



Changeling Press

NIGHTS
in pink satin
Sharon Maria Bidwell

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Vincent is a vampire of world renown, even if most people believe his story is a fable, but with age comes boredom. Seeking out new silk to line his coffin for his annual Cotillion, he comes across a bolt of pink fabric. Curiosity leads him to a mistake that is about to change his existence.

Martin is a newly turned vampire and a lonely gay man. When he finds an extremely good looking and famous vampire in his humble abode, he's glad of the company even though he's afraid.

When a simple mistake leads to explosive passion, what's a vampire to do but look forward to a future of gay nights between sheets of pink satin?

Prologue

"This is rather... bright." The satin cloth possessed an odd, almost fleshy feel as Vincent ran his fingertips over the fabric. Rolled like this, the layers possessed depth and substance.

"Special order," the rather thin, nervous young man said quietly from behind the counter. "It's spare, left over," he added, almost as though he thought Vincent might actually consider buying it. Someone with less acute hearing might not have heard the comment at all. The whisper was one of anxious caution but lacked the right kind of reverence. This man's fear scented the air. There were many types of hunger in the world and this retailer's sin was avarice, though fool he was to deal with the undead if he could not take better control of his emotions. His very nervousness was an appetiser.

Vincent almost sighed. The counter would be no protection against an attack, and if he wanted the young man's blood, the weasel would know it by now. Besides, the man looked as though he needed whatever meagre force of life ran through his veins more than his patron needed nourishment. Despite his pallor, Vincent otherwise maintained the appearance of a healthy young man, whereas the proprietor looked as though someone had recently dug him up out of a grave. His form befitted the décor, though.

Vincent gazed around at the other bolts of fabric. "I think I will..." He'd been about to say he would stick to red satin though maybe this time something in a deeper shade of red, closer to the colour of blood rather than scarlet to line the coffin, but he changed his mind. He'd come here for a change, and maybe it was time for a complete transformation, though not... He looked down. No, he couldn't bring himself to choose fuchsia pink. Maybe ivory or purple would suffice, classy or royal. "I will consider my choice and advise you of my decision in a day or two."

The living scarecrow nodded, and then jotted down an entry in his ledger. "I'll order everything else in the meantime. The handles you specified will take about five days to arrive." Despite his obvious fear, the man did good business and wasn't about to turn away a good customer. The love of money was the sin, not money itself. Vincent knew a lot about sin.

"This... special order," Vincent spoke the words carefully, thinking that surely one would consider most of the orders as out of the ordinary. "Who ordered this cloth?"

The vendor hesitated, his pen skittering across the page, making an errant mark. Approaching the counter, Vincent watched as the man's eyes roamed in their sockets, gaze flicking left and right but never up to his face. "Sir, please... I can't tell you something like that. Customer confidentiality, you know."

Vincent let his hand brush over the glass countertop, until his fingers reached the edge of the ledger and rested upon it like the pale ghost of a spider. "You can tell me, or I can ask more... formally."

The retailer sighed in defeat, but at least that chased back some of his fear. He reached down, drew out another book, flipped the pages until he found a certain entry, and then turned the book toward his customer who read the address. Vincent might have remarked on the foolishness of keeping such records, but then those that left such details were the foolish ones. Vincent always sent someone to collect the things he ordered; he never chose delivery. He never even used his true name and always paid cash. His very security depended on discretion, and on not allowing just anyone to know where he resided, particularly during daylight hours.

Reaching for the book, Vincent tore out the page; the vendor wouldn't need it, for the order was written down for delivery the next evening, already packaged and marked up for the driver. Vincent caught the young man's eye with his gaze as the storekeeper looked up in shock. Although clearly realising his mistake, the man could not now look away.

"You will forget that you ever filled this order. You will forget about the pink cloth, which I will take away with me. You will put it down on my bill as material but

you will not question or wonder what it was for or where it went.” Vincent didn’t want to risk leaving it behind in case it stirred the memories that his willpower would cause to lie dormant. Technically, he was supposed to be evil so paying for it seemed... wrong, in a way. However, he wanted the shop’s accounts to tally so that nothing untoward came to light.

The young man stared at him, jaw slack. Vincent clicked his fingers and life returned to animate the corpse-like figure. Blinking, the man enquired, “Is there anything else?”

“No.” Satisfied the man would obey his command, Vincent bestowed a closed-lip smile. “I will be in touch.” With that, he turned, picking up the bolt of cloth as he left.

Chapter One

One push broke the lock. Vincent walked into the ground floor flat, shaking his head. So easy to get in, so much cover, a closed-in garden with no back exit. He grinned. He always enjoyed rescuing a maiden in distress, even modern day ones. He could sense no one inside, vampire or otherwise, so he'd taken the liberty of gaining entrance.

Vincent set the bolt of pink fabric to one side although he had plans for it later. He wanted to familiarise himself with the layout, see if the bed was... sturdy enough. Visions of spreading that pink satin out over the bed and rolling around on it filled his mind. The satin wasn't the only pink thing he wanted to spread. He never understood some women's penchant for pink but it didn't take much to get a grip on this woman's moods. He anticipated someone delicate and very feminine. Someone who wore sandals and carried a very small handbag. Maybe soft curls surrounded her face. Yes, as he turned in a tight circle and took in the details of the flat, he could well imagine the woman who lived here.

For the first time in a long while, his body responded to the images that assaulted his mind. His cock twitched though failed to harden. To attain that level of arousal he needed blood, to drink. He fully expected to hunt with the female vampire who lived here. They could share prey, their mutual act of fulfilment bringing them closer. Flushed with blood, they could fulfill... other needs. Maybe she would know somewhere suitable, and they could search close by, or maybe she had a donor. He had no intention of harming this young vampire's neighbours, or harming anyone. He didn't see the point in bestowing pain or instilling fear unless it was necessary. If he went about this right, humans didn't even have to know vamps drank from them, not if one got the seduction right. One thing you could say for older vampires was that most of them could teach the younger ones a thing or two about temptation, whether it was

the luring of humans or each other. Vincent was looking forward to this seduction as much as the outcome.

Impatience welled up in him, and although initially he'd been pleased to find the flat empty so he could assess the situation, now he wished for the female to return home. Such eagerness surprised him.

His gaze wandered across to the bolt of pink cloth, leaning so innocently against the wall. Pink for innocence; red for sex. Ha! That pink was so vibrant it positively glowed. It certainly screamed sex.

Vincent paced, not taking in details of the room at all. His mind was awash with images. Even so, right now his... desires mingled. His sudden ache for sex spurred his craving to drink.

Pink.

His mind jolted back to that bright, vibrant colour as it flashed in the corner of his vision. At once, thoughts consumed his mind. Pink cloth, pink skin, pink folds, pink lips parted on a breath, a sigh... Vincent closed his eyes. In his mind, his fingers slid up the inner heated curve of bare thighs. His head descended; his teeth penetrated. Moans resounded, his and his victim's; they both trembled. His prey pleaded, though for what type of release it was difficult to tell. In the vision, his cock rose. It always did when his captive whimpered. A small smile teased his lips. It wasn't cruelty on his mind but an exchange of desires. Hell, this was his fantasy. He let the scene take his mind and body both. In the fantasy, he couldn't see the face of the person beneath him. He could only touch, taste, smell, and hear.

In his mind, they drank from a willing human. He would drink from either sex tonight to have that longing satisfied. One desire fulfilled gave Vincent room to consider another. He could put his teeth to other uses. He nipped, drew skin and flesh into his mouth and sucked. This time when his cock nudged willing flesh, it wasn't a hard brick surface he thrust against. He and his imaginary partner rolled in satin... pink satin, the colour of flushed skin, the glow of a sunset at dusk when he opened his eyes, the beginnings of a blush. The satin stroked, caressed him, like skin brushing against

skin but more than that, more intimate than that somehow. As he touched his unseen lover, the satin stroked him, embraced him, moulded to his form, as if it were a third lover in bed with them. The cloth dipped into hollows, creases of his skin, folds of his body, tickled him like the stroke of a tongue. He rolled, entangled in pink satin, in soft caresses, in longing, desire, and ultimately frustration.

As good as it felt, these images weren't real. Frowning, Vincent struggled to remain with the fantasy. He hoped to make them real, but he didn't want the vision to end. Just a little... longer... *Ah. There. Just there...*

On his back, he let the pink satin play over his body. It waved and shimmered, undulated as though stirred by a giant breath. Everywhere it touched, it coaxed. His body shifted, floundered, wounded by desire, want, need, *greed...* Unable to hold back, he grasped the pink fabric, wrapping up his cock and balls, forming a tunnel with his hands to plough and furrow into, somewhere *tight*. This penetration had no form. Sexuality had nothing to do with his need for release, to scatter, shatter, to attain that heady peak that only blood and sex could help him reach. *Climax...*

Vincent opened his eyes. If vampires could sweat, he'd be sweating. He didn't know if he should be grateful or annoyed that it wasn't possible. His body felt overheated and there was nothing he could do to cool down. *Nothing he could do... alone.* Not yet anyway. He suddenly regretted that he'd not bothered to feast on the way here. Then he'd already be hard. He'd have enough stamina to play out the scene in his head and then still share pleasure. The thought that he would if he could dismayed him. What if she walked in on him while he was playing? Would he jump in guilt or embarrassment? Would she scream at him? Would she ask him if she could watch?

It was probably just as well he couldn't perform yet, or the temptation to find out might have proved too great to deny. The only thing that might draw him back from the reality otherwise was the fact that the flat didn't match the mental image that plagued his mind. His imagination conjured up the scent of spices and the illumination of candles. How would the pink satin look under the glow of candlelight?

He suddenly saw himself naked in bed, white skin a stark contrast to the deep, rich pink. A shiver went through him and even that was of heat instead of cold. His tongue flicked out, licking his lips, flicking over his teeth. Aware of a stirring in his gums and in his groin, he blinked in wonder. His cock actually did more than twitch; it lifted enough for him to know that he wasn't just on the hunt for blood tonight. He'd sought blood and had sex as a consequence, but seldom did he hunt just to have sex. Tonight, he needed the sex more than food. He might be the hunter, but his cock was on a mission of its own. He couldn't remember when he'd last experienced such yearning. If he liked the woman well enough, perhaps this would be more than a single encounter. He needed someone on his arm to attend his annual Cotillion, but he was getting ahead of himself. For now, he had to concentrate on his search before the owner returned. He swallowed as a sheer act of will. Walking stiffly, he began to examine the abode.

The pink feather boa made him raise an eyebrow and so did the theatre-like mirror with its surrounding bulbs. He flicked on the lights for a moment only, and then switched them off again. One thing among many that the old movies hadn't got right was the idea that vampires cast no reflection. Still, the harsh light from the naked bulbs made his skin look yellow, and he couldn't see how anyone would find that a pretty sight. He couldn't understand anyone making up their face in the glare of that unforgiving light. It would show every grey hair and outline every wrinkle. Not that he minded such attributes. A lived-in face could be as attractive as any other, but the woman who resided here clearly cared for her appearance even though she could take a few lessons in tidiness. He stared down at the top of the dressing table, taking in the lipsticks and wands of mascara casually cast aside. Although the items lay in disarray, the display gave Vincent the impression that the make-up was important to the woman who used it. Everything was to hand, not hidden in drawers out of sight. Even so, this female was clearly not one for domesticity.

Moving into the bathroom, he noted that hair gel and various other toiletries spilled out from the cabinet. He glanced quickly at the brand names. Shaking his head

once more, Vincent returned to the living area. Vanity, all was vanity. It often took a newly turned vampire some months to get used to the idea that a flawless complexion came with the territory, and they would remain forever young. Well, forever the age when they had turned, anyway.

That thought gave him pause. He imagined someone much older than he had assumed, someone's grandmother. He dismissed the notion. Even if that proved to be the case, he could be gone as swiftly as a wind whirling through the room, or he could cloud such a new one's mind. He was intrigued enough to want to know more about the being who lived here. Besides, that image interfered with his fantasy and he refused to pay it attention.

Back in the living room, which seemed to be living and sleeping area combined, Vincent approached the bed. He pursed his lips, dissatisfied with the construction. What would the neighbours think if -- when -- they broke the bed? He anticipated much yelling... but not from the neighbours. Sex between vampires sometimes spilled out, seducing the humans nearby to equally wanton displays.

Pulling out the top drawer of the bedside table, Vincent received a surprise. Only the passage of time and the self-discipline that came with it kept him from jumping back in shock. He'd expected to find a romance novel, a box of tissues, maybe a condom. Well, he had found a book all right; the cover displayed a young man's behind, the man in question looking back over his shoulder wearing nothing but a smile. The condoms were to the side and fought for space with the twelve-inch dildo and several other objects that he sought to identify.

Whatever their purpose, this female was a saucy minx, and he might be in for a good night. Although he'd never lacked female company in the mortal world, sex with one of his kind was a dismally seldom-realised moment of bliss. Humans could easily break if he forgot his strength. Sex with another vampire could be as wild and reckless as both parties wished. He now cast all mental visions of craggy-faced grannies aside. Everything about the flat screamed of youth. Closing the drawer, he stifled the thrill of anticipation to examine the rest of this dwelling.

The dull, stained, and curling wallpaper peeked out from behind various posters lining the walls. This woman had a taste for a variety of men, and Vincent was pleased to see that in the handsomeness stakes, the men so displayed weren't a patch on him.

