over the possibilities and worried if it might be Jake. Everything pointed to him. She pulled into the drive of the Gravari mansion and stared up at the second level balcony. The wood needed work. White paint peeled here and there. It was still a beautiful house, one she'd never be able to afford in her lifetime. When she got out of the truck, she called to her dog.

She came around the side of the house to find the garden gate swinging open on its hinges. "Rex?" Cautious, she took a few steps and tried to see if anyone was lurking in the shadows of the overgrown hedges.

No one waited to attack her. Muddied dog prints crossed the porch in overlapping spots as if the dog had been pacing. Tory went into the garden and righted the overturned trash cans, replaced the torn up bags and garbage and dragged them to the side by the porch. "Rex? Rex!" She drew her thumb and index finger between her teeth and whistled.

The dog didn't answer.

She stared at the guesthouse, wondering if there was anything inside, old furniture or old books, maybe. She left the porch and crossed the lawn, the haunting image of Zale staring at the moon weighing on her weary mind. Her body tingled with desire over the thought of him. She paused at the worn door to the shabby structure and stared at the claw marks across its surface. Rex had been there. He'd dug a hole in the ground and muddy paw prints marked the hazed window that faced the road.

Tory reached up and tried the doorknob. Just as it had that morning, it clicked. She sighed and turned hard. Metal grated inside the antique knob, and the door opened.

Chapter Seven: Beast

Night filtered into his senses, cold, muggy. Zale breathed deep and tasted the air. *Mmm, I can smell her already.* He rolled on his side, dragging the cover with him and stared at his journal on the bedside table. Licking his lips, he thought of Victoria, of her soft, warm body and the taste of her blood. His body ached for it. It wasn't hunger like he'd felt when he was human, but something worse, an intense longing, a thirst that could never be quenched...an addiction.

This time, you'll kill her. You can no more control yourself as you could when you were alive. You can't hold back. You never could.

"Shut up," he muttered. Rolling out of bed, he reached for a clean pair of pants on the lintel by the bookshelf. He'd often wondered what the purpose of this room was before he found it. He guessed that Rhoda, his father's housekeeper, must've kept someone down here, a lover perhaps.

Groaning, he pulled on his pants and found the old silver brush to comb through his thick hair. He'd tried cutting it, attempting to fit in better with the conservative farm folk that lived in the town, but it only grew back, defying him as he slept and returning him to the physical state he was in the night he'd been made.

The scent of Victoria's perfume tortured him. He marched up the steps to the sliding door, opened it and pushed back the shelf that disguised his hiding place. He sniffed and frowned. "That damn dog was here." Moonlight danced through the dirty window, illuminating the muddied paw prints and the disarray that beast had made of an old loveseat. Clumps of cotton batting and fabric lay spread in an unsightly mess across the floor.

The door to the guesthouse thumped softly against the side of the house, wide open to the world. Zale's brows furrowed. He strode out into the night. Above him, the moon blazed down. Far in the distance, he heard Victoria's foul pet howling. "Stupid animal."

The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. Something wasn't right. The room did smell like her. She'd been here. It didn't make any sense for her to have left the door open, though. He grasped the knob, turning the metal to close it and realized the old lock had given out.

“I’ll have to punish her for that,” he whispered, a smile of delight curving his lips. “A spanking.”

The cursed dog howled out a sorrowful cry somewhere in the woods. Zale crossed the lawn, glad the animal wouldn’t be interrupting his liaison tonight. The lights were off in the mansion. He imagined she must be asleep. Zale liked waking her. “Mmm, I’ll slide into her bed and wake her with my mouth.” His body livened with the delicious implications. He padded barefoot across the porch and reached out for the door, not really paying attention until he realized the lock didn’t require mental picking. This door stood ajar as well, though only slightly. He pushed it open and peered inside.

The stale air reeked of roses. Remembering what she’d said about someone leaving flowers for her, he made his way inside, wary. Zale reached out with his mind, seeking hers, a snippet of her consciousness just to reassure himself. He feared being trapped in one of her nightmares a second time. When no warmth of union encircled his thoughts, he growled. “Where is she?”

He glanced at the stairs, but knew Victoria wasn’t in the house at all. Retreating to the outdoors, he marched across the porch and glared at her truck, parked in its usual place. The moonlight revealed a battered rose tacked beneath her windshield wiper. “This isn’t funny.” He clenched his fists and gritted his teeth.

Yowling broke out in the woods, more frantic now. “I’ll kill that mutt.” Zale closed his eyes, his anger at not getting what he desired piquing. He reached inside for the other being, the part of him that grew inside when he’d been tainted with vampire blood. The creature stirred and stretched as if it could crack its old bones and wake. He felt it gnawing on the wall he kept up against its control.

I only want your wings, you little monster. That’s all.

Something clicked in the back of his mind. His skin itched on his naked back, and he felt the monster’s will forcing bones and flesh to grow, to change. Warm blood slicked his skin when the tips of his wings emerged. They were sleek and wet, but he spread them wide and fanned out their shape to catch the air. A byproduct of such a transformation was that his nails elongated into harsh, black claws. His fangs lengthened, and his thirst became a pounding beat just behind his eyes...a thrum like a human’s heart...a sound he needed to silence.

Oh, you’ll murder her this night. Like this, you are more demon than man.

In the Moon's Light

He groaned at his father's haunting voice. It was times like these that made him think he might have a mental disorder. Maybe, after living so long all alone and feeding off the beings he once belonged to, he'd just gone insane, crazy like his mother, hearing her little voices all the time.

"Be quiet," he murmured. "Stop talking to me. You're dead." Just speaking to the voice made him shiver. His mother would talk to them for hours on end, sometimes whining, and at other times, having heated debates over the tea or the shade of the curtains.

Aggravated with himself, Zale sprinted toward the forest, hungry and yearning to find his mate. *She is mine and has been since the moment I took her.* He leapt into the air, his bat-like wings billowing and catching the currents. Soon he lifted high above the old estate, circling, seeking, hunting for the woman who had been taken from him. The beat pounded behind his eyes, hammering his brain, trying to throttle away his coherent thoughts and make him seek blood.

His hearing strengthened. He reached out wide with his mind, fighting the hold the beast within tried to take. Another howl guided him across the field behind the mansion, over the night-blackened treetops. He breathed in the scent of the swamp, the earthy odor of decay and flourishing vegetation.

Then he felt her. Victoria was dreaming. His mind clamped around hers. His wings faltered and reshaped themselves as he let the beast take control of his body and he, in turn, focused on Victoria.

"Wake up." He reached for her in the nightmare, but she ran from him down some dream-like corridor where the lights flickered and strobed. "Victoria! Wake up. I need you."

Zale emerged in her mind, aware that his body moved somewhere in the night sky, controlled by the other being. He trusted the monster to stay alive and hunt her down by scent alone. After that, he knew he must fight to take back his body.

He glimpsed Victoria sprawled across the floor, struggling to rise. She looked over her shoulder and screamed. The fear in her voice chilled him. "It's me!" he shouted, angry that she didn't recognize him in her nightmare. The air in the hall buzzed with fear and foreboding, infusing itself into him. He fought it and failed. Racing toward her, he tried to catch his breath.

Victoria managed to rise. She ran alongside the hall, one hand reaching out for purchase when she stumbled. She righted herself and continued on.

"You're mine!" someone shouted, a man's voice, deep and commanding.

Zale turned and saw a stranger, his mouth an angry line, a bald man with a gash across his forehead, a scar still fresh and pink. The pursuer ran right through Zale's body, filling him with fury and possessiveness.

Faltering, the vampire halted. He felt too human in this nightmare, weak and unable to call on his preternatural strengths. "Victoria! It's a dream. Wake up! I have to find you!"

The connection severed itself. Zale's human consciousness snapped back like a taut rubber band into his shifted body. The beast growled and fought his soul's reentry. He pushed it down and steadied his flight. A flash of gray showed itself below in the underbrush and thick birch trees. Zale dipped down, following the wolf-mutt.

His feet hit the ground, crushing leaves as his claws dug into the moist loam. Furling his wings, he turned in an uneasy circle. He smelled blood in the air, fresh and hot...sweet. Zale licked his lips, feeling the wet length of his bestial tongue. It disgusted him to transform like this, but it empowered him as well. The cooler temperature in the woods glanced off his furred back. He walked with a hunch, the weight of his wings curving him over. He knew if Victoria saw him like this, she'd fear him.

The dog ran across the vampire's path, turned and skidded to a halt. It snarled, and its tail lowered to cover its belly. Hackles rose gray and angry across its back.

"Where is she?" Zale asked the animal. His voice sounded garbled, almost as menacing as the dog's growl. Zale took a step toward the dog and the wolf-mutt backed away. It snapped at the air, spun round and leapt into the bushes. Zale heard it running away toward the swamp...toward the graves.

He shook his head, the memory of visiting that place making him worry. He didn't like seeing his name on the headstone any more than he liked seeing his parents' names there. The graveyard reminded him of the night he'd been made, of the luring slut of a vampire wench that dragged him down to the ground and sucked him dry until the beating of his heart ceased and he lay there stuck between life and death, the stars twinkling at him with irony.

