

# Just One Bite

Volume 1

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JUST ONE BITE

Volume 1

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# The Unlikely Vampire by Scarlet Blackwell

"Dinner is served, sir," Maxwell said.

Zachariah Sayle was like Pavlov's dog. At the mere mention of food, his fangs snapped out involuntarily and he salivated profusely. He ran his tongue over the sharp points and turned towards his manservant, his gaze straying eagerly across the room, in search of his victim for the evening.

"Here he is." Maxwell seemed particularly pleased by this evening's coup.

Zachariah stared at the six feet something of muscular masculinity posed carefully against the wall, grinning lazily. He grabbed Maxwell by the arm and pulled him aside.

"What are you doing? I don't...do men."

"Why not, blood is blood isn't it?"

"Yes but..." The vampire blushed, casting a glance at the stranger. "When I drink, often times I become aroused and like to..."

A loud voice interrupted him. "Humans aren't as deaf as you two boys might imagine. Now what's going on here?"

Zachariah's victim had a drawling Californian accent and the tan to go with it, dark-haired with piercingly blue eyes. He wouldn't have looked out of place on a catwalk and he knew it.

"There's been a mistake," Zachariah said quickly,

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nervously.

The stranger stepped away from the wall. "Now, if there's one thing I don't like, it's being jerked around. I'm a busy man. I've been handsomely paid for tonight and while it's not my bag..." He shrugged. "Whatever floats your boat, dude."

He peeled off his jacket and threw it over the back of a nearby couch, revealing a black T-shirt which emphasized every muscle of his impressive torso and black jeans which neatly showcased his finer attributes.

"Let's go, vamp."

Zachariah swallowed. He cast an anxious glance at Maxwell. Zachariah was an old-fashioned English gentleman who had been more at home in Victorian times where it was titillation just to see a lady's ankles. These days it was all drugs, pornography and iPhones and modern life bewildered him. He was too shy to court his own blood. Too polite to kill. He paid for it instead and if he got extra off the lady during it that was fine by him. It was perhaps disturbing that there was no shortage of volunteers. Men had never entered the equation though. Being the weaker partner was worrying and clearly on this occasion he would be, some inches shorter than the man standing in his apartment and rather more lean.

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, you're not my type."

"Yes, he is," Maxwell interjected swiftly. "AB negative. Your favourite."

Zachariah glared. "That's not what I meant."

His potential meal looked decidedly pissed off. "Hey you're not my type either, Goth boy but a deal's a deal. Let's get on with it." Zachariah regarded the pushy stranger stonily. Paying for blood usually put him in the driving seat. He was unused to having his meal walk in the room and start making demands. He was unused to *men*.

In the mean time, Maxwell had obviously decided he'd had enough. He sidled out of the door, leaving Zachariah and his paid-for meal alone.

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The stranger smirked, clearly enjoying Zachariah's discomfort. "What's your name, Goth boy?"

"Zachariah Sayle," Zachariah said between his teeth.

"Well, I'm Andrew. Nice to meet you. How do you want to do this anyway?"

There was a long, uncomfortable silence. Andrew sighed. He pulled off his T-shirt and threw it on top of his coat. "Want to bite me on the neck or the wrist? I'm guessing you prefer the neck. Much more...intimate." He almost leered.

"Put your clothes back on, sir," Zachariah protested, frightened by the acres of hard flesh exposed but Andrew had tilted his head back and the sight of the heavily pounding pulse at his throat caused Zachariah's mouth to almost drip.

He stepped forward, stifling an involuntary whimper of need, a slave to his passion as always.

Andrew regarded him with an amused smile quirking his sensual mouth. "Your eyes have turned red," he remarked. "You're into me after all."

Zachariah shook his head. "I'm into your blood, that's all." "We'll see." Andrew smirked. "I like a challenge."

Zachariah frowned, confused and unsettled. Was Andrew flirting with him now? Hadn't he told Zachariah he wasn't his type? This was deeply unfamiliar territory. Zachariah had not once touched a man in his two hundred year life, unless one counted the vampire who had killed him and taken extreme liberties with Zachariah while he did. A night he tried to block from his memory. He took a deep breath. He couldn't afford to wait any longer. He was almost faint with need.

"Sit down on the couch," he said in as authoritative a tone as he could muster. "Relax back. I'll take a quick drink, then you can go." He found himself almost trembling with nerves but put it down to the blood lust

Andrew did as he was told. As Zachariah moved over to him, Andrew grabbed him by the wrist, his strength punishing. "Sit on my lap." He pulled Zachariah firmly astride his thighs,

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despite his protests.

Andrew tilted his head back, "Go on then."

Zachariah hesitated. Andrew's hefty belt buckle dug into his groin. The naked torso was pressed against his, the heat of Andrew's skin scorching Zachariah through his thin shirt.

Zachariah felt suddenly dizzy. He leaned forward, lips seeking Andrew's neck and caught a whiff of cologne. He took his time, his tongue first coming out to lick the skin lightly, unsure of this rough masculinity beneath him when usually it was all yielding femininity.

Andrew shuddered a little as the tongue touched his skin. His hands suddenly gripped Zachariah's hips hard and his head fell back further in complete invitation.

Zachariah gave a little gasp. His lips pressed against Andrew's throat in a kiss. Andrew's large hands moved deliberately to cup the cheeks of Zachariah's bottom. Zachariah drew in his breath and let it out in an involuntary moan.

"You like that don't you?" It was a whisper against his ear which set the hair on the back of his neck standing on end and his cock thickening in his pants.