"Wait until she gets a load of me," Vincent murmured. Of course, that was his own conceit speaking, but when one had lived for so many years, some facts were simply undeniable. Many a night Vincent thought of his looks as another weapon, a way to lure in some lonesome soul so he could feed. He left them physically satisfied, or if he wasn't in the mood for sex or the situation lacked chemistry, he simply implanted the memory of an unforgettable night in their minds. He considered it payment in kind. Lately, sex had been far less important than blood. He was about to break a long stint of celibacy.

Lifting his gaze from the images of several well-known actors and pop stars of the day, Vincent gave a small start. An eclectic soul lived here, indeed. Higher on the wall, the posters depicted other females -- Madonna, Kylie, Liza and Barbra -- and then there were the plays, musicals all. Looking through the film collection was another revelation. Classics such as *The Sound of Music* stood alongside movies that indicated the woman who lived here had a penchant for movies of the 80s. The plastic cover of *Pretty in Pink* was so tattered that it had clearly been handled, and therefore presumably watched, many times.

Another box lay beside it with the same title but a curiously blank cover. Picking up the remote, he flicked on the television and hit play on the DVD. The movie currently in the player was a version of the film he'd never expected to see even in several lifetimes. The camera zoomed in on a close up shot of tightly stretched, pink flesh taking a hard battering ram. Vincent grinned. The ramming continued, displaying the intimate kind of penetration that would have many women running from any man who suggested it, screaming in fear of imagined pain.

The one receiving certainly showed no fear, and the one giving showed no reservations. Suddenly the batterer slowed his movements. He pulled out until there was only just enough of him to remain in place, and then he pushed in. Out again, just a

little more quickly. Gradually the motion increased, until once again the guy onscreen was a blur of hips and clenching muscle. As soon as the rhythm reached its peak, the man stopped, and then slowly worked the pace up again. That had to feel devastating. Vincent was about to throw his head back and laugh when the camera pulled back.

Vincent gaped, staring at the screen, remote held loosely in his hand, about as much use as a limp cock. When he came to his senses, he fumbled with it, losing the dexterity of several hundred years, reverting to the feeble scrabbling of a human being. He increased the sound and even if he hadn't been watching... *what he was watching*, his ears didn't lie.

"Harder."

That word spoke to his nature. So often his need -- the urge to drink, not his libido -- meant finding his "victim" and enticing her into a dark alley or onto a quiet road, pressing her to the hard unyielding surface of a wall. Talk about sex against a wall; he could have invented the cocktail. There was something about doing so, of pushing against the hard brick while parts of his body remained irritatingly soft even as he leaned into the softness of a human form. Then his gentle kisses turned harder, desire mounted, teeth lengthened even as his hands grasped and pulled, lifted... Invariably his conquest tilted back her head and then... then he lingered, kissing, licking, before *biting* down hard.

By that time, most of his prey were whispering *harder, harder, harder*, even as things turned rough. He chose women when he could, and when he'd had to drink from men, he'd not set out to seduce them. Mesmerise them a little perhaps, but even then, sometimes they had clasped at him, shouted *harder* too. The struggle had turned to something else, something more... he didn't know the word, couldn't think of a way to describe that feeling. Being in control of a female was one thing. Holding a man in his arms yet still being the stronger of the two was enticing, but it was an enticement he'd never seen through to more than the obvious conclusion of imbibing blood. Not that there was any reason he should want to...

"Is that all you've got?" the guy on his knees gasped out, reaching back, grabbing for the body ploughing into him, pulling the other man in close, *closer*, deep, *deeper*. What was this movie doing here? Why would a woman watch... this? He didn't pretend to understand it, although most men found the idea of two women perfectly acceptable. He couldn't decide if what he was seeing was acceptable or...

Vincent tilted his head to one side. The action was raw, the pounding relentless, the sounds disturbing. That was when he realised he was still turned on, actually more turned on now than before he'd understood he was watching two guys. For the first time in decades, Vincent's throat dried out.

His vampire body didn't react in quite the same way as a human body did, but right now he was feeling very human, very unsure, very vulnerable, and that didn't make sense. The sounds doubled, tripled, quadrupled, as though they overlapped or there were more than two guys on the film. Either it was a result of sound editing -- something that seemed far too sophisticated for this movie -- or there were other men just out of shot.

Ah...

Oooohh...

Oh...

Yeah...

Fuck...

Hmm...

Fighting the remote, Vincent managed to snap off the sound. More fumbling on his part finally stopped the DVD and then switched off the television. The ensuing silence made him jump. A sense of awareness, of being alone and yet at the same time watched, as though someone somewhere had just discovered a secret, made him feel edgy. What if he kept watching? What would happen? What would he see? Would he enjoy it? One of the men had been handsome enough and his modest equipment had suited his body shape. The other man was disproportionately large. Vincent hated the

thought that he'd taken the time to notice these things. How did someone perform oral sex on such a large man?

He set the remote down carefully. The simple gesture took more effort than it should have. His body didn't feel like his to control. His arousal had to be because of the reason he'd come here. He'd already been thinking of sex -- and it had been a while since he'd thought of sex at all -- so it was understandable that seeing *anything* so blatant would have such an effect.

Something was beginning to nag at him, though he couldn't quite decide what it was that troubled him so. Frowning, Vincent moved on to the bookshelves. Male and female authors jostled for space but the covers were more eye-catching depictions of men. Picking one up at random, Vincent was about to read the blurb on the back when a sound disturbed him. He was still holding the book when the door opened, and a young man walked into the room.

Chapter Two

"Who... what?" Martin stopped in his tracks. He should turn and run. A strange man stood in his flat... an extremely handsome one. He quickly took in the slightly square but narrow chin, the thin mouth with its fuller lower lip, the sharp cheekbones, and the depth of those brown eyes.

Absurdly, Martin wanted to kiss those lips and run his tongue over the closed eyelids, feeling the eyelashes tickle his mouth and tongue tip. The stranger's orderly haircut made Martin want to ruffle it with his fingers: first just to make him dishevelled and then later to grip, and tug, hold the man in place, cling on. An image of this man lying tangled in sheets, his hair tousled, his eyes closed, replete from a heavy bout of lust, took over Martin's mind and other things.

Heat immediately entered Martin's face and additional parts of his anatomy. *Whoa. Down boy.* Aware he blushed, that he could do so, not to mention also get hard seeing as he'd so recently fed, he tried his best to will his cock to behave and timidly held out a hand.

"I'm Martin," he said, cheerfully. The stranger neither took his hand nor shifted his gaze. Aware that it seemed a little strange to greet someone who had broken into your flat, Martin lowered his hand. "Seeing as you shouldn't be here, I guess that was daft. Truth is, I've nothing worth stealing so if you --"

"Do I look like a thief?" The other man's gaze had been flicking up and down. To begin with, he had looked a little wide-eyed and wild. Now that gaze narrowed; the skin around the eyes tightened. The voice managed to contain a certain amount of incredulousness, as well as indignation.

"Er... no." Now that the stranger mentioned it, that suit looked as though it was tailor-made, and the highly polished shoes shone so well that Martin could see a topsy-

turvy reflected view of the room in their gleaming surface. The neatly trimmed brown hair matched the tidiness of the manicured nails and stood out against the white skin so well that he could easily see... *Crap!* The guy was another vampire.

Anxiety quickly chased back disappointment. Knowing the other vampire would immediately be aware of his fear, Martin backed up a step, trying his best to look harmless.

"I'm no threat to you," Martin blurted. He couldn't think of another reason a vampire would come here except to harm him. Vampires killed each other all the time, but usually it was during major conflicts, territorial wars. London had no master that he knew of. He'd heard London had been declared neutral, but how and by whom, he didn't know.

Vampire politics confused him. The one thing he did know was that masters seldom cared about solitary vamps like Martin. "If this is your region, then I'll move on. Please, just let me live." Martin hated that his voice sounded so whiny, but maybe subservience would see him through. He couldn't help shaking in his proverbial shoes, and it made the small plastic bag he held rustle a little.

The strange vampire tutted. "I'm not here to kill you. Stop shaking, and put that silly bag down. What have you got in there, anyway?"

Martin fished out the contents, fighting the bag in his fear and tearing a hole in the plastic in his ill-concealed terror. He held out the CD so the stranger could see the cover. "It's Kylie's latest," he said in a small voice. "I know I'm a bit of a cliché, but it's what I like."

Blinking, the stranger stared first at the small square item in Martin's hand, and then looked to his face. Martin met that dark gaze and immediately wanted to fall into those eyes as though he were a speck, or a fleck, just a blight on the universe that irritated and someone could wipe away. He wasn't worthy; this being could make him worthy.

No, that was a lie. He felt more than that. The initial pull felt like that, and then it changed. Some would call it lust. He liked to think of it as love, or that love was

involved. Either way, yearning soared, roaring through his veins. He swallowed. He'd felt something similar on other occasions but never this forceful. Vamps could mesmerise humans and they could pull the same trick on each other, or at least the older ones could do it on the young. A moment's look was all it took Martin to know that this one was old. *Incredibly* old; perhaps the oldest he'd ever met. That wasn't the reason he wanted to submit, however. He felt no pull other than the pull of desire. He snapped his mouth shut, realising he gaped.

"I don't think you're... a cliché," the other man said, although he didn't sound entirely certain. He put the book he was holding back on the shelf. "In fact, I'm wondering how many vampires have a degree."

Martin blinked in surprise, met the other man's gaze, and then followed where that gaze flicked to the wall where his one small mortal achievement hung for all to see. Not that anyone ever came in here. His face grew hot with another rush of blood. "Mum was so proud that she got it framed for me." He'd forgotten the certificate even hung on the wall, until now. He'd forgotten what it had cost him to obtain that certificate: the many hours of studying, the status of loser where his brother was concerned, the lonely nights of jerking off as a way to relax and fall asleep. "Of course, that was before..." He stopped speaking, the words trailing off naturally.

"Before you became a vampire," the other man offered in a surprisingly gentle voice.

Martin shook his head. "No. Before I told her I was gay."

The look of shock that flashed through the other man's eyes sealed Martin's fate. He didn't yet know what that fate would be, but he knew he wanted this vampire. He didn't know who he was or why he'd come here, and the thought that this might be his last moments on earth entered his mind, but his fear couldn't compete with his sexual instinct. He knew what he wanted when he saw it and he knew he wanted this man. He wanted to lie under him, have him sink his teeth and his cock into his body. He wanted those long elegant fingers digging into his butt cheeks even as that cock -- *oh, I bet that*

cock is as long and elegant as his fingers -- delved deep. If he'd needed to breathe, Martin knew he'd be wheezing for air right now.

"She didn't take the news kindly?"

A moment's surprise flashed into the younger vampire's eyes, and it wasn't at all difficult to see. He'd caked the skin around his eyes in so much black and pink that it made them shine out from the surrounding darkness. Was that truly pink glitter Vincent could see in the young vamp's hair?

"That's putting it mildly," Martin said, and Vincent remembered they were having a conversation of sorts here. He couldn't help wondering why -- why they were talking, and why the young vamp sounded out of breath. Maybe it was due to fear, and that emotion certainly hung in the air, but that wasn't the only thing Vincent could sense. He almost flicked out his tongue as though he were a reptile and could taste the air.

"She... Well, she asked me to leave and that's how I came to London. I hung out in the clubs, then one night..." Martin shrugged.

"You picked up the wrong guy." It wasn't a question, just a statement of fact. Vincent tried to curb the weary tone in his voice, but possibly his words emerged laced with just a little understanding. He'd seen such things happen many times. He'd even rescued some mortals from their own reckless desires some nights when he'd been feeling generous or maybe a little bit sorry for himself. He shook the thought off. He was vital, strong. What did he have to feel sorry for?

Martin nodded, his gaze circling the floor. Dragging his thoughts back to the young vamp, Vincent mused over some of the clubs he'd attended in and around London, both gay and straight, for he would get close to a male if necessary. Blood was what counted when one felt cold, and even if one felt lonesome, that was what he told himself most nights. To drink usually satisfied all his hungers, all his needs.

As for how Martin had met a vampire in one of these bars, the scenario wasn't difficult to imagine. Such clubs often made for easy pickings, but Vincent could only wonder what had possessed a vampire to turn Martin. Vampires seldom killed humans

these days. They seldom needed to, for protection or food. Still, killings were in some ways as rare as the change. Too many vampires in the world meant trouble for them all. Overcrowding created conflict, even warlike battles, risked discovery. If you were choosing a partner, you needed to be very certain of your choice. 'Til death us do part could last an awfully long time if you were both immortal.

"How did it happen? The change, I mean. Did he say why? Or did you ask?" Sometimes you got vampire wannabes. Anne Rice had a lot to answer for.

"No. I..." The pink tinge that had been in Martin's face most of the time now began to creep up through his skin as a red cast. The colour reminded Vincent of the bolt of cloth, and it took all of his control not to jerk. His fantasy returned, bright and vivid. His eyes widened as the body in his fantasy changed in a blink. *Flip*. Just like changing a television channel, and he baulked as that reminded him of what he'd seen on the DVD. That led to thoughts of Martin watching the film, lying back on the bed alone, hands busy, spilling forth both sighs and seed.