Charging through the underbrush, he followed the dog's scent trail. Bushes shushed and branches snapped as he passed. Victoria should not be out here in the darkness. No man should be leaving her flowers, and her annoying pet shouldn't be roaming free, howling and hunting in the night. He slashed his claws against tree trunks in his haste. The beast writhed inside him, and the thirst made him swallow over and over. He bit into his lower lip, drawing blood to suckle.

Zale broke through the edge of the forest and paused at the old wrought iron gate that circled his family's graveyard. A small, stone mausoleum stood in the center. Headstones stood, cold and forgotten, laced with ivy and casting eerie shadows across the ankle high grass. He saw the man

In the Moon's Light

from Victoria's nightmares, a burly fellow, his shaved head shining in the hazy light, his meaty arms crossed over his chest as he stared down at the earth.

No...not the earth...at Victoria. He has her! A crumpled shape lay at the man's feet, the shadow of an angel's statue obscuring her from Zale's view, but he knew it was her. She'd been tossed over his empty grave as Fate's nasty reminder that he deserved no less for all he'd done in his long life.

The man blabbered into the darkness, as if he talked to her. From the distance that separated them, Zale recognized insanity. He knew the familiar chatter of madness and self-importance. This was Jake, the old lover she spoke of. This man was his enemy, threatening what he...loved? *Impossible. How can I love?* He looked down at his misshapen body and whimpered. *Such a creature is incapable of love.*

Chapter Eight: Jake

Tory's neck hurt when Jake grabbed her. He pulled her down the hazy dream steps as he had so many times before, so many, many times. She heard Zale's voice far behind, echoing in the college hall. Holding her breath, she focused on the warm feeling. Just the thought of him brought an ease, a calming tide that was not quite safety, but never the thick wave of terror she felt when she dreamt of Jake. "It's a dream," she told herself. "I have to wake up."

At once, her mind released her. She fell back against the pillows in the Gravari bedroom, the sheets cool against her sweat-stained skin. Caught in the throes of passion, she arched her back and let Zale nuzzle her inner thighs. She reached down to grasp his head, to feel the thick curls of his hair twining in her fingertips.

"You're mine," someone said, but it couldn't be Zale, for his tongue and lips were delving elsewhere. She shook at the heady ecstasy and closed her eyes in the dream.

"You knew I'd find you, didn't you? You don't believe all that shit they said."

She recognized Jake's voice and some part of her remembered being caught in that little guesthouse, the firm grip on her upper arm and the crazed look in Jake's eyes. She'd screamed then and he'd belted her across the cheek so hard she'd seen flashes of white.

Between her legs, she felt Zale nipping at her clit. He sucked it into his mouth, his unusual teeth grazing the tender skin. She was wet, always ready for him. Tory ground her hips down, urging him on.

The crickets sounded far too loud. Her back was clammy and itched. She scooted and held to Zale's temples even as another mouth pressed to her neck, slavering hot kisses over her cool skin.

"I'm cold," she muttered. "Make me hot..." She leaned up to receive the familiar mouth that tested hers. He kissed her hard, his firm tongue raking across hers, forcing its way deeper. Then he pulled away.

She opened her eyes, ready to beg for more, but pursed her lips.

"That's right, baby. Wake up. I'm back. I found you." Jake smiled at her with his sideways smirk that used to be so charming. He ran his thumb over her lower lip. "Hey, you shouldn't scream like you did. I had to smack you to make you shut up. Someone might've heard. We gotta be quiet, baby. So quiet like when we were in the parking lot at Jimmy's. You remember that, don't you?"

In the Moon's Light

Tory swallowed hard and nodded. “Wh—where are we?”

“Out in the woods. I missed your face. Oh babe, it’s nasty in jail. Those guys tried to fuck me, but you know your Jake. I beat the shit out of ’em. I’m your tough guy, huh? You love me, don’t you?” He leaned into her, parting her legs with his knee. Jake’s weight crushed away her breath.

“Yeah,” she mumbled. “My tough guy, always so strong...gonna protect me...” She winced when he touched her face. Her cheek felt half crusty, half wet.

“Cut you a little,” he breathed out in her face, his words diluted with obsessive passion. “You like it to hurt, don’t you? You want me to hurt you a little tonight? Not like before?”

She frowned, her vision blurring. It had to be another nightmare, but it seemed so real, so vivid.

His thick hand found its way into her panties. She wondered where the rest of her clothes were...how long she’d been lying here in the rain-dampened grass...how long she had left to live. His wide thumb slicked its way across her wet folds, teasing her.

“Say you want it, babe. You want to feel me inside you. Say it.” He glared at her, his eyes gray in the night, his face shadowed and leering.

She used to like it when he talked dirty, when he teased her, but not now, not after she knew what he’d done, what he was. Her body ached with weariness, and her cheek burned where he’d hit her. She recalled him toting her across his shoulder, her body swaying as he lumbered away from the guesthouse and from any chance of being discovered. Consciousness wavered, slipping her mind in and out. She blinked and he was Zale, his dark eyes brimming with passion. She wiped her eyes and he was Jake, a line of spittle glistening on his lower lip.

You’re mine... The voice in her head soothed her. *I’m here for you. Don’t be afraid.*

“Zale?” she cried in a soft tone. “Where are you?” Tory turned her head, scanning the darkness and the wavering shadows. “Make it stop...”

Above her, Jake growled like a feral animal. “Who are you talkin’ to, babe? Better not be seeing someone behind my back.” He slipped his finger up inside her pussy. She gasped and stared into his haunting eyes.

“Stop,” she whispered. “Let me go...you can’t...”

He lowered his angry mouth and smothered her voice. That old, familiar moan he did when he was horny echoed all around her. Tory turned her face, escaping his lusty kiss. Her gaze caught on a statue, timeworn and overgrown with moss and vines. Wings that once were white marble looked ashen in the dark. Etched on the headstone that the angel gripped, she glimpsed a name.

Tory squinted, trying to make out the letters even as Jake's mouth clamped down on her neck, sucking at the tender place on her skin where...

"Zale...Adelphos...Gravari," she read. Tory closed her eyes, and tears slipped down the sides of her face. The man she'd dreamt of lay buried beneath her. "I dreamed you..."

Jake's weight lifted. He was there one moment crushing into her, his wet tongue sliding along her skin, his fingers flooding her insides, knee teasing her inner thigh, and then, he wasn't. Jake shouted a slew of curses. Tory opened her eyes and sat up, scooting backward until she bumped into the headstone. The angel's wingtip bit into her shoulder. Jake came crashing down against the side of the little, stone building. He hit hard, grunted, and struggled to stand.

"What the fuck?" He looked from side to side and then directed his startled gaze at the *thing* that stood between him and her.

Tory drew her hands into her lap and her knees up. She stared at the creature's back, a demon straight from the depths of hell with matted fur across its back and spindly, dragon-like wings fanned wide. It lunged for Jake, its body contorted and claws flashing as it attacked. It wore pants like some mutant, half-formed, creature of darkness.

Her old boyfriend was better prepared this time. He jumped to the side and scrambled across the graveyard. "What the fuck are you?" he ranted. "Shit! Tory, come on!"

She realized Jake was trying to reach her, to save her from the thing. Standing, she grasped the angel's cold stone head and wavered. "Leave me alone!" she said, her voice tremulous. "Let it have me. I don't want to be with you. You sick fuck!"

The demon growled, a deep-throated sound that echoed through the empty night. It stepped forth, midnight eyes flashing over Tory's face. She heard its voice in her thoughts, twining and twisting in two opposing voices. *Trust me, Victoria.* Zale's misty voice soothed. Then another spoke, a gravelly sound like tires grating words over stones. *I'll kill you, drain every last drop of your precious blood and lick the wound clean...* It purred in her mind, a dangerous, animalistic sound.

"Zale?" She edged around the angel and stared at the monster. "My God, it's you. What—wh—what *are* you? What's happened to you?" She started to back up.

Jake rounded another gravestone and a rise of tall grass to get to her. She tried to dart out of his grasp, but he was too quick. His fingers latched onto her wrist. She slammed against his broad, muscular chest and heard the frantic beating of his heart. "You want her?" he taunted the demon. "Come take her from me. She's all yours if you let me go."

An arm locked around her neck, cutting off her air. Tory struggled and tried to break free.

In the Moon's Light

The demon turned its head to one side, looking so much like a curious dog that Tory might have laughed if she could breathe. It took a tentative step, its clawed foot slashing the high grass. "Give her to me," it said in the same grating voice it had spoken with in her mind. Its wings flicked back, folding until they were nothing more than two fat lines behind it.

Jake's already stifling hold grew tighter. Tory forced out a choked whimper. Her vision clouded. The thing moved faster, covering the distance between them, its arms raised, dagger-claws ready.

She couldn't feel her legs anymore. Numbness wore its way into her fingertips. Her nails dug into Jake's forearm, but the lack of air made her falter. Her hands fell limp at her sides. Her eyelids grew heavier.