Vincent pressed his tongue to the roof of his mouth as he remembered contemplating doing the very same thing on the bolt of pink cloth. He would have said he'd never felt embarrassed in life. As a vampire, and one of his age, he found it difficult to fathom that anything could embarrass him now, but the idea of Martin discovering him naked on his bed wrapped in pink satin like some elaborate present tied up in a big fancy bow... Vincent longed to bury his face in his hands. The trouble was he wasn't sure if it was due to the horror of the idea, or the temptation to see what kind of expression that would engender on Martin's face.

"He said... He said I was that good."

Vincent blinked. He'd forgotten what they were talking about. Then he recalled. "That... good?" Vincent had no idea what the young man meant. Martin nodded, blushing more, and finally the message sank into Vincent's ancient mind. "Oh!"

Martin appeared to be studying the pattern on the carpet. "He said that it would be a shame for me to wither and die. He didn't give me a choice, though."

Something wistful entered Martin's voice. Vincent couldn't be certain whether Martin liked this form of existence or not. He took a guess that Martin probably held mixed emotions over his immortal life. As to the reasons a vampire had changed him, Vincent had never heard of such a thing. What kind of reason was that to give someone? How good in bed could anyone be to warrant eternal life?

Vincent swallowed. He couldn't even remember when he'd last had sex. Maybe he did have some reason to entertain a little self-pity, after all. No wonder his mind was drifting away envisioning things he wouldn't do... *ever*. Not even if he lived for eternity. He needed to change the subject. "How many languages can you speak?" He wasn't sure he cared, but the facts of Martin's degree felt like a safe subject.

"Seven, five of them fluently."

Vincent didn't know why he was talking to the fledgling. The man disgusted Vincent in many ways. *That's not all you're feeling.*

Vincent denied the accusation. He didn't know why that small voice had spoken up inside him, and he refused to listen to it. Maybe it was his dick talking. *Hey, down here. I'm down here!* Oh great! His cock was irreverently dragging him into another age. He just couldn't decide which. He was beginning to think like a caveman, an age of man who no doubt considered functions and needs in the most basic way, satisfying those requirements by whatever means. On the other hand, could he be enlightened, where in a new world feelings mattered more than opinion?

Vincent turned away, paced. He clung to the negatives. Martin was so newly turned that his humanity clung to him like a nasty taste. He was so fragile emotionally, both as a vampire and as a young gay man, that Vincent wanted to slap him into shape. Still, he'd never encountered such a puzzle, and this one had skills, a connection with the modern age. His ability to gain qualifications and speak several languages said much about his mental acuity.

Inwardly, Vincent sighed. He had nothing planned for this evening other than to order a new coffin for his annual Cotillion, and to stop for a bite. He didn't need to look

at the clock to know how long before dawn. There was time to find a meal even if he stopped here for a while. Still, he could do with a nip.

"I don't suppose you keep any fresh supplies?" Blood from the vein was preferable but bagged blood would do. He'd even put off hunting until tomorrow night if the young man could provide.

"No. I... I'm kinda scared someone will find it."

"I'm not surprised." Once more, Vincent cast his gaze over the dwelling. "Why do you live like this?"

A frown touched the other man's forehead, creasing the skin between the eyes in a way that Vincent found oddly adorable. He suppressed the sudden flash of humour that warmed him. Martin hugged the CD to his chest. "As long as I pay the rent no one bothers me. It was my flat... before. It's all I can afford."

The remark lay on Vincent's tongue to say, *You're a vampire; you don't need to live like this*. He bit down on his tongue, tasting the blood that filled his mouth, drinking it down as the wound healed all too soon. The taste reminded him of his hunger. At his age, a vampire didn't need to feed every night, so he'd gone the last four days without while planning the ball, planning the coffin, the candlesticks, and the tablecloths.

Sighing aloud this time, Vincent considered that maybe after several centuries even one as noble and wealthy as he was dealt with the minutiae of life to fill the time. Could it be after all this time he actually grew bored? The annual ball was all theatrics, but he'd always looked forward to it. There were mortals petitioning for his bite, many females both human and vampire vying for his attention.

He'd enjoyed all the fuss... once.

Apparently mistaking the cause of his sigh, Martin jerked in what looked like surprise, a smile blooming over his face. He held out his wrist. "I've only just eaten. It could tide you over."

That meant warm and rich fresh blood would be flowing through the fledgling's veins. Vincent swallowed. The temptation was great; too great for his liking. The gesture was foolish for someone like Martin to make. That wasn't the only reason that

Vincent resisted. To drink from him meant they would touch. He didn't know why but the thought of touching Martin right now greatly disturbed him. For some reason he couldn't -- *refused to* -- acknowledge, Vincent's mind went wandering. He couldn't help wondering what the young man looked like under all that make-up; how he would feel in his hands. Rather than act on the impulse, he asked, "Do you have any idea who I am?"

Frowning once again, Martin shook his head. Bristling, Vincent opened his mouth to berate him for his ignorance and then stopped. He'd spent a great many years trying to gain anonymity. Why should this young man know his history? "I don't drink... from men," he said. "Not any more, except in an emergency." There. That was only the truth. He didn't seduce men. He didn't! He certainly didn't drink from newly-turned, young, gay, male vampires.

Perplexity now masked the other man's face. Yet again, Vincent experienced conflicting emotions. He tried to stop the thought that ensued, but too late. *A smile would look good on Martin's face, but that look of puzzlement makes him look endearing.* The thought passed through his mind like a small tornado, sweeping everything he knew about himself up in its path only to toss it aside.

"I... Oh." Martin's expression changed to one of embarrassment. "I just thought... I didn't mean that you liked... That is... Well, okay then."

His third sigh of the night caught Vincent unawares. In truth, Martin paid him a great honour offering up his blood. He said so now, but added, "Don't do that. Don't offer your blood. Not to just anyone. Especially not to someone you only just met." He didn't know why he was willing to talk to Martin, but he felt the need.

"Okay." Martin nodded as though cataloguing it away for future reference. Vincent hoped he did. Many a young vampire died trying to seek amity with an older vamp by offering blood. "So, who are you, then?" Martin asked.

Inwardly, Vincent groaned. He shouldn't have started this. He shouldn't have stayed once he realised his error in believing that a female vampire lived here, and that he could seduce her. "Just call me Vincent," he said.

"Is that your real name?"

"It's the name I go by these days."

"Why? Do you have something to hide?"

"No more than any vampire has to hide," Vincent replied, stretching his lips into a closed-mouth smile.

"Then what's wrong with your real name? Is it something funny or difficult to pronounce?"

Irritated with the barrage of questions, Vincent warned, "You're seeking trouble."

Martin laughed. "Some say I *am* trouble."

Despite his annoyance, Vincent struggled not to grin. He didn't want to like this young vampire, but for some reason Vincent couldn't help warming to him. He was aware that warmth contained many layers, and if he was attempting honesty, he had to admit that included some sexual curiosity. Not inclination, but interest, a very different thing; it had to be different... because he wasn't gay. "I've no doubt," Vincent told him, and then considered the unfamiliar though welcome feeling of mischievousness that now suddenly filled his belly in place of blood. "Let's just say a certain famous Irishman and I once shared a drink."

Martin blinked, and then his eyes widened. "You mean..."

Vincent raised a hand and shook his head in warning, but the apparent glee, eagerness, and unspoken questions shone on the young vamp's face. It was way past time that Vincent left. He didn't need the hero worship. He certainly didn't need it complicated by what he was feeling. He had millions of fans all over the world. They just didn't know he truly existed.

He shouldn't have even implied that he did. Not that anyone would believe Martin if he tried to wile them with the story of the chat he shared with the greatest vampire of all time. Someone as young as Martin would boast about such a meeting, and other vampires would laugh. If Martin insisted the story was true, it could even get him killed. Whose fault would that be? *Yours*, Vincent's traitorous mind replied. He

tried to ignore that small voice but it wouldn't die. If he walked out of here now, Martin would always wonder if he was for real. Martin might be tempted to tell people they'd met.

"We can talk," Vincent heard himself saying before he realised he was going to suggest any such thing. "Just not about... that."

Clearly, Martin wanted to continue the conversation, and would likely agree to most anything to get Vincent to stay. That was Vincent's fault. The smile Martin bestowed on him left Vincent feeling vulnerable in a way he hadn't felt in years.

Chapter Three

“What will you do with your immortal life? Spend it feeding in dark alleyways, hypnotising the local storeowners out of the latest music tracks?”

The question caused Martin to bristle. The conversation hadn't gone in the direction he'd anticipated. He tried to steer the topic toward Carpathian Mountains and derelict castles, but Vincent was having none of it. Martin didn't care who this vampire was -- and really, why should he believe him? Nor did he care how old he was. That didn't give this stranger the right to question his life. He might be undead now, but this vampire made Martin feel as though he'd never been turned, as though nothing had changed. Suppressing a sigh, Martin glanced around the interior of his flat. Who was he kidding? Maybe nothing *had* changed. Still, that didn't mean this strange vampire had the right to question him.

As full of questions as Martin was, as much as he fancied the guy, he resented this man coming in here uninvited and unannounced, picking apart his life. So his undead life wasn't perfect? His mortal life hadn't been great to start with, and now there was a whole other bunch of problems to face. Yes, he now slept during the day, which made earning a living problematic at times. He hated to steal, and placing a compulsion on someone for goods or cash still counted as stealing. If he worked nights, he didn't have time to find food, and if he spent his nights hunting for willing or susceptible humans, he didn't have time to work, and so needed to steal from his victims as well as drink from them.

Sleeping during the day meant that he could easily stay awake all night, of course. One would think the night was the perfect time to hunt. Even so, he couldn't survive on all night parties, and he'd always felt out of place in gay clubs. He'd always been too much of a geek. You'd think a nightclub would be the perfect place to pick up

a bloke, and then to take a nip of blood during sex would be simple. However, being new at the mesmerising thing made him a nervous wreck. A club also offered too many distractions. The music was loud and there were all those lovely writhing bodies. Even if few blokes fancied him, he could admire them from afar. He could brush against them on the dance floor. He'd tried to entice them but he was too thin even now, especially now, as he often failed to get enough blood to drink, and if he lost concentration for a second, the mark wandered off. Besides, it looked odd if he managed to lock his gaze with a mortal and they both stood motionless in a moving crowd.

Therefore, he'd stuck to trying the trick in the bathrooms until some bloke twice his size had pushed him into a stall, face against the wall, and by the time he'd remembered he possessed vampire strength he'd been too preoccupied with what was going on at the backdoor, so to speak. Lost in sensation, he'd forgotten he needed to satisfy more than one desire these days and then, by the time he remembered, it was too late. The encounter satisfied one need but brought the other craving alive.

"Goodness, do you never stop complaining?"

The question brought him out of what felt like a self-induced hypnotic state. Only then did Martin realise he'd told the stranger all that in a furious rant. Not a stranger, in fact, but the vampire of all vampires, if Martin was to believe him.

"It's not easy, is all." They sat, one on either side of the bed. It hadn't escaped Martin's notice that Vincent had cast his gaze around uneasily and then chosen the bed as the most acceptable place to sit. Vincent's obvious dislike of the flat made Martin feel as shabby as the room. Knowing that some of Vincent's distaste was justified, Martin struggled to hold on to his resentment. "And being gay complicates things. Some guys get upset if you don't get hard right away. Some don't care, but if you want to get hard you need their blood."

"Some women don't like it either," Vincent said, a wry smile tugging his lips to the side.

"Really?" Martin displayed his scepticism by raising his eyebrows. "I'd bet you never have these problems."

"No. No, in fact, I haven't had... *problems* in a long while. Until tonight." The older vampire straightened his cuffs though his suit looked freshly pressed. He gave off the odd impression that his clothes never wrinkled, as if they wouldn't dare.

"You're saying that as though I'm a problem." Despite the fact they'd been chatting for more than an hour, Martin grew uneasy once again. "I never invited you." One of the things Martin hated was learning that the tales of a vampire not being able to enter a property were as good as a lie.

The power to keep a vampire out only applied to properties with families who had lived in them for a decent length of time, or to ownership, and it certainly didn't pertain to rented accommodations, as too much human and non-human traffic passed through. It didn't keep a vampire out of another vampire's house. He wasn't entirely sure about some of the... other things he'd heard.

"Is... Is it true?" he began hesitantly. He glanced into Vincent's eyes. "I don't have to worry about... things?" He could see that the euphemism wasn't sufficient. "I don't have to worry... about... diseases, and the like?" He looked away as he asked, casting Vincent little furtive glances.

Vincent blinked at him. "What am I going to do with you?"

Vincent whispered so quietly that if it hadn't been for Martin's vampire hearing he wouldn't have heard him. Embarrassed, Martin looked down. Vincent's hand hovered on top of the bed covers so lightly and in such stark contrast, the limb appeared to float in mid-air. Martin received an image of Vincent's hand hovering that way over his skin. Vincent's fingers walked an inch toward him. Martin looked up. Their gazes met and the moment froze. Was it his imagination or were they leaning toward one another?

Martin tilted his head, eyelids growing heavy. His body melted with anticipation. Vincent's form became a dim blur. It was going to happen. They were

going to kiss. Even now, Martin could feel the first delicate soft brush of Vincent's lips. The gentle questing movement would be a prelude to the sudden thrust of his tongue.