Zale, she thought. *I'm dying*.

The world went black, and Tory lingered. She felt her neck twisting painfully. A crack resounded in her mind. Then she fell. Her body slapped against the cold earth. Her heart beat a few times in her ears and silenced.

She heard Jake dying in a rush of growls and tearing sounds. His deep voice boomed, anguished and desperate. Rex howled and she thought maybe, just maybe, he was nearby.

She dreamed of Zale, or at least she thought it was a dream. His chiseled face gaped down at her, his eyes welled with bloody tears, and his mouth turned down. Zale's sorrow pained her. She wanted to reach out and touch him, to hold him against her body.

He bent and kissed her cheek, his sharp teeth scratching their way to her neck. His mouth was hot and comforting. She watched the moon blur and widen, a beckoning light that called her to reach for it. She thought she heard her grandmother humming a lullaby. Heaven shimmered, a mirage of beauty and light just out of her reach. Tory surrendered to the pull on her soul that wanted nothing more than to be by her grandmother again, to hear her stories and her lilting, musical laughter.

Then Zale bit her and pulled at her blood, drawing her soul to remain. It hurt to feel the life draining from her body. Even as he suckled at her neck, she felt the wet heel of his hand sliding past her lips. The slick, coppery taste of blood dribbled on her tongue. Blood—tasting acidic and deathly, then warming her appetite, making her draw more, making her thirsty.

Beneath the moon's light, she felt her mind awakening. Her body that had begun to stiffen and lose its feeling reversed its take and came alive. Strength fed through her as she drank down

Zale's blood in hungry gulps. The dull pain in her broken neck righted itself, buzzing to a faded pins-and-needles sensation.

He withdrew, sitting beside her. A blood tear dribbled down his cheek and pattered on her bared breast. Tory reached up, drew her fingers across the red trail and wiped his face clean. She brought her fingers to her lips to taste the saltiness, but only the metallic flavor of his blood lingered on her tongue.

Jake lay to one side, his throat torn out. A dog...her dog gnawed on a chunk of flesh, his teeth scraping bone. His ice-colored eyes flickered on her. Pausing, he growled a warning, but made no move to leave his gory meal.

"I'm sorry for what I've done to you," Zale murmured. He drew her into his lap and held her against his chest. His skin was cold, but she realized, so was hers. Sounds multiplied, frogs croaking down in the swamp, crickets chirping ten times louder than before. The crunch and clack of Rex's teeth, a car trailing along the empty road, passing the mansion and moving away, every blade of grass, every stroke of the night wind against her face, she heard.

"What have you done? I don't understand." She circled his waist with her arms and clasped her fingers behind him so he couldn't escape. He wore the same pants as the demon she'd dreamed of. He kissed the top of her head and didn't answer for a long time.

Chapter Nine: Metamorphosis

Zale expected her to run, but Victoria only clung to him, her chest rising and falling with each breath. He knew the change had overcome her. She couldn't understand yet what had become of her former life. He lifted her up and carried her away from his grave. Her foul mutt chomped on Jake's remains. Jake...the man that killed her, snapping her neck in a fit of fear. Of course, Zale had taken something much worse, her soul. He'd pulled her back at the crucial moment just as his maker had done to him, only his reason was noble, or so he thought. *Maybe my reason was selfish.*

She nuzzled his chest. "You won't leave me now, will you?"

"Not for all eternity." He set her on her feet and waited to see if she'd balk, or stay at his side.

"You killed him." She traced his jaw line with a tender touch.

She slipped her fingers into the waist of his pants, sliding them side to side. As she looked up, her eyes shifted color to a golden hue, wolfish and fantastic. They glittered and faded to their original shade. He knew she'd thirst soon, that the worst lay ahead of them. Her body would stress and strain against the new creature she was becoming.

"Your stupid dog helped." He placed his hands on her shoulders. "I can't take all the credit."

"Rex isn't stupid." She narrowed her gaze, the hint of a threat in her expression. Her cheeks moved in a slight way, the bones melding with the demon buried beneath her skin. He wondered if she felt the subtle changes, the small differences that, with time, would answer her will if she chose.

"He doesn't like me, and I don't like him."

"You saved me and brought me back somehow. I was dead." He could tell her mind was turning over the realization. "I think I saw heaven."

He closed his eyes and nodded. "You're lucky. I never did. Only the darkness and the cut of my maker's teeth, then her face cold and vicious above mine, her lips red with my blood." He blinked away the memory, hoping this moment wouldn't end like that one had. "You're like me now, Victoria. We're the same...nightmares that rise at night and rest by day. Don't hate me for it."

He leaned his forehead against hers and smiled wide, showing off his fangs. She returned his grin, her teeth small mirrors of his now. It pleased him. He wanted to feel her biting his neck and drawing himself into her in more ways than one this night. The sight of her changing turned him on, stirring both his human passion and his vampiric desire to possess her, to claim her. *We're the same. My loneliness ends this night. I'll never sleep in an empty bed again...never.* He pondered making love to her in the forest, her body burning with metamorphosis as he impaled her, joined with her...becoming one.

She touched his lips, running the soft pad of her finger across them. Victoria tapped at one elongated fang and frowned. "I'm your plaything."

"Yes." He sucked in his breath, his gaze blurring with desire. Zale wondered if she felt the need as he did.

"What strange dreams I have." Her eyes, blue once more, narrowed. He swore he caught parts of her thoughts as her mind attempted to grasp the changes overtaking her body. She bit at her lower lip and flinched. Stepping back from him, Victoria traced the fresh cut there. She drew her fingers before her face. "Zale?" She stared at him, her brows knitting together. Her bloodied fingers went to her teeth. She touched the tips of her fangs.

He wanted to cry for what he'd done. *I told you. You never listen to me, boy. You've killed her.* His conscience reprimanded him in its usual way, echoing his father's voice. "No, Victoria." He reached for her and closed his arms around her shoulders. "Just stay with me. You've changed, but you have to trust me. You're still the same too, still here, still alive."

"I don't like this." She sniffled and pushed his arms away, batting at him. "This feels too...real." She backed into the shadows. The leaves danced all around her in the night, swallowing up her form. "I feel so...thirsty."

"Wait!" he started after her, but she vanished, a vampire trick she shouldn't be able to master so soon. Reaching out with his mind, he felt a trace of her, a binding terror that heightened his senses and made him shake. She feared what she'd become more than she had feared Jake. Zale sprinted, thick brambles and ferns catching at the sides of his pants.

She knows you're not a dream. Now she'll go mad, as insane as your damned mother. There's no hope for you...or for her.

He moved at top speed, fighting the beast within. It liked a good chase and craved its freedom. The mansion appeared ghostly with its white paint in the pale moonlight. Zale jogged by the guesthouse and up the porch steps.

In the Moon's Light

Fresh, muddy footprints crossed the wooden porch into the house. She'd left the door open. He raced upstairs, wondering just where she thought she might escape to. "Victoria!" Inside, the ghostly furniture gave him pause. For a fleeting moment, he wished the house held its former glory. He imagined the floor when it used to be polished with the soothing music of canaries clinging to the air. The empty mansion reminded him of himself—still there, still in one piece, but not quite whole. Climbing the stairs, he clenched his fists. He stopped at the landing and heard her small voice repeating over and over.

"Wake up, wake up, wake up..."

Zale stood in the doorway, staring at her. She hugged her knees, seated in the center of the bed, rocking back and forth. Her hair obscured the left side of her face. She'd tracked mud across the once pristine, white sheet. "Victoria?" He stepped closer to the bed.

She glanced at him, her one visible blue eye wide. "Go away," she whispered. "I have to wake up now. This has to stop. I can make it stop. It's *my* dream."

He sat on the edge of the mattress and reached for her. She backed away, a hiss sounding through her teeth. "Please," he began, feeling desperate, "let me hold you."

She closed her eyes and curled into a tight ball. "Zale, I saw my grandmother. Was that real? This beautiful light and such...peace. Are you...real?"

He crawled across the bed and clutched her tight. This time she didn't fight him. "Yes." He kissed the top of her head. "I'm as real as you are now. Forgive me."

"Wh—why did you do this to me?" She curled into him and pressed her cheek against his chest. Her fingers slipped past the waistline of his pants, trembling, cold, vampire fingers.

"You belong to me now. I made you into this form. You're mine. I want you—no." He shook his head. Emotions closed around his heart, choking off his words. Want was not the right word, really. He wanted many things, and had them all through his life. He wanted women, sex, control, more money. He'd had those things, and they did not make him happy. He'd tired of them even in his youth, tired of excess, and more recently, tired of the boredom of being alone.

She whimpered, her voice tremulous. "It hurts. I'm thirsty. I need to..." Her lips closed over his skin. Sharp teeth grazed his flesh and pierced just below his right nipple. He arched his back to give her better access. She drank from him for a time while he wrestled with his thoughts, her mouth making wet, suckling sounds. He felt like a parent, caring for a child.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled. Even as she glanced up with confusion, she tugged at his pants. “I want to taste you...every part of you.” Her eyes narrowed, flashing with gold. “Make love to me. Do it before I wake up. I need you...I need you.”

He swallowed, afraid now. Need? Was that the word he searched for? Surely now she knew this was no dream.

A growl sounded in her throat. The beast within him perked at hearing one of its kind. It strained against his mind, anxious to escape, to take over. The skin across his back itched, the wing buds beneath it ready to spring out. He forced the beast back, closing his hands around her head, her silken soft hair. Zale struggled to maintain control. He didn’t want to scare her any more than she was already.

She tore at his pants, shredding them in her eagerness, claws expanding and retracting from her fingers. Victoria shot him a second look, as lost in what she did as the first.

Her questioning gaze made him shiver. His cock came to life, exposed and hardening only inches from her hands. The gold color remained in her wide eyes even as they narrowed and her mouth tightened in a curving grin.

“What?” he asked in a breathless daze. “What’s wrong?”

Fingers closed around his shaft, holding him still. She stroked once. Her other hand moved lower, the palm kneading into his perineum, as she cupped his balls. “You’re mine.” She moaned with delight. “Tonight, you belong to me. Whatever I say, you must do it.”

The tables turned in that moment. She caressed his hardness, coaxing out his full arousal. The tip of his penis oozed cum. She smeared the slippery wetness over the head. “Mm,” he moaned with each tender exploration. Her fingers worked magic.

“You’ll come when I tell you to.” She lowered her face. Her lips ran across his dick, velvety soft.

“Yes,” he answered, holding back the desire to force her to do more. She wasn’t afraid now. He knew she must feel new strength surging through her body, the ease of tuning in to the scents and tastes of the world. Everything in the beginning, every sense was heightened, overwhelming.

“Say you need me,” she ordered, squeezing his length just hard enough that he winced. “Say it.”

“I...need...”

Her tongue darted out, teasing his tip. “Say it, or I’ll leave you.”

In the Moon's Light

Zale sighed. He closed his eyes. His body shuddered. She continued to fondle his balls, easing them across her palm. "Victoria. I need...you. I—" His voice hitched when she took his dick into her mouth. The tip of her tongue, warm and wet, drew circles across his slit. He couldn't find the words to tell her what he felt, the fiery urge to claim her, to... "I love you," he choked out.

She moaned as she sucked him. Everything moist and gliding, hot, shutting down his thoughts. She released his cock and sat back. "Cum inside me. Fill me." Both of her hands shot up to his chest. She crushed him down into the mattress. Straddling him, she positioned her pussy over his rigid length. The tip met her entrance. She stared down at him, her fangs exposed, her eyes locked on him.

"You are *my* dream." She growled and grasped his hands. In a swift movement, she pinned him. Her breasts rested on his chest, pressing in with each breath. "Mine."

Chapter Ten: Charlotte

Her nails dug into his skin as she slammed down, forcing his length inside her. Tory grinned at him, more so at the confused look in his eyes. His mouth opened in a slight way, almost in awe. She felt so alive, so much power, as if the world were hers for the taking. She held still, tightening her thighs, squeezing his cock buried so deep inside her.

“What’s the matter?” She moaned. “You look frightened.”

Zale swallowed hard, his throat clicking.

She eyed his Adam’s apple as it bobbed once. *His throat...his skin...so delicious.* She licked her lips, still thirsty for him. “Don’t you want me?” she whispered, lowering her mouth to his.

“Do you know what you are?” he choked out. His brown eyes flickered. He thrust up, his mouth tightening with pleasure even though his eyes showed a deep inner pain. Sighing, he thrust into her a second time.

“Ah, ah, ah,” she chided. “Not tonight. You do what I want. It’s not about you now.” She kissed his lower lip over and over, drawing it into her mouth, nipping with her new teeth. The desire to control him made her shiver.

”Victoria...” He could hardly speak. His voice was lost to passion. “Answer me...do you...?”

She sat up, arching her back and moving from side to side to feel the tightness of his dick pushing at her inner walls. “Mmm. I know.” His question irked her. She didn’t want to think. Her skinned burned. Her body pulsed with electric heat and sensations accosted her mind. His scent, musky cologne and man, made her nostrils flare. She tasted the alluring perfume of sex in the air, the hint of laundry soap she’d washed the sheets with...dust, leather, the wind, and the sweet earth outside. Everything pushed in on her, making her feel alive.

Tory took Zale’s hands and placed them on her hips. “I’m changing,” she said, breathless as she lifted up. Her pussy slicked and dripping, she slid back down, moaning. Her clit awakened.

Every inch of him moving inside made her long for more. "Pull me against you. Fast. I want you deep."

His fingers tightened on her hips. She rode him at a slow pace, hastening her rhythm with each desperate groan that escaped his lips. Reaching down, Tory touched her clit, teasing herself to climax.

She held still when the ripping orgasm washed through her body. Something clicked in the back of her mind, another entity, a shadow of her soul twisting, turning and clawing its way to the forefront of her identity. Her fangs lengthened. Tory loosened her grip on Zale, her nails growing into sharp talons. Like a reflex, they sank into his skin. He cried out in pain. She pushed away from him, startled, and backed off of the bed, naked, her body tingling, burning. "My back itches," she whispered. "What's happening to me?"

Zale scrambled to get to her, his face reflecting concern. Dark eyebrows arched, seeking answers. "Fight it, Victoria! Don't let it overwhelm you."

Her vision blurred. The room bled crimson. In front of the open window, the gauze curtains swayed in the breeze. Outside within the night sky, she glimpsed the moon, no longer a pale goddess floating luminous across a black stage. It pulsed with color, one color, the sanguine shade she craved. Pressure built behind her eyes, a hammering migraine. She opened her mouth. Words hung half-formed there. Darting forth, her bare feet now hooked at the ends of her toes with vicious claws. She longed to escape the house, the confines of this mansion and fly... *Yes, fly! I can spread my—*

Her back cracked. Skin twisted apart, unleashing her new wings. They weighed her down when she reached the sill. Their tender flesh dripped some watery lubricant. Rex stood on the lawn between the guesthouse and the mansion, his muzzle glistening. *Blood*. Even the dog looked tasty. Twisting inside her body, her stomach demanded blood.

Fingers slipped around her waist to gently pull her back. "Please. Don't leave me alone, Victoria." Zale's low voice appealed to a part of her that lay drowned beneath the hold of the beast. She shuddered when he planted a kiss on her back just above where her flight muscles extended into the moist, weeping wings she'd sprouted. Looking over her shoulder, the edges of red bled to purple around her line of vision. She narrowed her eyes. He flinched as if her gaze stung.

"Victoria." He touched her cheek with a finger, his eyes welling with tears, bloody, sweet, making her mouth water. "Don't hurt me."

She cocked her head to one side, turning. The underside of her wing flopped over his face, leaving wet streaks on his skin. “Hurt you?” She snorted at the sound of her voice, changed to a deeper, sultry tone.

“The moon calls to me too. I’ve learned to ignore it.” He stepped forward. Their bodies met, his human in appearance and hers ever-changing. She knew it was all a façade. He was the same as she, a creature of darkness. Zale hid it well when he wanted to.

The canine growl rumbling outside drew her attention, but she didn’t turn. Rex broke into a mournful howl. She heard human voices, lingering and not so far that she couldn’t get to them...hold them, taste them. Her desire to leave, to hunt, made her anxious. Clawed fingers balled into angry fists.

“You hear them, don’t you?” Zale asked, his hands seeking hers. “You want them, to kill them.”

Her upper lip curled. *No, not kill. Just taste, to drink.* She shook her head, trying to rid her mind of the whispering voices, the call of the moon. “Let me go,” she demanded.

Tory pulled her hands free and backed up. Her feet scraped on the wooden floor. Zale held his arms out, obviously hopeful that she would return to them. She bumped into the windowsill and fell straight through the screen out into the night. Torn screen remnants, black and fluttery, drifted before her face.

The beast snapped into place. Wings spread wide; muscles straining. Turning in mid-air, she caught the wind and sailed over the Gravari Mansion lawn, her dog chasing her shadow far below. The moon pulsed in the sky. With each thrum, a slew of human voices entered her mind, torturing her thirst. The wind whipping through her hair tickled her new wings and dried them of the fluid they’d made when bursting free. She held her arms to her chest by instinct in order to gain less wind resistance. The moon told her to follow the highway.

There are always cars on the highway. Cars with men. Men with blood.

Soon she sped along so fast that Rex couldn’t keep up. The trees lining the asphalt swayed in the breeze. Limbs reached for Tory. She dodged with newfound ease. This felt natural...free. Cresting a slope ahead, she glimpsed two white, glowing circles. The pale headlights bled pink, maroon, and lastly, showed as two blood-red orbs. For Tory, they were targets. She drew her wings together, dipping down to receive her first meal.

In the Moon's Light

In her mind, the honky-tonk music beat out a whining tone. She heard the driver's voice humming along, his every intake of breath. Finally, her mind settled on the man's heartbeat, thumping in a relaxed rhythm. All this and she had not breached the cab.