Vincent broke the connection. He sat up, straightening his back, so Martin was even more certain they had indeed leaned toward one another. Disappointment rushed through him.

"You don't have to worry about disease," Vincent said gently. "You don't have to worry about illness or germs, not even during sex. You shouldn't even have to worry about blood. We don't need as much as you may think except when we're injured. The sun won't burn you up in a blaze but you will burn, and if you didn't have enough sense to get out of it, if the pain didn't drive you inside, then you'd die. As for... gay sex, we don't need to eat, we don't need to digest the way a human does so..."

Martin felt the beginnings of a blush. "I've sort of worked out some of that stuff myself, but it's good to have it confirmed." He missed food, or rather the desire for it, but there were some good things about being undead. His body gave itself over to pleasure more readily. He didn't even need lube, although he preferred to use it. He just liked sex better that way. He could deduce what Vincent was telling him but alas, it also made him desire the man even more. There was something irresistible about Vincent trying to explain such intimate things to him. The idea he could have sex without worry made him want Vincent there and then.

"I'm sorry," Vincent said.

"Excuse me?" For an instant, Martin didn't think he could have heard him correctly. The vampire's tone sounded rather pitying.

"That the one who turned you chose not to teach you anything."

Anger rose to the surface, chasing his desire back. Or if he was going to be honest with himself, the feeling was more like irritation. They'd been about to kiss. He knew it. If Vincent hadn't pulled back, they would have kissed, and so if anyone needed to be taught something, it was Vincent! Instead, he preached. So Vincent had a point? So what of it? How dare he be so condescending? "Thanks for the concern," Martin said,

heavy on the sarcasm, "but I've done just fine up until now. I never invited you," he repeated. "Why *are* you here? What have I done to you?"

"Nothing. You've nothing to fear. I... I made a mistake."

"A mistake?"

The older vampire managed to look embarrassed though that was surely Martin's imagination. "You ordered bright pink cloth to line your coffin. I was curious as to who would order such a thing."

Martin blinked. He stared. He opened and closed his mouth more than once. He was about to ask how Vincent knew that but then another overriding question popped into his mind. "You took the time to wonder over something like that?" Martin watched Vincent nod. "My, you must be bored."

Judging by the man's expression, indignation flared to life. "Now, just a minute!"

Martin laughed. "And here I was worrying about what sort of impression you had of me."

"That implies I'm no better than you." Vincent sounded decidedly perturbed.

"Are you? I would have thought you had a thousand better things to do. As for my choice in satin, what do you have? Boring malevolent red, I suppose."

Vincent's expression of annoyance changed to one of surprise. "Actually... I haven't decided, and I was ordering a coffin for my annual Cotillion. It's for display, not to sleep in. You do know the coffin isn't strictly necessary?" Vincent went on. "You just need to stay out of direct sunlight, especially for one your age. I said you'll burn, but as you live longer you will develop more tolerance."

That was good to hear, about developing tolerance. He hadn't even known for sure that the sun would burn him, just assumed. As to the coffin... "I know I don't need the coffin. I just thought it would be --"

"Trendy?"

Martin shook his head, and then changed his mind and nodded. "Partly."

"Isn't that as sad as me having malevolent red for a lining?"

Despite feeling instantly depressed, Martin managed a rueful smile. "Worse, probably."

They both looked at each other for a moment, and then, to Martin's amazement, they grinned at the same time. He had the impression that if they knew each other better, they might both have laughed.

"So, what other reasons did you have for the coffin?" Vincent asked.

"I thought it might help me feel, I don't know, more like a vampire, I guess. Not so... so alone." Martin couldn't believe he'd let that piece of information slip. He could feel the other vampire's gaze, but there was nothing he could add to that statement and he'd probably embarrassed both of them. Speaking of sunlight, though, Martin turned his head to look at the clock. "It'll be sunrise soon."

For an instant, he could have sworn the other vamp was surprised to notice the time. "I should have left ages ago."

"Can you make it home in time?" He didn't want Vincent to go, but he couldn't think of a way to detain him. Thoughts of detaining Vincent led to images of handcuffs, but any vampire could break those.

"I can, if I hurry. I walked." Vincent grimaced. "Damn congestion charge. I may have money, but I won't put it in libidinous pockets. I could send for a car."

Of course he could. Martin pictured some prestigious dwelling with servants hastening to Vincent's beckoning. "You..." Martin hesitated. He didn't know if this offer would be rebuked the same as his blood. "You could stay here."

Positive that Vincent would refuse, Martin stifled a gasp when the other vampire asked, "If you don't have your coffin yet, where do you sleep? Out here on the bed doesn't seem all that secure. You never know when an accident will happen. Someone might break in just as I did, and while you should win a fight, one direct burst of sunlight could cause you severe agony and could even be the end of you, being so newly turned."

"I know this. You don't have to be so..." Martin bit back on the word. He'd been about to call the other vampire arrogant even though he had a point. When all an

assailant had to do was whip back a curtain to kill or at least cripple you, it did seem rather lame to lie out in the open. He hesitated to tell Vincent where he slept, though. Although Martin's body was already busy altering the blood he'd consumed tonight into whatever kind of nourishment his new state of being required, a fresh rush went straight to his face. He could feel the migration manifesting as heat in his cheeks. "I sleep..." He waved a hand vaguely in the direction of the fitted wardrobe.

"You sleep in the wardrobe?"

At least it sounded as if Vincent tried to curb his incredulity. Martin could only shrug.

"Well, it's fitted into the alcove and secure. There's enough room. It stays very dark. Sorry," Martin added. "I didn't mean to sound so defensive. Mother always said that's one of my faults."

"To hell with what your mother has to say." In truth, Vincent had been about to refuse Martin's offer to stay. What he actually wanted to say was "You expect me to spend the day in a wardrobe?" The young man looked so dejected he didn't have the heart. He was just taking pity on the young vamp, that was all. There was no other reason for him to act benevolent, no reason at all.

"Show me where we'll sleep."

Martin's face changed to an expression of surprise -- although he couldn't possibly have been more surprised than Vincent -- and then delight.

"Of course," Vincent added, "I've broken the lock to the front door so we'd better make sure it's secure before we settle down for the day." His natural caution winning out, Vincent still winced at stating the obvious.

"Sure." Martin sounded exuberant and Vincent almost expected him to say he'd do anything asked of him.

First, Martin took the time to remove his make-up, while Vincent secured the flat. While Vincent imparted what wisdom would help the young vampire survive, and cleared out some more things from inside the wardrobe, he watched the true features of the young man emerge. The removal of all that pink and black make-up exposed a

fresh-looking face with pale eyes and slightly pink lips that looked tender. Vincent much preferred the natural flush of those lips. Martin's face devoid of paint made the angular cheekbones stand out more prominently. Vincent almost asked Martin why he hid such attractive features under so much gunk, but the very idea that he'd noticed the young vamp's "attractiveness" disturbed Vincent and urged him to silence. He cast a speculative gaze toward the area of the wardrobe and wondered if there was time to change his mind.

The happy expression on Martin's face made Vincent strangely uncomfortable even to think of ducking out. He'd promised to stay for the day and so resigned, Vincent prepared his mind and body to spend the time in cramped quarters. The conveniently situated structure took up the expanse of an alcove so at least a solid wall protected their backs. They took more bedding and padded it out to make it more comfortable, finally settling down to rest.

A vampire could sleep standing up if need be, which seemed to surprise Martin. Did the young know nothing these days? Vincent declined to join Martin down on the floor, ignoring the rather plaintive sound of "Oh" that the young vamp made when Vincent told him he would be perfectly fine standing all day. He leaned against the wall, folded his arms over his chest, and closed his eyes. Several minutes ticked by.

"Are you asleep?"

Dragged back to alertness, still it took Vincent several seconds to recall where he was, purely due to the oddity of the situation. He opened his eyes and looked down at the vague shape on the floor. Everything appeared as dim, grey contours. The wardrobe was indeed very dark and it took even his vampire's vision a second or two to adjust. "Not quite," he replied. What nonsense questions would the young man ask of him now?

"Only, you're standing on my hair."

"Sorry." Vincent flinched. He moved.

"Ow!"

"Sorry."

"My fingers."

"Sorry."

"It would help if you took off your shoes."

Opening his mouth to refuse, Vincent couldn't think of a reason to do so. This wasn't his home, and he could blame no one but himself for his current predicament. What *was* he doing here? He'd had no business coming here, and the young vamp had been nothing but gracious. After all, Martin was sharing the equivalent of his coffin with a stranger, and even though a coffin wasn't necessary, the vulnerability of doing such a thing said much about their willingness to spend the day together.

Once more, Vincent silently questioned his motive for remaining. There had been no reason for him to stay. He should have gone home. He could have helped the young vamp without staying. He could have arranged to have someone else advise him. He could have arranged to see him again.

Oh yes, now wouldn't that have gone down a treat! He could just imagine what Martin would have assumed then. Martin might be attractive. His strange blend of naivety and enthusiasm made him interesting. Even the way he gazed back... Vincent shook his head. The idea that Martin would willingly follow where Vincent led didn't make him a good candidate to be Martin's mentor. Yet if he sent someone else along to advise him, Martin would take it for an insult. He would refuse help. As he definitely wasn't going to see Martin again, Vincent really would have to teach the young vampire a few things before he left, or else Martin wouldn't see many more nights.

A gay term flitted through Vincent's mind: chicken. Only in Martin's case, the term covered more than one meaning. For the first time it occurred to Vincent that the vampire who had made Martin over hadn't known what he was doing, or it had amused the creature knowing that Martin probably wouldn't survive very long. He'd seen this before -- vamps created as a source of amusement -- but he'd not seen it this century. If that were the case, it could be the mention of Martin's sexual prowess had been a form of flattery to serve a more malevolent purpose. He opened his mouth to voice his thoughts and then closed it again.

Whatever the reason, Martin was now immortal, immune from natural death, and Vincent just didn't have it in him to be that evil. Once, he would have told Martin the likely reason for his new existence and felt nothing over the young man's anguish. Now, he guessed it was possible even vampires mellowed with age. He could take the idea that he'd mellowed. He didn't like the idea that he couldn't help feeling protective toward Martin. Why this one? Why this man?

Balancing on one leg, Vincent removed one shoe. He set his foot down gingerly, feeling hastily withdrawn fingers. He stifled the urge to apologise again, lifted the other foot, and removed that shoe, too. "Where shall I put them?"

"Up on that shelf."

He did.

"Owwwwhhh!"

The sound of complaint filled the cupboard against a backdrop of falling objects. Only when items finally stopped falling did Vincent say another sorry. A lot of shuffling around followed his apology, during which time Vincent pressed himself as hard as possible against the wall, while Martin stood and returned the cupboard's contents to their original positions. While Martin stood, Vincent was very aware of his proximity. Vampires were only warm when they'd recently fed. Martin had fed and Vincent was very aware of his heat. It wasn't like having a human in the cramped cupboard with him, but the desire to press that warmth against his cool skin remained. They also didn't need to breathe, but Vincent could have sworn they both panted a little.

Martin had stopped fiddling around, and all was still and silent within the cupboard. Vincent must have imagined the heavy breathing for now Martin didn't breathe at all. Both vampires were so still a human could have walked by them quite unaware. If only Vincent could be unaware of Martin. Mere inches separated them, probably less than he believed. He longed for space, distance. If a vampire could suffocate then that was what he would have done now. The urge to... he knew not what, but to do *something*, reach out, grab Martin, drag him against him perhaps, but

not to kiss, no, certainly not that, caused Vincent to stand rigid. If he pressed any harder into the back wall, he would crumble the plaster.

Just as Vincent was giving into the idea that he was going to do something he'd regret, the young vamp settled back down again. A moment of silence filled the space before Martin spoke.

"You know it would be a lot easier if you just sat down."

Chapter Four

Another long moment of silence spun out. Martin could almost hear the other man's brain cells ticking over. *Sit down. Please sit with me.* His initial suggestion had been one of practicality and entirely honourable. Well, maybe not *entirely* honourable, but it wasn't as if he truly expected anything to happen. Then again, the longer they spent together in the small space, the more Martin became aware of Vincent's presence. He didn't know what had happened there a moment ago, but they'd been standing in front of each other, and he could sense Vincent as clearly -- clearer -- as if he could see him. He'd sensed Vincent's struggle, although he'd not been entirely sure what it meant. When it appeared nothing was going to happen, he'd sat down.

No more than a few seconds had ticked by before he realised that spending the next few hours in here with Vincent without touching him or having Vincent touch *him* was going to drive him insane. Every instinct and sense of awareness he possessed focused on Vincent.

Did he wear cologne or was that just his natural scent? Martin hadn't given his new condition much thought until now but in his meagre experience the walking dead didn't seem to carry any scent. This was a good thing. It meant you never sweated. It meant less reason to wash, although Martin couldn't imagine going a day without a bath or shower -- he'd washed before going out for the evening and Vincent certainly looked groomed -- and it meant that other vampires couldn't hunt you down by scent. Many believed vampires smelled of the grave, but as far as Martin was aware, vampires carried no smell at all. Of course, your very lack of odour could give you away to another vamp. Martin used cologne but he wouldn't have thought that someone like Vincent...

"There's not enough floor space."