She closed her eyes and burst through the semi's windshield. The driver shouted, but she didn't care. Wings wrapped round his body. He'd worn his seat belt and she clung to his waist, sinking her claws in deep to hold on. Glass spilled across the seat. The truck lurched, losing its path and veering off the road. Nothing else mattered but the driver's pulse...his blood.

He struggled, but she held him. Her lips quivering, Tory bit into his salty neck. She suckled against the broken skin, tasting his thoughts, his life, his past and his hopes for the future. Fear drained down her throat, thick and hot, mingled with his blood. His soul lingered across her taste buds, bitter.

The beast within her purred.

Lumbering off the highway, the semi crashed into the line of high trees. Metal crunched. The engine groaned. Branches busted out the remainder of the glass to poke at her back. The scents of oil and earth rose in the air. Tory's nostrils flared. Blood dribbled from the side of her mouth. She stared at the worn leather seat cover drinking as fast as she could. The driver's breathing slowed. His meaty fingers, that had dug into her shoulders, slackened their hold.

Behind the slowing beat of his heart, she heard his thoughts, *Oh God, please don't let this be the end. I have to get home. I have to see Charlotte one more time.* Regret weighted Tory's senses, numbing the beast in a way only a human emotion could.

Charlotte stood in the darkness behind Tory's eyes, a freckle-faced woman with deep auburn hair...a perky smile. Small breasts that fit in this man's hands just right.

Tory sucked and swallowed, draining him.

Far away, she recognized Rex's familiar howl. The beast wanted to kill the dog. It wanted to rip the animal's throat out and drink his blood as well. The part of Tory's soul that remained shuddered at the cruel thought.

Her victim's mind soon blanked, the last image he sent, a newborn baby crying in that redhead's arms. The beast felt nothing, no regret, no horror or revulsion. In fact, it wanted more, one, maybe two more this night.

Tory released the driver. Sitting back in the dead man's lap, she folded her wings and stared down at his grizzled face. His blue eyes gazed, wide and lifeless, straight at her. She frowned.

Her humanity pushed forth now that the pain of thirst waned. The voices in the blood-moon became dim. She ran a hand through her hair and flinched when her claws grazed her scalp.

What have you done? she asked the other entity within her changed body.

The country music blared from the speakers. Sounds of the night echoed and ebbed through her hearing, straining her eardrums with every minuscule sound. Leaves rustled in the wind. The semi's engine hummed, still running despite the accident.

Her other half didn't answer her. It growled low, half-purring, but with its guttural sound, it defied her.

Tory wiped her mouth and stared at her bloodstained forearm, marveling at the beauty of the red swiped upon her skin.

Guilt struck her soul. She reached across and pushed the man's eyelids shut so he couldn't stare at her anymore. His days had ended. He could never go home, never be with that woman he so dearly loved. She wanted to know his name, to cry for him. Instead, Tory leaned backward. The truck's horn honked, making her jump.

"I killed him," she whispered.

She turned away from the horror of it and climbed across the cab's hood. His memories drifted in her mind, wrenched from their master and set free to linger among her thoughts. They twisted and furled, embedding themselves with hers.

Tory screamed as she stood on the hood, her body naked in the cruel moon's light. She spread her vampire wings and leapt away, wanting to forget, to change back...to wake up in the morning and have this be just another nightmare.

As the sky swallowed her and she gained height, the cold air warned Tory that this dream had no end. She swept higher, anxious to lose herself. Wispy clouds slithered over her icy skin. She went blind in their gray. She stared upward, seeking the sky, the stars, the traitorous moon that had helped damn her to this existence.

Chapter Eleven: Forever

Zale stood before the window, the thin, white curtains caressing either side of his nude body. He gazed at the moon, pale and waning from its fullness since the first night he'd seen Victoria. He hesitated there for a time, afraid of finding her, fearing her rejection, or much worse, her revenge. "Even the dog chased after her," he reminded himself. "What sort of *thing* am I?" He ran his hand through his hair. "I have to find her." Sighing, and disgusted with his hesitance, he climbed over the sill and jumped.

The crisp air rushed past. His wings burst from his skin and caught the air. They strained and flapped, carrying him across the estate. Long ago, flying had been fun. He rather liked the freedom of it and the ability to sneak up on his prey. Now it was just another part of his curse.

He reached out with his mind, seeking hers. At first, he felt only the emptiness, the cold silence of being alone and forgotten, long thought dead. Even the haunting voice of his conscience said nothing. He shivered as he often did, not feeling like the cold, heartless predator he used to be. Something changed when he turned her. Some small part of his cruelty faded at that moment.

Victoria? He called to her mind, hoping she'd answer. Zale flew over the swamps, the winding glitter that indicated the river far below. He sniffed the air, hoping for a trace of her unique scent. There was nothing, not even the annoying howl of her dog. He circled the estate and decided to search the highway, knowing she would be drawn to life, to blood.

It was late for such a sleepy farming town. No cars passed along the length of the asphalt road. The stink of oil and blood flooded his nostrils. Lights glowed on the side of the highway. A massive semi lay half turned on its side in the ditch. He smelled Victoria too, but even as he lighted on the mangled hood and peered inside at the dead man, he knew she was gone. He sat down and studied the gory scene, the man's neck turned at a pained angle and marks where she'd stolen his life. The blood glistened. Zale licked his lips.

He closed his eyes and listened for her. A low growl sounded in the bushes. “Mutt,” he whispered at her dog. He shot the underbrush an angry glare, realizing he was jealous of the animal. The dog didn’t come out.

Giving up, Zale jumped off the cab and took to the air once more. He circled the scene in an effort to seek a link with her mind, but found nothing. At long last, just before dawn, he drifted over the Gravari lawn and lighted in front of the guesthouse. Instinct would drive her out of the sunlight or else she would burn to ash somewhere in the world, and he would never know. Mourning all that had happened, he trudged through the messy upper level and went down to his empty chamber.

The candle flickered to life by his will. Shadows danced along the walls. Zale sat at the edge of his bed and reached for his journal. He found his pencil just where he’d left it and scrawled out a message to himself.

She left me, turned into what I am and fled the safety of my arms. But who am I kidding? I was never a safe thing to her, only death, her end and her beginning. I want to sleep now, to forget this chapter of my life as I’ve tried to forget all those before it. My father was right about me. I used her. I used everyone.

He closed the book and cast it aside. The pencil rolled when he set it on the table and plinked onto the floor.

Hissing once, he gathered the bedcovers around his body and curled up on his bed, feeling sorry for himself. He decided to shut out the world and hibernate, hiding from his problems. His mind began to shut down. He heard the lone call of that stupid, confused bird. Just as his thoughts ceased, far in the distance, another bird answered the first.

* * * *

From her vantage in the sky, she had followed Zale’s flight, shutting out his thoughts when they reached into her mind. She lighted on the roof of the mansion and stared at the lawn where she’d first seen him, the memory of the woman in her victim’s mind pulsing in flashes to torture her. *I am a vampire*, she thought. *And a murderer*. Tory swallowed hard, wishing she could taste the man’s blood once more. Its flavor was not as she remembered in life, but something sweeter. Part of that man’s mind had touched hers and she saw glimpses of his past if she cared to let her thoughts be silent.

Across the woods, the sky lightened. The sun would come soon. Her heart quickened and her eyes ached at the sight of the horizon. Instinct bade her to hide from it. Tory shook her head, fighting the guilt. “If I die now, I won’t feel this pain again.” She glanced at the run-down guest house and wondered how Zale had survived so long with such a weight on his shoulders.

In the Moon's Light

The beast inside her trembled and cried against the dawn. It twisted to hide in the shadows of her consciousness, fearing the light. With a feral growl, it pushed at her will, and she stumbled off the edge of the roof.

Gathering her breath, Tory spread her demon wings and floated to the lawn. The thick grass whispered underfoot. "I should die," she reasoned aloud. "What is my future in this new body?" She raised her arms and closed her eyes, waiting for the end to finish her.

The first rays of light spread across her skin. She waited for the warmth she knew as a human, expecting it to burn. Instead the light felt cold, icy and unforgiving. A dark clamp shut over her will and the beast screeched, forcing her to move away into the shadows, past the ancient door. She could smell Zale, the tempting taste of his skin lingering in the air. That desire to be with him overwhelmed her guilt, pushing the pain back. The beast took her hand and showed her the way she needed to go in order to survive.

This time, lured by her dream-lover, she let the beast take over and guide her through the shambles. It sought out a bookshelf and dragged it aside to reveal a sliding door. Instinct made it long for secrecy. The beast bade her to step onto the platform and slide the bookshelf into its place. She closed the door and turned on the dark stairs, able to see a glimmering candlelight dancing in the chamber below.

One slow step at a time, she descended into the darkness, feeling as though this symbolized her acceptance of fate. The meager chamber she found at the bottom of the stairs held nothing more than a bed, a bookshelf and few crates of possessions.

She recognized Zale curled beneath his bedsheets, his moaning voice mournful. He muttered in his sleep and she heard her name time and again. "What do vampires dream of?" she wondered.