Vincent's remark lassoed Martin's wandering thoughts. Unfortunately, the sound of the man's resonant voice in such closed quarters made Martin's internal organs flutter, and unseen muscles clench. He tried not to thrash on the floor, moan, roll around, or groan, though he wanted to do so. Oh boy, did he want to! He forced himself to speak.

"There's not enough space with you standing, not if you keep standing on my hair. Besides, as nice as you smell, I really don't want your feet in my face." While his words were true, he didn't tell the *whole* truth.

"I'll move to stand by your feet, then."

"No! Don't you dare move across me. If you do, you'll no doubt have the entire contents of the cupboard down on us, and there's a bowling ball up there somewhere." No doubt he could heal from such an injury, but he had learned early on that being undead didn't mean the damage hurt any less. He'd expected a lessening of pain, both physically and emotionally, but no such luck. If anything, everything felt heightened, and he experienced increased pain and intense emotions.

"If anyone has to move, it'll be me. It would be easier if you just sat down, though." This was only partly a lie. He really didn't want the man's feet in his face but only because the longer Vincent stood there, the more Martin wanted to lick his ankles. The other man didn't wear socks, apparently, and with his newly acquired sight, even in the darkness Martin could see a hint of alabaster skin. The trouser legs had pulled up to expose a sharp, corded line of ankle. Martin longed to nibble and the desire had little to do with food. He even licked his lips before he realised he was doing so.

Restraint. I have to learn some restraint! Patience.

If anything was going to happen here only time would tell. He waited. For one so old, it appeared to take Vincent rather a long time to make the simplest decision.

"Fine. I'll sit."

Martin struggled not to cower, expecting the bowling ball to come crashing down on his head at any moment, but nothing happened. Even as his mind attended to

greater concerns, other parts of his body and mind pulsed, expanded, lifted, *rose...* practically jumped for pure joy.

Vincent shifted around. Martin tried to keep his thoughts clean while the man settled. When Martin looked next, instead of an ankle, he now had the guy's buttocks staring him in the face. Alas, he could only imagine the smooth creaminess hidden beneath that immaculately tailored suit. His lips parted. His mouth fell open. He gaped. His fangs began to extend, and it was only his force of will, his need to concentrate to make them retract, that stopped him from leaning over, grabbing Vincent by the hips, and taking a bite of that glorious backside. Then Vincent turned to set those fine curved cheeks on to the floor, providing Martin with a mixture of relief and disappointment. One long leg stretched out. The other leg folded, hands linking around the knee drawing the limb back into the man's body. "Better?" Vincent's rich voice rang out.

No, worse in fact, but he couldn't say that. Martin nodded, certain the other vampire would see the gesture. Martin could only hope the man couldn't see the bulge at his groin, which he could do nothing about; if he groped his cock in the hope of easement, no doubt he would only draw attention to the protuberance.

"You think I smell nice?" Vincent suddenly asked.

Oh crap. Yes, he had said that. Vincent made it sound as if he'd only just realised. Swallowing and checking his teeth with his tongue as he did so, Martin made sure his fangs had retreated enough to allow him to speak without lisping. "Well, I love cologne. Whatever one you're using, it's nice." *I'm lying. You smell positively edible and it has nothing to do with my desire for blood.*

"I'm not wearing..." Vincent's voice trailed off as though he were lost in thought.

Vincent was in a... built-in wardrobe. Wasn't that what Americans called a closet? The irony wasn't lost on Vincent. He was with a young gay vampire who said he smelled nice, and for one so young to be able to pick up the scent of another vampire was unusual. It was almost unheard of except for those who formed attachments. Besides, men didn't say that type of thing to each other, although what did he expect? The man was gay and inexperienced in both life and being a vampire, apparently.

Just because Martin was gay, that didn't mean he wanted to jump on him. Of course it didn't. That was like saying every woman on the street would sleep with any man, or vice versa.

Besides, Vincent was quite certain he had no homosexual tendencies -- it didn't matter where your mind wandered; that didn't mean anything -- so it didn't matter what Martin wanted. Vincent was equally certain that Martin surely knew he wasn't interested. Vincent seriously lacked vibes in the gay department.

Gay department: that was a laugh. Vincent could picture it now. First floor: women's and children's clothing. Second floor: men's attire, and on the third floor you'll find the gay department. What would they sell? "Buy three bottles of Sheer Glide and get a free date with a sales assistant of your choice. Sheer Glide is both hypoallergenic and condom friendly."

Thankfully, vampires didn't have to worry about things such as condoms for health or hygiene. There was nothing a vampire needed before initiating sex, except maybe a partner of choice.

Vincent closed his eyes. His mind was babbling and he never babbled, not mentally or verbally. What was wrong with him, and why was he developing a hard-on? The realisation dismayed him. He'd felt aroused when he'd entered the flat, but then he'd believed that the occupier was female. Only now did he accept that the underlying shimmering exhilaration hadn't gone away. Even now, his ardour increased.

Vincent tried not to shift, although he wanted to do so. He felt very uncomfortable. His arousal confused him. An erection -- even the partial one he could currently manage -- complicated the fact that he hadn't fed tonight. It took blood from other parts of his body, and while the sensation was pleasant, it made his teeth ache for all sorts of reasons. Martin sat far too close for comfort, not that it mattered. It wasn't as if Vincent was attracted to him, but despite the younger vampire's naivety, he possessed a certain innocence that Vincent felt drawn to.

He was used to being alone, or the renowned showman. It had been a long time since Vincent felt so companionable. Complicate that with the lack of sex for several... Oh, make that a... decade? Vincent opened his eyes to the darkness. Had he truly not had sex for a decade? How had that happened? The last time was that girl in Scotland with the tongue piercing that had felt so good on his cock.

Vincent swallowed just to feel the movement in his throat, hoping the physical motion would dispel his thoughts. Gay men thought nothing of blowjobs, did they? Did a blowjob count as sex these days? Would Martin consider it a gay thing if Vincent wanted him to --

"Don't you ever wrinkle?" Martin suddenly asked, exploding into Vincent's mind in a way that filled the vampire with a strange mixture of horror, remorse, and... regret? "I mean, won't your suit wrinkle with you sitting like that?"

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you were trying to get me out of my clothes."

Martin could almost hear Vincent smiling when he spoke. At first, it crossed his mind that Vincent had caught him out, but then he decided not. The older vamp sounded far too amused to have taken his comment seriously. Martin didn't know why, but he'd felt an undeniable attraction to this vamp the moment he'd set eyes on him, and Martin's suggestion that Vincent stay wasn't out of concern, but rather because he didn't want this particular day to end. In truth, so far being a vampire sucked. Martin had found the existence to be as unrewarding as... well, as his life had been before his death. Sexual attraction was one thing, but with Vincent, Martin sensed the weight of centuries. How did anyone survive that long without going insane?

"Some very old vampires," Vincent said, "can read minds, at least when you project thoughts as strongly as that."

If he'd been human Martin wouldn't have been able to see a thing in the pitch blackness of the cupboard. Even to a vampire's eyes, from this position, Vincent's head was little more than a dark shape, but Martin could see that he turned his head and looked down. If Martin moved just a little bit he could lay his head in Vincent's lap. As if his brain agreed, his head grew heavy. His body twisted a little as if he had no control

over it. Some dim, distant part of his mind wept. So did certain parts of his anatomy. "Is that why you asked me to stay?" Vincent asked.

Vincent's comment finally sunk into Martin's psyche. He'd read his mind? Had Vincent heard all that stuff about being attracted to him and fear of a long and lonely existence? Yikes! As to his last remark, for an instant, Martin wondered if Vincent referred to the thought of his wanting to lay his head in Vincent's lap. Then Vincent added, "Did you want me to stay due to my experience? Was there something you thought I could teach you?"

Although that question could have a sexual nature, Martin now knew that wasn't what Vincent meant. They were back to the topic of surviving for centuries.

Say yes. Don't let him know the other reason that you wanted him to hang around and...

Vincent turned his head to look away. "I... see."

An awkward moment of embarrassment spun out during which Martin could only wonder what Vincent saw in his mind. For the first time, it began to dawn on Martin that he was with a much older, experienced vampire who could tear him limb from limb, quite possibly remove his head from his shoulders. Even vampires could die for real, and though he wasn't at all certain about his current existence, Martin wasn't ready to have it end. Some straight mortal men went berserk if they realised you felt a sexual attraction for them. Multiply that animosity by a vampire's strength, and you could be in for a world of hurt.

"I can't say it's the first time I've been aware of a man's attraction. It's just not something I've ever been interested in." Rather than aggravated, Vincent sounded analytical. "It's not as if I've not seen things, considering how long I've... existed. I can't say I've ever understood such an attraction between men."

"Of course not. I didn't mean... I mean, I didn't... don't expect..."

Again, Vincent looked down. A hand reached out and slender, cool fingers brushed through Martin's hair. "You know," Vincent said. "I think I will have that nip of blood now, if you don't mind. Before your blood cools completely. I'm suddenly full of the need."

Chapter Five

In such a small space, there really wasn't room to manoeuvre. Somehow, Martin ended up sitting on Vincent's lap, leaning back into his arms. One desire fed another; even one as young a vampire as Martin would know that, and the idea that the man wanted him filled Vincent with an odd kind of pleasure. Such was vanity, though inwardly Vincent berated the egotistical nature of the vampire. He seldom succumbed to such things, but this night -- and day -- appeared to be full of surprises.

As eager as Martin was, Vincent couldn't fail to notice the sudden tension in the younger vampire's limbs. Part of Martin's stiffness was sexual, but part of it was purely that of fear, despite Martin's desire for him. Vincent ran a hand up the surprisingly long line of Martin's neck to cup the man under the chin. "Be still," he told him. "I've no intent to harm you."

Once, he might have ripped open such a young vamp's throat to satisfy his hunger, or even his anger, but no longer, and certainly not today. Times changed; things once acceptable became regrets. What one did as a matter of course in centuries past haunted you into the future. Anyway, it wasn't as if he hadn't known that Martin had more than one reason to get him into the... closet. Vincent smiled at the double entendre. He'd known. Of course he'd known. He just hadn't wanted to accept, because what did that say about him? Martin hadn't wanted him to leave, and he hadn't wanted to go.

"This would be better with bare skin." Martin's whisper sounded next to his ear and spoke to deeper places than it had a right to go. Vincent's cock gave a feeble push in the confines of his clothes. The sensible thing to do here would be to deny it the blood it so needed and wanted. As clear as the argument was, Vincent failed to take heed.

“Have you heard the saying that one shouldn’t push one’s luck?” Vincent spoke against Martin’s throat and tried to put as much chastisement into his voice as he could, but he struggled to sound coherent. If Martin didn’t know that the semi-tumescence that nudged him in the butt wasn’t a small torch, but struggling yet undeniable interest, he soon would.

He needed to feed. That was the reason Vincent gave himself for his unusual response. He needed blood, not sex. His need just confused the two desires.

He was lying to himself. His cock strained to harden. Blood would cure that problem.

“Sorry,” Martin said, swallowing down the word, but he didn’t sound sorry, and the swallow caused movement in the throat under Vincent’s hand and mouth. What could a little bare skin hurt? Dismayed at the thought, Vincent allowed a more practical argument to win the day. He didn’t want blood on his suit and Martin was right; it would wrinkle if he spent the day in it, in such cramped conditions. The trousers were one thing but the jacket was a favourite of his. His vanity pricked him again.

“Fine.” He shifted, striving to get out of his clothes. Martin leaned back far enough so Vincent could ease off the jacket. While the jacket snagged his arms, Martin’s fingers started working on Vincent’s shirt buttons.

Vincent ceased moving. “What are you doing?” The words hitched in his throat. He suppressed a shudder. The ache in his cock increased, and it wasn’t as if he was hard yet, even if he wasn’t quite limp. His cock fought the limitations of his body; he grew faint.

“Helping.” Martin apparently tried to make the remark sound innocent enough, but he didn’t quite succeed. It occurred to Vincent that he’d put himself in rather a vulnerable position with his arms pinned back like this even though he possessed the strength to rip through the jacket should Martin try to attack him. Even so, for one of his age, he should know better. This was a stupid thing to do.

He almost laughed. That wasn’t the only stupid thing he was doing right now.

"I wasn't born yesterday," Vincent remarked. Martin's gaze lifted, a mere glance that slithered away before Vincent could drown him in his gaze. The hands remained busy unfastening buttons but the younger vamp shrugged.

"What do you want me to say? I like you. I want you to drink from me. If that's all I can have or share with you, I'll still be in your arms for a short time."

Vincent watched him, studying what he could see of his face, delighting in the concentration of Martin's gaze as his fingers worked the buttons. What Vincent was feeling, Martin was feeling ten times worse. "I could kill you too easily." He made the threat sound seductive, drew the sensations coursing through his body and Martin's into the words, turning those emotions into sound. For a vampire, he gave good voice. Martin shuddered, fingers juddering against the last buttons, losing their grip.

"I know."

Vincent might have imagined it, but the voice possibly quivered just slightly on the end of that sentence. "You're not afraid?"

"I didn't say that."

"Afraid and... excited?" One might have called it a good guess, and the way Martin's hands shook once more as Vincent spoke gave the older vampire almost all the information he needed. He was unsure of one piece of the puzzle, though, and to ask seemed almost too cruel. Did Martin like the thrill of danger to spice his desires, or was he just that lonely? Vincent suspected a little of both.