* * * *

Zale slept in that darkness that accompanied his curse. He saw nothing but black and heard the distant memories of his victims mingling in the back of his mind like forgotten thoughts vying for his attention. Then, a strange thing happened. Out of the darkness, a woman's voice invaded his repose. She whispered his name and called to him, sounding mournful. The dream layered velvet kisses across his face. *I've found you...*

Zale squinted when he opened his eyes. The room hadn't changed. Everything was as he'd left it. The only difference being that a comfortable weight pressed against his back. He breathed deep and caught her scent, intoxicated by the hope flooding his mind. "I'm dreaming," he muttered. "It can't be."

She moaned. Her hand snaked its way over his waist. She pulled him tight to her body. Her curves settled against him, her warmth driving the cold from his body. She'd fed recently, her body heated by the life she'd taken. Her knee pushed its way between his legs.

"Victoria?"

She chuckled. "Zale." Sharp teeth nipped at the back of his neck. Her knee moved higher, massaging between his legs. "Zale Gravari."

He placed his hands over hers. "I thought I'd lost you, that you'd left me."

"I did." She nuzzled his neck and whispered into his ear. "But I'm back." Victoria leaned over to peer into his eyes. Hers had returned to the lovely blue he remembered them that first night he'd encountered her. She smiled sideways, showing off one fang. "I think we started this whole relationship the wrong way."

Her breasts crushed into his upper arm, whetting his appetite for more of her. Zale's body burned with desire. His cock reached for her, stiffening.

Sitting up, she held out her hand to him. The sheet drifted down from her nude body, revealing the golden curls of her pubic mound, her fair skin, made more so by her vampiric blood. "Since you're not a nightmare—"

"Dream!" he interrupted. "You said I was a dream."

"Right. A good dream." Victoria cleared her throat. "Since you're not a...dream, I think I'd like to know you, why you're not buried beneath that gravestone by the swamp, and how you came to be *what* you are."

He beamed at her, his heart heavy all at once. *She returned to me.* Though he still feared her retribution, he hoped it wouldn't come. "Someone forced me into it. She lured me into the forest and stole my soul." He reached up to trace her face, a face he didn't think he'd ever see again before now. "Victoria, you were dead. I brought you back. I'm sure you understand that now. If...if you can't forgive me, if you want revenge for what I did...I'll understand."

"Revenge?" Her eyes narrowed.

"If you want to kill me for it—"

"Kill you?" Her brows furrowed, revealing her confusion. "No. If I kill you, I'll be all alone. Even now my dog won't come near me. He doesn't growl like he does at you, but I guess that's because he remembers me from before." Her strawberry lips pressed together.

"You don't hate me for it?" He rested his thumb on her lower lip, running it from side to side. "You forgive me?"

In the Moon's Light

Victoria let out a soft breath. Her eyes pinned him. "Jake killed me, not you. I..I want...to be with you, Zale. I have ever since that first night. I didn't think you were real. It's as if I fell into one of my nightmares, and now I can't wake up."

"Stay with me forever," he whispered, feeling desperate. "Don't wake up from this."

"Forever." She smiled wider, a devilish grin. "Every night I'll come to you and make love to you in different ways." She urged him to lie on his back. "Sound familiar?"

"I don't think those were my exact words..." He cringed.

Victoria ran a finger down his chest, teasing him. "You will teach me how to survive, how to drink without killing them. I can't bear the pain of their memories when I take their lives." Her eyes welled with pink tinged tears. The moisture glistening there tore at his heart. It was then that he realized he still had one.

"I'll try." He wanted to. Zale needed to change. Now he had a reason to do so. "I was never good at letting them live. You are the first." He leaned up to receive her kiss, hotter and ardent, stronger than before she'd turned. Her weight pressed in on him, holding him there. In all his affairs, he'd never had a woman that dominated him in any way. That desire was what had drawn him into the woods and the dark end his maker forced on him.

She broke away to whisper, "Then our forever starts right now, this night."

Zale closed his eyes, relief washing over him as she assaulted his mouth once more. She delved deep, teasing him. As she withdrew, she traced his fangs with the tip of her tongue. "Taste me," she said, breathless. "Lick my body all over."

His chest tightened. She backed away, shot him a hungry glance, and lay against the mattress, spreading her legs wide. He stared at her body, taking in her rounded breasts, her hardened, rosy nipples. Her chest pulsed with each quickened breath. His gaze traveled lower. He wanted to run his tongue everywhere, across her spread labia, down into the recesses of her folds, up to her hooded clit. Zale crawled to her side and kissed her earlobe. "As you wish," he whispered.

He sucked at her lobe, breathing into her ear.

She moaned. "Lower."

He took the tender skin between his teeth and breathed out. "Wherever you say..."

"Lower." Her small voice demanded action.

He obliged, the desire to please her urging him on. He feathered kisses along her neck. Her vein beat against his mouth. Sucking the skin, he resisted biting. He lavished wet kisses, more licks

than anything else, across her skin. Every inch of her tasted sweet. Working down, he crossed her chest, edging to her left breast. Her nipple poked at his cheek. He stopped his descent to tease her.

Victoria arched her back. "Lower." She sounded impatient.

He swirled his tongue along the side of her breast, working in painstaking, slow circles until he reached the rippled texture of her areola. There, he glanced up. Her face remained frozen in ecstasy, her mouth agape, her eyes closed.

He sucked her nipple into his mouth and tickled its firmness with his tongue. She writhed, moaning. He sucked harder, biting down every so often and fighting a satisfied smile every time she cried out in pleasure.

He moved to her right breast, working it in the same way. As he tasted her, he slid his left hand down to explore her pussy. He found her wet and ready. Slicking his fingers up and down, he had to think of something else to keep from cumming. His thumb tapped at her clit. She arched higher, her legs trembling, her cries more urgent.

"Lower!" she demanded. "Please, do it..." She grasped his head, curling her fingers into his hair, and forced his face down. He licked her belly, past her navel and straight down into her curls. There he breathed deep her sweet, musky scent. His mouth replaced his thumb. Two fingers delved into her smooth wetness.

Victoria gasped for air, already on the verge of release.

Zale lashed her clit. His fingers thrummed deep within her body. She came in a weeping, thrashing torrent, screaming his name. He continued to suck her, coaxing a second, lesser orgasm from her body. When her insides pulsed against his fingers, his cock swelled. He bit his lip hard, drawing blood. Hot cum erupted, spurting beneath him on the sheets.

He lifted his face and blew on her clit. Her legs shuddered at either side of him. Crawling up her body, he felt at peace in the moment. Zale pressed a sloppy kiss on her cheek and flopped on the bed beside her. "This is a better beginning to forever than my first one," he murmured.

Chapter Twelve: Moon's Song

Tory rolled on her side, Zale's arms still about her body. His breath tickled the back of her neck, slow and relaxed. She closed her eyes, and the whispers began, the moon's alluring song of life and death. They'd slept through a day. Her first day as a vampire turned into night abruptly. Thirsty, she drew his fingers to her lips and kissed their soft tips. Zale had hands that hadn't seen a day of heavy labor, his nails manicured, his skin velvety. "Wake, my love," she murmured.

His lips swept along her skin. He kissed her lightly and sat up. "Did you dream?"

She thought on his question, trying to see past the emptiness that stretched between now and the end of the night before. All Tory could recall was their lovemaking, her anxious need to be pleased. After that, her mind drew a blank. She shook her head. "No."

"Good." He smiled at her, showing his fangs. "It might be like that for years. Days of dreamless sleep." His gaze lowered to her bare breasts. He bit at his lower lip. "In time, though, it could change."

"You have dreams," she told him. "When I came here before dawn and you slept, you spoke in your sleep."

"Memories mostly."

"Mm." She nodded and grasped his head, pulling him down to kiss his taut mouth. His dark eyes brimmed with worry and hesitation. She nipped at his lips, and when they parted, she nipped at his tongue. His groan made her hunger for more.

"Victoria," he gasped out. "Can you hear the moon? The call? The voices?"

Those words made the being inside her drool. It eased behind her thoughts, and when the first beating began in her mind, it sprang forth to push Zale away. His face reflected fear. The beast savored it, licking her lips.

"There you are." Zale slid off the bed, naked, his cock not hard enough for her liking just yet. He raked his fingers through his curly hair and glanced at the stairs. "You want to come out and play?"

Tory grappled with the dark thing that shared her body. She didn't want it to have full control. She struggled to speak, but the thing beat her to it. "I'm thirsty," it said in a sultry purr. She held on and battled it as Zale led her other self up the steps to the sliding door.

"We'll feed together, you and I. That's what you want, isn't it?" He eased the door open. Turning his back on her, he slid the shelf aside and stepped into the upper room. The silver moonlight, pale and gray, tried its best to show through the hazed glass.

Voices sputtered and stirred. The beast propelled Tory forth. She slammed past the door and out into the night. Her bare feet registered the cool, damp grass. The forest behind the house shivered its leaves. A lone howl rose and went silent.

She sought out the source of the cry, licking her lips.

Not that way. It was Zale's voice in her mind. His hand closed over her wrist.

She flicked his hold off. "I'm thirsty."

A flash of gray darted in the corner of her eye, a dog, racing across the lawn. She smiled and gave chase, her claws and teeth elongating. The skin at her shoulders itched and burned for release.

"No!" Zale shouted.

She pressed after the animal, thinking only of the blood, the drink, her thirst to be quenched. She needed to catch it, to embrace its warm body, hear the beating of its heart going silent.

Tory screeched when the beast caught Rex and held his furry body in a death grip. The dog yelped and struggled. The beast bared its fangs. Tory closed her eyes.

An iron grip braced her, forcing her backwards. The dog broke free and disappeared in the overgrown hedges.

Zale clucked his tongue. He lifted her off the ground like a wolf cub. "You'd kill your own dog. Victoria, I'm shocked." Sarcasm layered his low voice, and also, understanding. Light flashed in his eyes, a flicker of the same beast he harbored in his body.

Tory pressed her own beast to the rear at last and gasped for air. "How do you control it?" With trembling hands, the talons furling into non-existence, she reached out and hugged him. "How do you make it stop?"

"You must fight it, but..." He paused to nuzzle her cheek. "Also embrace the darkness it thrives in. The thing you hear and feel in the recesses of your mind—it's another part of you—a part the blood awakened."

In the Moon's Light

"I hate it." She breathed Zale's scent deep and wished this nightmare were different. The thirst clung to her body, still causing parts to tremble with need. The bushes crunched where Rex hid, now surely terrified of her.

"I'll help you." He hugged her tight. "We can do this. Together, we can do anything. As long as I have you..." He clutched her closer still. Skin tore and flapped, wet, forcing bursts of air across her naked skin. He'd let loose his wings. They rose above the lawn. He carried her across the estate, the moon calling to her as before.

Reach out to the darkness. Hold it close to your heart. The beast must know who is the leader, the first in your shared mind. Do it now, Victoria. She closed her eyes and pressed her cheek against his, trying to concentrate. The whispers filled her ears. The beast listened, as well. She knew it listened, knew its dark heart and its feral desires. Part of it wanted to tear Zale to bits, and even so, it wanted to mate with him long into the night, taking him rough, controlling him. Surprise washed over Tory. She wanted that too.

They circled. Tory dared a glance. Far below in the gray-lighted graveyard, she saw Jake's remains. Reaching out to the beast, she felt its satisfaction over the man's death. It hadn't liked him either. Worse still, the beast knew Jake, knew everything about their shared past. The beast had been with her long before she'd been turned.

You understand now, don't you?

"Yes," Tory whispered. Zale was right. The beast had been there all along, waiting to wake, to feed, to live. It was strong and violent. The beast would not let her be hurt. It would fight...if she let it.

Closing out the call of the moon and the thirst for blood, Tory opened her mind to the darkness that dwelled within her. The beast regarded her from its hiding place. Like any starved animal offered a morsel, it sprung forth, overeager. Tory felt her soul twist and tighten within her body. She let go of Zale, wriggling and battling mid-air to escape. Freed from his grasp, she let the dark being out.

Bones crackled. Muscles rearranged with twinges of dull pain. Skin stretched taut and broke open. Slick wings burst from her shoulders to break her fall, to carry her high above the tombstones below. She caught up to her mate and flew about his lithe body. Two pairs of eyes fought to see out until, at last...a click resounded in her mind, and Tory saw through both sets.

She stretched her legs and arms. Her wings fanned wide to sail on the winds. Soon she outdistanced Zale, her thirst driving her toward the highway. Cars zipped beneath her. It was not the drivers she wanted, but someone resting in a bed, unwary, dreaming.

Time was nothing to her. She rode the wind with chilling speed. The Lehman property unfolded beneath her, the scent of cattle and manure faint compared to the soothing perfume of blood that needed letting. Their old farmhouse stood in the center of the property, painted white and glowing in the night. She flew round it once, sensing Zale not far behind, the call of his mind, sweet.

Tory dipped low and landed, soundless, on the balcony. She padded along the wood planks, dodging wicker furniture, potted plants and a few statues of angels. She halted by the open window, the drapes tussling behind the screen. Soft snores echoed within, masculine snores. She breathed in the sleeping man's scent. Tory sucked in her lip, drawing her teeth across the tender flesh. The dreamer smelled delicious. She longed to pull the covers back from his body, to touch the skin over his pounding veins, to lick away the taste of salt. Interrupting her hunger, Zale lighted on the balcony and joined her.

Chapter Thirteen: Feast

Zale recognized the look on her face. Hunger. It called to her, and she'd found her next meal. He peered through the screen and saw the young man, well-built, a white sheet tangled in his legs, he lay on his side. His mouth gaped open as he snored. "You want that one?" He glanced at Victoria to be sure.

She nodded. "Do you want to watch?" Something else danced in her eyes, a playful gleam.

"I'll watch if you like."

She extended one taloned finger and sliced around the screen-frame. The netting fell away. Her wings diminished, sliding into her back to become one with her body—the magic of a shape-shifter. As she climbed through the narrow opening, her talons retracted. She appeared human as ever, naked and alluring.

Intrigued, Zale followed. He stepped to the rear of the room to observe, the shadows swallowing him up. His lover stood over the man's bed, her head tilted to one side as she spied on the sleeper. It reminded him of himself, of staring at Victoria as she dreamed.

Victoria's expression changed, her brows dipping and her mouth tilting to a frown. "He's dreaming." She sounded sad about this realization. For her to know such a thing, Zale guessed she'd taken a peek into the man's mind. Merging with her inner demon had unleashed her strengths.

"Is that bad?" Zale whispered.

"It's a nightmare." She sat beside the man and reached out, resting her palm on his forehead. "I can stop it, change it. Make it something...better." She leaned over him and drew her lips across his cheeks.

The dreamer shuddered in his sleep. His toes curled, and he let out a soft moan. Victoria's breasts brushed against his chest. She kissed his jaw, working her way down to the man's neck.

Zale watched, jealousy biting at him while she kissed the sleeper. Her left hand slid between their bodies, gaining purchase over the bulge in the dreamer's white underwear. She caressed him

through the thin cotton. Zale reached down out of habit and touched himself, imagining her hand instead of his.

Her tongue darted out, tracing wet circles over the dreamer's tender skin. Zale moaned, echoing the man's low voice. *What kind of dream are you giving him?*

Pausing, Victoria glanced at Zale, a wicked smile curving her glistening lips. "The best kind," she murmured. "The kind you gave me when you first came to my room." Her fingers raised, dug their way beneath the striped band of his underwear, and delved inside.

A swooning cry of pleasure broke the silence in the bedroom. Victoria's arm raised and lowered in a gentle rhythm. She sucked at the dreamer's nipple, her stifled moans falling in time with his. Across the room, Zale bit his lower lip to keep his grunt of bliss from interrupting her new game.

She worked her victim into a fevered frenzy and held his mind in limbo, within the trappings of a dream. His right knee slowly raised, his thigh hiding Victoria's perfect, round ass. Zale wanted to grab her, hold her down and take her, but he resisted. He held his cock tight when she dipped her face to the dreamer's neck. Her mouth opened wide, revealing the pale glint of sharp fangs. Her bite wasn't cruel or swift. Instead, she pressed her mouth to his neck as a lover would. Her jaws closed with hesitation.

Zale swallowed, remembering the sweet tingling taste of her blood when he'd first taken her. Just then the dreamer cried out. His pupils raced behind closed lids and his upraised leg quivered with the released tension of a powerful orgasm.

Releasing his own hardness, Zale ventured forth. Victoria's fair fingers withdrew from the dreamer's underwear. In their wake, a dark splotch of wetness pooled. She reached up and held the man's head with both hands. The tempting cadence of suckling rent the air, making Zale's mouth water. Her ripe ass did worse for him. He climbed onto the bed, unable to resist.

Straddling her from behind, he clutched her shoulders. "Slow down lest you kill him. I know that's not what you want."

She growled between swallows, warning him as any predator would to stay back.

Clucking his tongue, he pressed his cock against her crack, drawing her attention. She didn't release her victim. Zale reached around her body and grasped her nipple. He pinched—hard.

Victoria flinched, her blood-tainted lips forming a feral grimace when she turned on Zale. "Ouch."

"Stop." He ground his hips into her.

“Mm.” She thrust back. Licking her lips, she twisted and lost her balance, falling onto the man beneath her.

“One hell of a wet dream you gave that guy.” Zale helped her slide over. Once she was settled, he pointed at the wounds on his neck. “Let me teach you a little secret.” He placed his thumb in his mouth and notched his skin with one fang, drawing blood. “Leave them like this, even if they’re alive, and they’ll bleed to death.” He showed her the dribble of crimson on his thumb just before pressing it against each wound. “But offer back what you stole, seal up the opening, and your dreamer lives to dream another night.”

She nodded, understanding. “He’ll be sore in the morning, like I was.”