The jacket was off. Martin had pushed the shirt open and back, revealing Vincent's shoulders. Those cool fingers followed the course of the cloth and brought Vincent a little to his senses. The blood Martin had consumed that night rapidly cooled now, and it would lose its taste. Although to drink from another vamp was pleasurable, it was more so the sooner after one had fed. Vincent helped with the rest of his shirt. He was about to make a grab for Martin when the young man started peeling off his top.

"What do you think you are doing?"

Martin paused, looked a little aghast and uncertain. "Can't I..." He stopped.

Clearly, Martin hoped for bodily contact, and more than just a wandering hand. Vincent preferred women, but he'd drunk from men in his day, as he had said, when he needed to, and he'd never been overly concerned whether they were clothed at the time. He hesitated, trying to decide if he should refuse. Even now, though aware of their mutual attraction, he tried to deny it. The look in Martin's eye changed his mind. Some might have called that look crestfallen. What Vincent couldn't understand was why he cared. Was he finally getting old, if not in years, then just by the passage of time?

A sudden urge overwhelmed him. He could only call it an urge for contact. He wanted to shake it off, run from it, but what would be the good of doing that? He sensed the longing would pursue him. Vincent knew all about desire; he'd lived with nothing else for centuries.

He'd travelled continents, changing names, changing identities, the way he lived his life to suit the times, and always... *always*, desire remained his constant companion. He satisfied it momentarily, often in blood, sometimes in sex, on many occasions both, and even more occasionally by changing his way of existence. Always he moved on to another town, another country, and yet another need.

Finally, he'd ended up in London for the longest time, where the city beat with a pulse all its own. Its frantic heartbeat matched his need... or so he had believed. Now, he didn't understand why his throat felt dry, why his heart stuttered. Usually it only beat during emotional extremes, or while he gulped down blood. Yes, then it beat, as new life entered, flowing into his mouth, down his throat, filling his veins.

He wanted this. He wanted Martin. He wanted to drink from him, and as soon as he tried to push the desire away, it grew, as he had known it would. That was always the way for a vampire, but some part of him needed to try even if he didn't understand why.

You do know.

In that moment, Vincent was glad Martin was young, and that even if he'd been older, Vincent was one of the few vamps who could shield his thoughts from almost

anyone. Vincent didn't need to impart that snippet of information to the one now on his knees between Vincent's legs, and leaning over with such a longing look on his face.

Desire denied to a vampire was a desire mounting, doubling, even tripling in the space of time that it took to say no or yes. A shiver ran through Martin, but Vincent recognised it not just as a sign of excitement or fear, but of emotional pain. He tugged the young vamp forward, ignoring the short, sharp cry of surprise that left Martin's lips as he tumbled into Vincent's arms.

Vincent didn't even hesitate. He ripped the shirt from Martin's back, cradled that swiftly cooling body in his arms, feeling, seeking out the last of the fading warmth from the blood Martin had imbibed earlier, and traced the line of the man's neck with his teeth and tongue until he found just the right spot. The shiver that now ran through Martin's body was undoubtedly one of pleasure; indeed, Martin had fallen between Vincent's legs, and something hard and unyielding pressed into Vincent's thigh, telling him so. Martin had drunk blood earlier. He could get hard for the next few hours. Envious of the fact, Vincent bit down.

The pull on his neck sank down into Martin's body. He didn't know how to explain it, but that was how it felt. Every glut of blood Vincent took first rushed up, spilled out of him, and then the sensation receded, sank down, before the next surge came once more. Therefore, each pull came from deeper and deeper within his body. Martin couldn't help it; he groaned. The pain had assailed him, short and sharp, before this crazed pull and release on his body took its place. It felt wonderful and horrible all at once, much like the first time he'd had sex with another man; pain and pleasure combined until his body learned, and complied.

He didn't want to struggle now, but his hands couldn't help wandering, pushing, trying to ease his body free. Shock chased the sensation into retreat. Real fear took hold and then eased back. Vincent could have taken his life at any moment, and the last few hours might have been a game, but the idea refused to sit well with him.

Martin remained convinced that Vincent didn't intend to hurt him. Even now, the tide receded. Lips pulled back from his skin before returning in a kiss that preceded

a tongue flicking out to lick the wound clean. The movement, practiced, precise, caused Martin to shudder. He swooned, slumped, drifted for a time, only aware of the other man's sigh, of the life he'd shared with him, of the blood that flushed through the body that lay under him, of a growing, hardening length against his hip.

He shifted and closed his hand over that hardness before he could think about what he was doing. Turning his head, he spotted reddened lips, a small pink tip of a tongue barely seen touching the faintest smear of blood on the pout. Want and need coalesced. He struck, not with his fangs but with his mouth, fastening, sucking and teasing, forcing apart those lips, easing in his tongue. Martin tasted blood and it gave spice to the kiss.

Vincent's eyes shot open. *What the hell?* This couldn't be happening. By the time he realised someone was kissing him, a tongue had circled his twice. Sharp teeth tore his lip, and a second taste of blood dazed Vincent. A moment later, he remembered who lay in his arms, and he pushed the other man back... or would have, if that hadn't meant Martin would probably take his lip with him.

Vincent stared into the other man's gaze. Even pressed this close to Martin, Vincent could see that those eyes stared back fiery red. The young vamp was lost in his need, a condition not uncommon for one so freshly turned, and Vincent could hardly blame him. He'd let this happen. Martin shouldn't pay for his mistake. Still, he needed to get the young man off him. He tried to call his name and being that the other man's mouth remained fastened to his by lips, tongue, *and* teeth, it came out as a muffled "*Ma... thin.*"

That wasn't going to work. He couldn't shake the young vamp loose that way. Vincent considered trying to bespell Martin, but the angle was wrong, the gaze too close to focus and, therefore, too indistinct. Besides, Martin wasn't seeing anything right now. His eyes might be open, but his body had taken over his mind. Ah... good times, as Vincent recalled them, when he'd been young, but then over time one's conscience took over. He regretted many things. He'd equally regret Martin tearing away his lip even if

he could heal the injury. He did the only thing he could think of. Vincent kissed him back.

It took a few seconds for Martin to respond but then his hands began to wander and Vincent let them. The violence and violation of his mouth continued but now echoed in the way Martin's hands grabbed and groped him. Trying to take control of the situation, Vincent started to ease them around. If he could get Martin on his back, under him, then he could hold him down and just maybe...

A particularly vicious squeeze of his cock made Vincent gasp. The slight pain shot into his testicles and then up into the rest of his body. The sensation seemed to enter his mouth as Martin's fangs shifted. Blood flowed and now ran in a steady trickle from his lips to Martin's mouth. Vincent both heard and felt Martin swallow. One gulp followed another and Vincent let Martin drink, giving back some of what he had taken. His lip throbbed but, more alarmingly, so did his cock.

Remembering his predicament, and the fact that Martin didn't appear inclined to let go or stop drinking, Vincent did something that he still silently insisted went against his nature. He stroked the other man's erection. Martin gasped... and let go, at the same time winding his legs around Vincent's hips. Still, that was better than having teeth penetrate his lower lip.

The vampire who had turned Martin had only left him with one piece of advice. Actually, he'd left him with two comments that amounted to the same thing: Take, never give. Feast, but don't let anyone feed from you. Martin had remembered that for about two minutes. Such advice sounded too cynical for his liking.

The moment Vincent's teeth had pierced his flesh, Martin had ceased to think clearly. The moment he'd acted on impulse and kissed Vincent, Martin ceased to think at all. Now his mind returned to him by degrees, but the images that assaulted his senses hardly strived for coherence.

Feed me. Eat me. Feast. Don't stop. Let me drink. Cock hard; rub it now. Fuck me hard. Fuck me anyway, anyhow. Kiss me...

The fact that Vincent was doing just that began to bring Martin to the surface of the tide that was dragging him ever deeper into becoming a creature of pure need. By the time he could remember his name, Martin was sure of two things. His first thought consisted of the idea that Vincent held him in an embrace more arousing than anything he'd ever encountered, which either said something sad about his existence up until this moment, or this man was just that incredible. The second thought said that Vincent was going to kill him for this.

The notion forced Martin to let go and brought him short of screaming out of his trance.

Chapter Six

"Did I do that?"

Martin lay on his back staring at the wound that currently made the lower part of Vincent's face throb. The young vamp's chest rose and fell as though he were a man labouring for air. Martin didn't need to breathe but the action went with his wide, staring eyes, and the utter panic Vincent could see in them. He nodded but at the same time, he said, "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Glad to hear it," Martin said almost flippantly, but the expression on his face belied his tone. Martin didn't believe him. "Oh, sorry." Martin suddenly appeared to notice their position. He struggled to move and then winced, no doubt because all he succeeded in doing was somehow wedging them tighter together.

Vincent hissed; he couldn't help it. Martin was on his back now, his legs wide open, wrapped around Vincent's hips, lodging them into the tiny space. Erection rubbed against erection in perfect harmony, creating friction through the thin barrier of material. Vincent had never felt such a sensation. He wasn't sure if he liked it or loathed it. Not only that, his lip still bled. The bleeding eased but little drops fell from his lips, pattering Martin's face like rain. He watched Martin's tongue snake out to lick up the drops it could reach.

Despite the hiss issuing from Vincent's lips -- one that Christopher Lee would have been proud of -- Martin appeared oblivious to Vincent's unease, lost in too many other considerations. Vincent wished he could feel equally oblivious to the hardness lying alongside his. Martin licked his lips and the sight caught Vincent's gaze as surely as his own gaze could mesmerise. He stared, and couldn't stop staring.

Suddenly aware of the confining warmth in the closet, of another male's body so close -- closer than any man had ever pressed against him before -- of the slight

coppery, salty tang of blood in the air and on his tongue, Vincent quivered with need. The strength of his desire took him by surprise. So, too, did the awareness of his pulsing erratic heartbeat and the matching, throbbing tightness between his legs. His heart only beat when he'd recently fed and then only in extremes. In the space of another beat, Vincent became overwhelmed with thoughts of giving and receiving pleasure.

What was wrong with him? He looked upward, taking his gaze from Martin's lips to his eyes. What he saw there failed to help. Martin lay silent, expectant, patient. He clearly knew Vincent felt... *something*. Maybe he even knew what Vincent wanted more than Vincent knew himself. One thing Vincent did know was what Martin wanted to do with his lips; Vincent had only to ask him. No, not even ask. One look would do it. One look much like the one he could swear was on his face now, and Martin would shift position and willingly sink to his knees.

Martin's eyes widened, only this time the look questioned. Vincent felt like a cat caught in the glare of a headlight, and everyone knew what happened to a curious cat. He shook his head, but the sensation belonged to someone else, as though some other force moved his head. Martin's gaze flicked left and right but didn't move away. It just wasn't possible that a younger vampire could mesmerise, let alone captivate Vincent, so something else held him trapped. Not only that, but Vincent had inadvertently sent his desire out as a thought. As old as he was, Vincent could feel that thought as though it were solid, corporeal. He became aware of his desire slithering around in Martin's mind and through the other vampire's body.

No.

A hand traced the centre of his desire.

No.

Legs locked around his, no longer merely braced and wedged, but taking control.

No.

The body under his arched.

No.

A hot mouth opened against his throat, hot with recently shared blood. Part of Vincent's mind churned with the thought that men often shared other fluids more commonly than they shared blood.

No.

Teeth nibbled; lips sucked.

No.

Fingers tugged, parted fastenings. Flesh spilled out into the other man's grasp.

No!

A hand clasped the back of his neck, tilting his head down. Vincent had the strength to tear himself away but didn't. He closed his eyes, unable to look. Not looking made the feeling worse. He could only sense and smell. Cloth ripped, fell away from both bodies. Flesh touched flesh, more heated than it should have been. A mouth pressed insistently against his, tongue snaking past the barrier of his lips, forcing its way inside, and drawing his tongue back out in a chase. Teeth clamped down, penetrating his tongue, purposely holding him in place. If he'd been worrying about his lips, Vincent sure didn't want anything happening to his tongue; he daren't move.

Time wrung out as Martin fumbled around. Vincent would have asked what was happening if he'd had use of his tongue. He refused to acknowledge that he grew impatient. He wanted to pierce, to plunder, to sink *inside*.

Martin proved to be a perceptive young man as his fingers eased the very tip of Vincent's desire against a small tight ring that gradually expanded to draw him in. The passage felt smooth to his inward glide. Vincent frowned. *Lube*? That was what they called it, wasn't it? Did the sod keep it in his pocket or here in the cupboard? Was that what the little bugger had been doing? Preparing himself? Martin angled their bodies perfectly, and it seemed the work of a moment just to give in, to *ease* in.

No, no, no!

Vincent's eyes shot open, but by then it was too late. His body had other ideas. That ring of muscle clamped his cock hard and tight. He'd never felt such tightness, and where a living man might have been hotter inside, that peculiar temperature added its

own spice to the proceedings. One desire fed another, and being old, Vincent had learned self-restraint long ago. Those lessons deserted him now.

One bright thought penetrated his mind as he found his rhythm: Who said you can't teach an old dog new tricks? Martin's chuckle resonated on the end of the thought and Vincent groaned. The trouble was the sound became lost amongst all the other noises that currently escaped him.

"Fuck me," Martin whispered but to Vincent's ears, the request sounded so loud. Besides, wasn't that what he was already doing? "Nice, easy, hard." Martin's face twisted, contorted even as the words slipped from his mouth. "Impale me."

Vincent almost laughed but the situation had stolen his voice. Martin's eyes flashed at him, red and wild. "You've got a monster there."

That was when Vincent realised that Martin was intentionally trying to make him laugh, to distract him, make him stay... not that he could think of leaving right now. His hips slammed forward, drawing out a hissing "Yessssss" from Martin's lips.

Still unable to believe he was here, Vincent's mind convulsed between what he was feeling and studying the physical reactions Martin displayed so openly. "Yeah," Martin moaned, tossing back his head. "Please..." His neck rolled from side to side. "Vince," he moaned. Maybe that was just a shortening of his name, but maybe it was also incoherence. "Ah..." Martin's lips parted. "Hmm..." His lips compressed around the sound.

It was like watching the movie all over again, only this time the noises falling from Martin were intimate, and it wasn't just because their bodies clamped tight together in such a confining space. His sighs of pleasure, his moans, weren't just noises; they were as vivacious as sensation. Very aware that he was the cause of Martin's response, Vincent stared, mesmerised by the vision of Martin's face. It was a little like watching someone secretly. He watched every flick of Martin's tongue as it licked his lips, every flutter of eyelids, and every frown. The lip-licking made Vincent want to press his lips against Martin's but now wasn't the time for more kisses. They'd gone so

far beyond. Kisses came before... or after, and after wasn't going to be very long if Martin kept moaning like that.

Martin responded to every little push, moving and tilting his hips, inviting more. Even if Vincent's mind argued, his body accepted every conscious lift of Martin's pelvis to his. Pleasure became ethereal, unreal. What he presumed shouldn't have felt natural felt unbelievably right. Vincent's body took over his mind.

* * *

"Touch me here."

"Martin..." Vincent's gasp resonated around the small enclosure. Time stood still. Maybe the vampire told the truth and he was as old as the hills, but Martin had the experience on him here.

"Rub me here, like this."

"I can't." Even as he said no, Vincent was rubbing him, sliding fingers into previously stretched flesh. Martin was already wet with Vincent's seed. Infertile as vampires were, like blood they continued to produce body fluids just as living creatures did. They just couldn't procreate. They couldn't produce life where there was no life. As cool as Vincent's ejaculate was, Martin felt glad of it. All things heightened, he'd actually felt Vincent empty inside him, something he'd never experienced in life. He wanted more of the same. Martin whimpered.

"Put it in."

"Not again."

"Yes." Vincent had to hear his plea.

Minutes, or hours, ticked by. Both men rested, but all too soon, fingers wandered and stroked. Already overworked flesh rose to gentle coaxing. One other thing vampires had was stamina. When Vincent shoved his thumb into Martin's mouth, Martin sucked it at once. He circled and bit, laved it as though it were the smallest yet most wonderful cock in the world. On his knees, Martin couldn't see but he could feel when Vincent slammed into him. If he'd been human he'd be raw by now, and even as

a vampire he was testing his limits. They both were. It wasn't enough. Could it ever be enough?

It might be as midnight in the cupboard, but in the real world night would descend. Vincent would leave him. Martin didn't want this time together to end. For as long as Vincent responded to his urging, Martin had decided he would take him. He would endure. He wanted every possible moment because he knew... he just *knew* when Vincent left, the craving for him wasn't going to end.

"More." Martin broke the silence that hereto had only been interrupted by their low sighs and shuffling around.

"Up."

He heard but Vincent's hands already dragged him to his feet before he could comply. Spun, Martin faced the wall at the back of the wardrobe. He was open and wet, and just as well, for though he could survive more damage than a human could, Vincent angled his cock up and in. One thrust shoved Martin into the wall. He gasped, amazed that Vincent remained hard, amazed that the reluctant vampire was no longer holding back. One thing Vincent hadn't done was touch Martin's cock. Even now on the verge of another orgasm, when he took hold of Vincent's hand and guided it to that rigid column of flesh, he felt Vincent's hesitation.

"Please," he whispered, and whatever qualms Vincent struggled with, he apparently relented on the sound of his plea. Long, slim fingers encircled Martin's cock, and the younger vampire bucked, grinding toward sweet release. He rode Vincent's hand and cock until the wall shook, plaster broke, more things tumbled around them, and they both shattered, crying out, the same incoherent shouts tumbling from their mouths as though they were one being.

* * *

The sun rose. So did Vincent, repeatedly, until the sun set and he fell. Eager to be free from the wardrobe, he pushed against the doors with too much force. Both he and Martin practically flew out into the room. Vincent gulped in air as though he needed to breathe. Naked, on his hands and knees, he gazed around the room. His gaze finally

came to rest on Martin, lying equally naked, replete, a far too satisfied smirk on his face. Martin rolled his head to the right so he could look at him. He grinned.

"Out of the closet," Martin said, laughing on the end of the short but eloquent sentence.

Vincent scowled but he couldn't seem to call up enough anger to back up his expression. "Funny, not," he murmured.

Martin swallowed, suddenly looking a little more sober. "Are you going to tell me you hated it?"

"That's not the point."

For a moment, Martin just lay there, looking at him. Then he turned his gaze to the ceiling. "Of course not."

He sounded resigned, but Vincent had lived too long not to hear the plaintive tone. Pain was a bitch. Emotional pain could sometimes be worse. Right now, Martin grieved. Vincent hadn't left yet, but he'd be lying if he said he was oblivious to how Martin felt about him.

"I can't." He couldn't what? See Martin again? Do this again? Have sex with another man again? He couldn't change what had happened. Regret was pointless. It would be best just to put it out of his mind, resign it to the past and experience. Alas, the thought of putting all this behind him wasn't as easy as he had believed it would be.

"I don't mind receiving," Martin said with a grin. He made it sound like a joke when they both knew it wasn't. Vincent no longer sensed Martin's fear, not because of what they had done but because they both knew he wasn't going to hurt the other man for this. He was Drac... Old. He was old, experienced, and strong. He could have stopped Martin if he wanted, and they both knew that.

"You don't have to lay a hand on me, or tongue. I won't try to fuck you. I want to penetrate you but with my tongue, not my cock."

"Don't," Vincent warned but the word emerged sounding far more choked than it had a right to from a throat that had no need to draw in air. The thought of Martin's tongue tickling around... back there... He tried to shake the thought off even as it

persisted. If he asked, Martin would do it to him, *for* him, offer up anything he wanted and not because he was desperate or needy but because right from the moment they'd touched, and maybe even before then, they'd wanted each other.

"You seek fulfilment for an empty existence." He hadn't meant to say that aloud, and he could as easily have been speaking to Martin or trying to justify his own actions.

Martin rose up on one elbow and then up onto an outstretched arm. If he hadn't known Martin was such a young being, Vincent might have flinched back from that dark gaze alone. Once more, the young vamp had surprised him. A moment later, Martin surprised him yet again.

"You want me to admit that I'm lonely? I am. I've always been that. If you're trying to analyse me, then fuck you."

Vincent widened his eyes. Even though he was aware his expression turned dark, possibly dangerous, Martin apparently refused to back down. Vincent could taste the other man's fear mingling with diminished excitement, although desire remained. Martin just wasn't going to give into either emotion.

"I'm gutted my family deserted me. I'm sorry they can't accept me for who I am, but that happened before I became a vampire. I'm not devastated by it. If they can't take me how I am then that's their loss. You turn me on and I'm attracted to you, but I don't fuck for your or anyone's validation."

"I'm..." He didn't finish. What good would it do for him to say sorry? He had said sorry more times in the last few hours than he'd done in a lifetime. He didn't know what to say, and he didn't know what he was going to do, but right now he wanted a shower, and not because he felt dirty. Considering what he'd done over the centuries, things he'd sometimes had no choice but to do, sharing an intimate moment with another being was low on his list of guilt, even if that being was of the same sex. The trouble wasn't so much what he had done but what he would do next. Even Martin's mini-confrontation had turned him on.

Chapter Seven

The doorbell rang. Aware Vincent would have heard it from the other room, and even over the noise of the shower, Martin called out, "It's okay. It'll be the delivery man."

He went to the door, checked the peephole, opened the door, and let two men carry the box within a box into his room. It might seem peculiar to deliver a coffin inside another box, but he guessed that discretion won out. As for the late delivery slot, well, you got what you paid for, and the guy who supplied these coffins understood certain people had special requirements.

By the time Vincent emerged from the shower, Martin had pried open the surrounding wood and stood looking at the shiny black box. He lifted the lid aside and then fingered the pink satin. Hearing Vincent cough politely, he glanced at Vincent's face and, seeing the man's expression, he hung his head. He couldn't tell if his skin flushed. In life, Martin had often blushed. To do so now, he needed blood and although he'd not fed since the previous night, he and Vincent had shared blood back and forth several times; to do so didn't feed the body enough, but it fed other desires.

"I know it's silly but, well..." The pink lining had seemed a good idea at the time. Now, Martin wasn't so sure. Despite what he'd said, he'd believed the coffin obligatory in some aesthetic way. Vincent had told him this wasn't so. Unable to take a day job, this one expense he could have done without.

If people believed in vampires, they might laugh to think of one needing money, but if you didn't want to get noticed, you needed to fit in with everyone else. A coffin in a studio flat wasn't exactly the definition of "fitting in" for most. He could see that now. One unexpected visit from the owner would have her calling the police at worst, chucking him out on the street at best.

"Where were you planning on keeping it?"

In truth, he hadn't given it any thought. He'd considered under the bed, but the space wasn't large enough. Martin tried to conceal his wandering thoughts, but if Vincent didn't pick them up from his mind, maybe he picked them up from something else, maybe Martin's expression, because Vincent sighed.

Martin was partly thinking of the problem the coffin now presented, but he was also thinking of lying Vincent down in it and getting on top. He was thinking of getting down on all fours and barking like a dog if it turned this incredibly hot guy on.

Sure, he wanted more of the incredible sex they'd just shared but Martin also wanted sex with Vincent. He liked what he saw, physically and otherwise. Martin could only hope that if Vincent could perceive any of these thoughts, that Vincent would also notice how much he wanted to see him again, even if the encounter had nothing to do with sex. He liked Vincent. There. He sent out the thought. Let Vincent make of it what he would.

"What I said," Martin blurted, hardening his voice. "I know who I am. I don't have a problem being gay. Being a vampire, that's a whole other matter. That, I don't understand at all, but I've learned to cope with one, and I'll learn to cope with the other. That's not why..." He waved a hand to the open wardrobe. "I just want you to know that. I just wanted... you. It doesn't have to be more than that. It doesn't have to mean more than that. It doesn't have to carry on beyond this room, or after tonight." He said all those things, but they weren't entirely true. They didn't have to carry on but he dearly wanted them to do so. Martin shifted uneasily. Vincent stared. Was the vampire reading him? Martin looked down at the floor.

"You're lethal," Vincent told him. "Left alone, you'll get yourself killed within a year, maybe before another six months are up."

Martin opened his mouth to argue and then snapped his jaw shut. Vincent was probably right.

"Pack what you want to take with you."

Martin looked up. "What?"

"You clearly can't be trusted to survive on your own, and I wouldn't want a rat to stay here." Vincent cast his gaze around the room, a distasteful curl to his lips. He dropped the towel, much to Martin's surprise and delight, and then proceeded to tug on the jeans Martin had lent him, Martin having ruined the trousers of his suit. The jeans were a little too short, and Vincent's expression turned to one of surprise. He was likely shocked to find he was wearing such a thing as a pair of jeans, let alone borrowed ones. "Well?" he added when he looked back, and it apparently registered that Martin hadn't moved.

"You want me to go with you?" Martin had to be sure he understood, though he was almost too afraid to ask.

Vincent shook his head, but it was more a gesture of resignation than denial. "I can't think why. I should know better, but I can't leave you here."

Wanting very much to accept the offer, Martin squared his shoulders, set his jaw, and said, "No."

Vincent stopped dressing, stood there, and blinked at him. "Pardon?"

"I said no."

A dark cloud swept over Vincent's face but Martin refused to back down. "Your choice," Vincent snapped, the words sounding as though he had to force them out. It also sounded as though it was a foolish decision on Martin's part, and maybe it was.

"It's not that I don't want to go with you," Martin said. "It's more of a question as to whether you want me."

Vincent had pulled on his shirt but had yet to fasten the jeans. Wisps of dark hair poked out. Martin tried not to look. Now Vincent fought the buttons of the shirt, every gesture conveying exasperation. Again, he paused. "I just said --"

"No," Martin interrupted. "Do *you* want *me*?"

The question stilled Vincent's movements. His fingers held onto the shirt where he'd been about to push a button through a relevant hole. That was what it came down to: objects and holes, or orifices, and the desire for them, but that kind of craving

without an emotional connection never lasted long. Martin needed to know if Vincent felt anything other than curiosity.

He'd buttoned the shirt wrong but couldn't seem to do anything about it. Even when Martin approached and took over, slowly but deftly undoing the buttons he'd fastened into the wrong holes, and putting them into the correct slots, Vincent just let him. How old did a vampire have to be to move with an elegance that made walking look almost like floating? Nowhere near as old as Vincent and yet right now he possessed little control over his body. He feared moving because he would stumble, over his feet, over his thoughts, over his words.