“Yes.” Zale crawled over her and took in her face. He lowered his mouth to hers to lick away the traces of her meal. The taste of blood lingering on his tongue made him want for more. The head of his cock draped across her mound. Reaching down, he teased her folds, pleased at how wet she was. “You like to feed like this?”

She moaned a barely discernable yes. To him, it made sense. This was how he fed on her. She’d found pleasure in it then, just as she did now, being on the other side. Teasing her clit, he lowered his body, hoping to make love to her.

Victoria growled low, halting his efforts. She grasped his shoulders with strength only a vampire could possess and flipped him on his back. Straddling him, she took his wrists and forced them into the pillow at either side of his head. Swaying her hips from side to side, she sought his cock with her pussy. The pieces fit together.

His length slid inside her velvet wetness with tortuous, gradual rhythm. Her body swallowed him whole. She stopped and kissed his lips with a feather touch, teasing him. Zale let out a drawn breath. He thrust once to test her. She slammed down against him and shook her head.

“Not like that.” Nipping playfully at his mouth, she reprimanded him, “Not that way tonight.”

He nodded. Any way she craved it done would satisfy him. Patient, but wanting, he stared into her eyes as she rocked atop his cock. Each movement made her insides tighten about him. Each sway caused her to groan in ecstasy. She hastened her pace, those blue eyes half closed, her lips parted.

Making love was a connection now, a shared heat and a playful game of domination for her. He tried to be silent, to let her have her way. His body tensed. She forced her way down hard time

and again, slipping, joining, pulling away and uniting once more. The bed creaked in unison. Their silent bed-partner didn't wake, lost in some nightmare turned bliss and weakened by blood loss.

He couldn't hold back any longer. Zale closed his eyes and let go, his orgasm spurting forth deep inside her body. Ticklish after bursts caused him to shift, thrusting despite himself. Oblivious, she continued to force herself up and down, her breasts bouncing against his chest. She whined and slammed hard, twisting to one side. Moisture flooded between them, hot and wet as she came.

Catching her breath, Victoria collapsed across his body. He held her and whispered in her ear, "I wish we could stay like this forever, that this was our bed."

Her lust and thirst sated, she moaned and closed her eyes. For a time, she slept there in his arms. Beside him, the man began to snore. A slight wind made the ruined screen flutter against the siding outside. He listened for a long while for the two night birds, the feathered lovers that had found each other at last. The music of crickets and bullfrogs drifted through his peaceful thoughts.

She'd fed without killing and made a thrilling display of it, as well. It gave him hope for their future. He knew she was not as strong as he was. If she had to kill them she'd go mad, as mad as he'd nearly become.

Combing his fingers through her long hair, he sighed. *If I hadn't found you and wanted you as I did...*

"Should we go home?" she asked, lifting her face. "Will the sun rise soon?"

"Let's stay here and wake up with our friend." He nodded to the side, holding back his chuckle.

"Will he be all right?" Concern flared over her features. She turned to take in her victim's condition.

"Were you when I took you?" He rubbed her back, hoping to soothe her fear.

"I couldn't get you out of my mind..." She pulled away and sat beside the man. Her fingers shook as she touched his face, a light grizzle making a miniscule grating sound as she traced along his jaw.

"But you were awake, Victoria. You were awake when I came to you. You know that, right?" He sat up and climbed off the bed. Crossing the woven rug, he peeked out the window at the night sky.

"I thought you were a dream." The mattress creaked behind him. Her footsteps made low thuds. Warm fingers curled around his waist, heated from the fresh blood in her veins. "I think...you still are."

In the Moon's Light

“Let’s go home.” He placed his hands over hers and swayed there for a moment, enjoying the closeness of her body. He wanted to go home—to his father’s house, the place he’d always known would be there for him. Maybe it was time to buy it back, have it in his name. He’d let it pass on to others and not cared until now. Stepping away, he climbed through the open window and padded across the wood panels to the balcony’s edge. There, he leapt off, his wings catching up. Behind him, he felt her presence, following, and soon overtaking his flight. It was good not to be alone anymore.

* * * *

Outside the guesthouse, he kissed Victoria. “Go warm the bed for me.” He scanned the yard, the porch and the open gate to the garden. There was unfinished business to attend to. He didn’t want her present for it. She was sated and tired from feeding and didn’t put up an argument. She nodded once and started inside, disappearing past the sliding door to his dark hideaway.

Zale glanced up at the mansion and wondered what it would be like to sleep beneath that roof every night for the rest of his life. He’d hated it for too long. It was time to let the past go.

He crossed the lawn and went to the garden, memories flooding him of his father sitting there, staring off into the distance every spring when the bulbs bloomed. He was a man that had lost hope, but clung to his ill wife, nonetheless. Shaking his head to be rid of the melancholy, he found the little tool shed. A shovel, old and worn, was just the thing he needed. He started on his way, the chill in the air passing over his nude body. By the wall, he paused.

The dog’s water bowl was empty so he turned on the hose and filled it. Glancing around, he found the tub of food and dumped some into Rex’s other bowl. “Not that you need it,” he whispered. “Wild mutt probably eats better from hunting in the woods.” He left the gate open in case the dog ventured back.

* * * *

Not much remained of Jake. The heat during the day wasn’t bad yet, so the stench of death left out overlong didn’t overwhelm Zale. He dug slowly, patient in his endeavor, thinking only, *Someone ought to be buried in this grave, and it sure as hell isn’t going to be me.*

Three feet beneath the sod and moist earth, he stopped. “You don’t deserve this,” he whispered, shooting the dead man a glare. Zale bent and grasped two ankles, tugged the body to the hole, and sighed when it thumped on the bottom. He shoveled the pile of dirt into place, marveling that there never seemed to be enough to make it level as the ground around it.

He stood there for a moment, his task complete. It felt symbolic, like burying the rancid part of his psyche that had festered for years. Grinning, he decided to stop being so deep and philosophic. “Got what you deserved, you bastard.” He balanced the shovel on his shoulder, thankful he’d not been as unlucky as Jake. He had the girl, eternity, and soon he’d have the house. He shot the angel statue over his grave a sardonic look, thinking once more of the irony of its presence. He read over his name, frowned, and started back through the woods to the guesthouse.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed the wolf-dog following. At times Rex paused and stared, at others he was a flash of gray among the undergrowth, keeping his distance in the shadows.

Naked as the day he was born, Zale returned to the guesthouse. He set the shovel by the door, went inside and braced it shut with the ruined sofa. The dog howled nearby. Shrugging, the vampire made his way to the lower room, ascending the stairs with the light feeling of hope and new beginnings in his heart.

Victoria sat on his bed, flipping through his journal. The sheet draped around her like a toga. She glanced up, her blue eyes twinkling mischievously. A grin parted her lips. “You’ve been a very bad boy.”

He flushed. “You shouldn’t be reading that.”

“Probably not,” she agreed. Turning a page, she began to recite his musings. “Audra took me into her parlor not five days after her husband’s death. It was there that I found what I wanted more than anything, the taste of a woman’s—”

“Please stop.” He crawled across the mattress and snuggled next to her. “I wrote so much of that ages ago, long before you.”

Peering over the edge of the journal, her eyes narrowed. “Oh?” Victoria cleared her throat. “Here is the one that interests me.” She flipped and found her place. “Her name is Yasmeen. A night servant in Mrs. Daumier’s house. I can’t get her out of my mind, blonde hair, fair skin, eyes like a blue sky on a clear day. She taunts me whenever I visit, flashes of her ankles, her milky white breasts overly exposed when she pours the wine. I swear she listens at the door when the widow and I go at it.” Victoria set the journal in her lap. “You had a thing for blondes.”

He took a lock of her hair between his thumb and forefinger, sliding it back and forth. “Some blondes, not all. That one...and this one.” Zale leaned close and dragged her hair across his lips. “I had a thing for widows too.”

“She’s the one that made you what you are,” Victoria pressed, unwilling to let him change the subject.

In the Moon's Light

He shrugged. "I killed her for it." Snatching the book from her, he rifled through the leaves of parchment. "Are you searching for unknown wives, unclaimed children?"

"Should I be?"

"Children maybe, though I wouldn't know it if they were mine." He turned to the last entry he'd made. "Did you read this one?" Flashing the page at her, he waited as her gaze slid across the words.

"My father was right about me. I used her. I used everyone," she read. She sank back into the pillows and closed her eyes. "We used each other, Zale." Victoria reached for his hand and pulled it into hers. "And now we're together." Drawing his fingers to her lips, she kissed each one. "What were you doing out there?"

He kissed her cheek, working his way to her ear. "Burying the past, yours and mine."

About the Author

Anastasia Rabiya writes erotic romance, paranormal erotic romance, and fantasy. She often crosses genres in order to follow her muses into the darkness where they seek out destiny in all its forms. She believes in fairies, demons, angels, magic, passion, chocolate, supportive friends, e-books and writing critique groups. Her deepest desire is to pursue her creative dreams and realize them. Every spare moment she devotes to writing for her haunting muses.

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