Martin waited.

"I... can't answer that. I only know I don't want to leave you... here."

"Here isn't so bad. I've lived in worse places."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

Martin moved in. He shouldn't have given off any warmth, not now, not for one so freshly turned who needed to feed mostly due to their recent exertions, but he did. Vincent didn't understand that heat, or maybe he just didn't *want* to understand. Maybe it wasn't heat that he felt but something else. What he wanted didn't seem to matter to whatever force animated him.

He lifted his head as he moved back a step to escape the closeness of Martin, but that meant their gazes met.

"Do you want any part of me?" Martin spoke so quietly no one but another vampire would have heard.

"I do," Vincent confessed though he knew not why. Martin's lips curled.

"You just don't know which part yet?"

A nod seemed as good as a word. Vincent sighed. He'd not wanted anything for so long and now to think that another man... He shook his head as though the movement might clear his thoughts, though he already knew what he was going to say. "I don't know what I want. I'm not promising happy ever after. No one can do that so soon even if they're immortal, maybe especially not *because* they're immortal. But happy

for now isn't so bad. I could make you happy... for now. I won't harm you, and I just can't leave you here."

"What difference does it make to you where I live?"

"It just does, is all." Vincent shrugged. "I can teach you and maybe in time..." He shrugged. "No one knows what the future holds. As for what you're asking, this is too much for one night. You're asking too much... but I'm willing to see where this goes."

Martin swallowed; Vincent studied the movement in the man's throat as he did. Martin's whole posture was one of nervousness, maybe mingled with a little hope and longing. He sounded afraid as he spoke but Vincent wouldn't have been surprised if Martin just had no choice in what he apparently needed to say.

"I have to advise you I can be quite demanding," Martin said. Was Martin warning him? When Vincent made no attempt to interrupt, Martin moved closer. Vincent turned his head, aware they both tilted their heads; he need only lean in a little, and they would be kissing. Martin's words almost crawled over his lips with promise. "You've no idea of the things I'll ask you for. Of what I can make you want. Take me with you, and you might never want to let me go."

Martin reached down. His sure, knowing hands slipped in past the gaping waist of the jeans. Those hands adjusted Vincent, settling his jewels into a more comfortable position, cupping, stroking, turning him on, and then withdrawing, easing up the zip without catching a single hair. Vincent couldn't have done half so well himself. He was sure he would have caught his skin in the zip. The jeans were more than a little tight. The fit made him aware of all his most intimate bits. The fact that Martin's hand lingered on the outside of the fabric didn't help him think.

Shaken, Vincent asked himself once more just what in the world he was doing. This was madness. Still, when one had lived as long as he had, did such things truly matter? If he wanted Martin, why shouldn't he have him? Taking several centuries of courage in hand, Vincent whispered, "Will you go with me?" He only realised he'd closed his eyes when he felt Martin's head move in a nod against his. Then all he paid attention to was Martin's kiss.

Epilogue

"Martin, come here!"

Martin responded to Vincent's shout as he always did, hurrying to his call, only slowing at the last moment, trying not to appear quite as eager as he was. He wasn't fooling either of them. "What is it?" he asked, walking into the large elegant room. Vincent's home screamed wealth though mostly for practical purposes. The whole place was kitted out with special glass, shutters, and shades. There was more than one secret room. Martin had never felt so safe and it was only partly to do with the security of Vincent's home. He felt safe with Vincent, in body and heart both.

Vincent lounged back on the sofa, waving a remote control at the television screen on the wall. They differed in one thing. Vincent kept up with world events, and Martin almost turned away groaning when he saw the news. Then he stopped, turned back, and slowly approached the sofa as Vincent turned up the sound. There, in back of the shot, was his pink-lined coffin.

"And then what did you do?" asked the reporter.

"I said, what the bloody 'ell to me mates, like."

"That's right." A beefier man joined his mate and scratched his head. "An' I said, well, don't that beat all. Never seen anything like it." The two London dustmen stood glancing at the cameras shyly, although you could see they were enjoying their moment of fame.

"And you've been a dustman for many years?" the reporter enquired. She smiled encouragingly.

"Refuse collector," one of the men corrected.

“Waste management operatives,” the other man said. The reporter blinked. “Been at this more years than I’ve seen hot dinners,” the waste management operative declared.

“Exactly,” the other man said.

“Where do you suppose it came from?” the reporter asked.

The shorter man sniffed. “Well, I thought maybe there was one of them dominatrix around.”

The reporter blinked again, although this time her eyes widened. Clearly, it wasn’t the response she expected. Martin giggled. He recalled the day.

Although early morning and a dull overcast day, the sun’s presence had dragged at his senses. Lucky for him, Vincent’s blood had given him strength. As long as they kept out of direct sunlight, Vincent assured him they could move around adequately during the day. Sunblock also helped. The experience proved Vincent spoke the truth, but Martin had felt his eyes closing, his skin stinging. By the time they’d finished, he’d been almost slipping into unconsciousness on his feet. After deciding to go with Vincent, Martin had packed up his most personal possessions.

“You’re not to bring the coffin,” Vincent had told him.

Martin pouted, fingering the lining. “I so liked this pink satin.”

A strange grin had stolen over Vincent’s face. “I have the rest of the bolt.” His gaze slid toward Martin then away again, as he tipped his head toward the corner of the room. There against the wall in the shadows lay a roll of pink satin. “I’ll have sheets made with it.”

Martin had agreed that was a better idea than the coffin but he couldn’t risk leaving the coffin in the flat where it could be traced back to him, and therefore maybe even the establishment where he’d purchased it. Vincent had agreed. They’d dumped it in a London street, and then rushed for the black car Vincent had sent for. Martin had wanted to see the reaction of the dustmen finding an abandoned coffin on the street, but it hadn’t been possible. Now six months later it seemed something in the universe had granted his wish.

The smaller dustman stared wide-eyed at the other. "Someone with a gothic fetish? I doubt it. Not that you ever know," he added, murmuring, "I mean, it *is* London." He said this as though London were the only city in the world where such things occurred.

The reporter coughed pointedly. "And the... item has been in storage ever since?"

"Yeah, well, it's not like we knew what to do with it."

"That's right," a third man said, speaking up for the first time in the conversation. "I was driving. I can say I've seen it all now. It's not every day you find a coffin abandoned against a brick wall, its lid askew, let alone one with a fuchsia pink lining. What do you do with it? Didn't even know if it would fit in the truck."

"We were a bit worried, you know, in case it had... been used like," the first man said, speaking the last words on a whisper loud enough to wake a corpse.

"Did you search?" the reporter asked.

"For a body?" All three men gazed around now, until one of them laughed, but the idea of an actual body clearly unsettled them.

"There was nothing," the large man insisted. "We had to decide what to do so we took the coffin. Nothing in the rules about such things but it's rubbish, ain't it?" He scratched his head. "Council never tells you what to do about something like this. We got it back here, but it's been here ever since. Become quite a talking point."

One of them chuckled suddenly. "An abandoned coffin. And dig that pink lining. Whatever next? Gay vampires?"

Martin sensed Vincent's amusement. The older vamp turned the television off, and then turned his head to look at him. They stared at each other. Vincent had been hesitant that day all the way home. Even so, Martin had been patient. He'd tumbled into the car the same way he'd tumbled into Vincent's life, into his arms.

Happy for now had sounded good enough, but during the last few months, the more Vincent let him into his mind, the more Martin realised just how happy Vincent was. For the first few weeks, the older vampire had remained in denial, but time had

taken care of that. Apparently, having existed for so long, Vincent had thought the world held no more surprises for him. Life had other ideas for them both.

Mentally, they sparked off one another. Their conversations often took the construction of veiled insults, but there was no animosity in their arguments.

Physically they were surprisingly compatible in that Vincent let Martin have his way and Martin liked being the strange balance where he took the subservient role yet dominated Vincent into letting that happen. He loved urging Vincent on *into* him, or laying Vincent back and using his mouth to drive him wild.

Emotionally... that wasn't nearly so easy to explain. Emotionally they were still learning many things about each other, but love wasn't always an easy thing to put into words. Together, they'd both learned there was more than one way to come out of the closet... or a coffin.

Martin moved around the seat and Vincent stirred as though to get up to meet him. "No," Martin instructed and Vincent stopped moving. He leaned back, gazing up. "Let me. Stay there. I'll kneel."

Martin went to his knees between the other man's legs, leaning in for a kiss. They cuddled, and caressed, shared a slight coppery tang as they kissed. These days they never let a day pass without drinking blood. It didn't take much and most of it was bagged from donors, but they drank a mouthful here and there to make sure their bodies could always respond. When Martin sat back, he concentrated on getting Vincent out of his clothes.

"Here?"

"Hmm." He could have easily taken Vincent into the bedroom where bright pink satin adorned the bed, but here on Vincent's white sofa was just as good. There'd been so much of the pink fabric left that they'd had sheets and loads of cushions made out of it.

The sight of Vincent leaning back, lifting his hips, helping Martin drag his clothes off, not a spark of hesitation in those movements or in his thoughts, said more about how Vincent had accepted their relationship than anything else could. It only took

Martin a moment to shrug off his robe. "Right here is just perfect," he told Vincent, and as always, Vincent never argued with him now.

A moment later and he couldn't speak another word with so full a mouth. His family had spent time telling Martin to keep his mouth shut regarding his sexuality, but no lover had ever said such a thing to him. Martin was an expert at this, and it entered his mind to wonder if they gave degrees out for cocksucking. Fellatio 101. He would have grinned if he could.

He set out to prove his skill, aroused by the swelling column that plugged and closed his throat. He'd been good at this in life. In death, with no need to breathe, he'd turned the moulding of his lips, tongue, and throat into an art form. He moaned; he hummed. He grasped swollen testicles and pulled on them, testing their endurance until he just knew Vincent's gasp contained some pain. He could tell that in Vincent's case, the pain was good, an aphrodisiac. He'd learned more about this man in silence than in all the time they'd spent talking.

Martin caressed as he sucked, working his finger toward that dark hidden entrance. The first time he'd done this he'd been afraid that he'd push the other vampire into killing him. That first time, Vincent's body had tensed under the probing but he hadn't refused. Now as then, Martin pushed, broke through, and slid his finger in an inch then two, curling the digit forward. When Vincent's fingers wove into his hair and gripped him hard, he knew he'd eased in enough to find the right spot. Vincent bucked and Martin opened his throat. Vincent's thighs trembled. The older vampire clearly fought whatever urges assaulted him, and then lost the battle. Hips surged, thrust, fucking his throat.

There was more than one good thing about not needing to breathe. As Vincent's orgasm approached, Martin felt the warning in the throbbing flesh in his throat and in the man's movements growing still, as well as in Vincent's bone-crushing grip. Martin couldn't help it; he bit, just a little, and once more he tasted salt, this time Vincent's semen mingling with the spurt of blood. This wasn't the first time he'd done this but these days with the sharing of semen or blood they also shared love.

Looking up, Martin gazed directly into Vincent's eyes. Although that gaze was heavy and lidded, drugged on passion, he could see the smug curl to Vincent's mouth. Now was the time to get his other wish.

"So... pink satin for the coffin next Cotillion?" Martin asked, putting an innocent tone into his voice. With his fingers, he traced a slow circle on Vincent's stomach.

That dark gaze said he wasn't fooling anyone. Vincent's enigmatic voice replied, "You can have anything you want as long as it's in my power to give you."

"Your love?" He didn't know where the question came from but he blurted it out. He already knew he had Vincent's love; he just wanted to hear it.

Time paused. Vincent stared at him. "My love," he finally said, as if he were agreeing. "My love wrapped up in pink satin."

"What?"

"I'm going to steal your coffin back for you."

Martin laughed. "There's no need."

"There is, and it's nothing for me to break in and get it. They'll probably be glad to see the back of it. I know it's mad. I know it's crazy, but no more crazy than my falling in love with you." He leaned forward, bestowing a kiss on Martin's lips while Martin took to trembling. "I love you," Vincent whispered, breaking the kiss. "I love you even more in pink."

Sharon Maria Bidwell

When asked to describe her writing, Sharon can find only one word to summarise: diverse. She's written both fact and fiction yet cannot imagine the day when she will call herself anything other than a storyteller. Her articles, poetry, short stories, and longer works have appeared in a variety of print and online publications both in the UK and in the USA. She's received fan mail all the way from South Africa.

Sometimes writing in more than one country requires her to exclaim there is nothing wrong with her spelling. This fact wouldn't surprise her English teacher who once wrote in her school report, "Sharon could do well with her writing if she only stopped coming up with such fanciful tales." He may have criticised her over-active imagination but he never complained about her spelling. Being English, Sharon simply prefers having a *colourful* life rather than a colorful one.

Her work often crosses genres; thus, crime, horror, fantasy, action, adventure, fairy tales, gothic, erotica, romance, and slipstream, are themes she uses in any combination. She gave her website the title of "Aonia" for in Greek myth that is where the muses lived and with numerous small publishing credits, praise for her novels, and several books now available, the muses have definitely found a home at Aonia. Should her English teacher (or his ghost) choose to drop by he would be most welcome, as are her readers.