Zachariah tried to ignore Andrew's comment and the hands which squeezed and massaged. He continued the foreplay of Andrew's neck, kissing, licking, sniffing the aromatic skin the way he always liked to do before he feasted. It was, in a way, something to tease himself with, despite his hunger. Often it told him if the victim's blood was poisoned by chemicals or disease. Here he smelled nothing but pure, vigorous health. It sent him almost insane with desire.

"I lied about this not being my bag," Andrew whispered. "You are very much my bag."

Zachariah nearly moaned in surprised delight. He pressed closer to Andrew, bracing himself on the couch with his arms by Andrew's head

Andrew pulled him flush with his chest. "I can feel you hard for me," he whispered. "Ever had a man before, vamp?"

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Zachariah shuddered. He was so aroused that the blood lust had almost started to take second place. When he replied, he stammered, like that shy human he had once been. "N-no."

"No, I didn't think so. That's okay though." Andrew's hands slid under his shirt and up his back and Zachariah shivered and shook. "Because I can teach you."

"I don't..."

"You don't what? Want me? This says different." Andrew put a hand between Zachariah's legs.

Zachariah almost cried out, such was the thrill that went through him. Nobody had been this sexually aggressive with him since his creator. He stared into the ocean blue eyes and their heavily dilated pupils.

Andrew rubbed Zachariah's cock firmly through his pants. With his other hand, he took Zachariah by the hair and pulled his face into his neck. "Now bite me, vamp."

Zachariah hissed in supreme pleasure and sank his fangs into Andrew's neck, piercing the skin. The reciprocal groan and the way Andrew's hands tightened on him left Zachariah in no doubt as to Andrew's arousal. He bucked up at Zachariah, erection pressing against him.

The blood flooding Zachariah's mouth was like liquid fire. Scalding hot, it was honey and nectar and all pure sweetness he had never expected to taste from a man. Now he knew better and now he was done for. He rocked uncontrollably against the hand in his groin as he drank.

Suddenly his belt was unfastened, his pants peeled undone and Zachariah tried to fight the large hand which reached inside but the fingers were around his shaft quickly, jerking him off firmly, surely and oh God, Zachariah was in paradise.

He panted for breath, spilling blood which ran down Andrew's neck.

"Careless," Andrew said into his hair and nipped Zachariah on the neck in turn. His victim was breathless, his pounding heart giving up his blood to Zachariah ever faster. He let go of

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Zachariah's cock to unfasten himself and then their two shafts were together, hard and thick and leaking and Zachariah was bucking forward insatiably while Andrew clutched his ass, grinding himself against him.

Zachariah took his mouth from the wound. Andrew immediately attacked his neck in turn, kissing, biting, sucking blood to the surface before grabbing Zachariah and kissing him hard on the mouth.

Zachariah shook and trembled. He tried half-heartedly to pull away but Andrew held him ever firmer, his mouth demanding, commanding, plundering.

Zachariah submitted. He let Andrew's tongue find his. He pressed a tentative hand between their bodies, wrapping it around Andrew's shaft. Andrew growled in pleasure. His hands yanked Zachariah's pants and boxers down and then they spread him open, touching that secret place no one had been near since his creator.

Zachariah squirmed. He caught his breath and bit Andrew's lip as Andrew stroked him with one finger. Andrew laughed and drew back. "Easy tiger."

Zachariah surged forward and lapped the blood from his mouth, groaning, possessed, and Andrew carried on with that stroking, pressing lightly at Zachariah's entrance until Zachariah felt himself give, felt the tip of the finger swallowed and himself penetrated.

"Mmm..." was the appreciative murmur in his ear before Andrew let Zachariah go and reached for his jacket, withdrawing two items – condom and lubricant.

Zachariah stared. What was going on here? Andrew had not just come here to be prey. He had come here to seduce. How did he know Zachariah was worth seducing or did he sleep with any vampire who paid him, regardless of what they looked like?

He didn't ask. His mouth wasn't capable of formulating adequate words. He was too interested in watching Andrew unwrap and roll on a condom and cover it thickly in lube. Too

Just One Bite: The Unlikely Vamp interested in feeling the coldness of lubed fingers on him, touching, stroking, spearing.

"Oh God." His head fell back.

Andrew bit him on the neck, pressed at the bruised skin with his tongue. "You're so perfect. God, I knew you would be."

Zachariah stiffened. He pulled back to look down at Andrew, who gazed up at him with those ocean blue eyes large with need. Zachariah wasn't sure he had ever seen such desire on a partner's face before and it made his dead heart clench with a thrill he hadn't felt in years. Was it crazy to consider that maybe this was it? Maybe this man was the one Zachariah had searched for all his immortal life?

Zachariah wanted to ask so many questions. But it wasn't easy to keep on track with fingers in his ass. And first and foremost he was a *man* before a vampire. A man who had never considered this. But not once had he forgotten the way he had responded to the touch of his creator, even if he had tried to suppress the memory.

He let his head fall onto Andrew's shoulder, nuzzling his neck, licking at the lazy trail of blood.

Andrew took his hand away. Hard flesh slid between Zachariah's buttocks, pushing, seeking. Zachariah's hands dug into Andrew's shoulders. He let out a cry as Andrew thrust up into him, pulling Zachariah down to impale him.

"Oh God, oh my God..." he gabbled almost hysterically, as he remembered this feeling. When he had died. When the ecstasy of being drank from while being made love to, overwhelmed the knowledge that he was being murdered.

He turned his mouth to Andrew's neck as Andrew held his hips and thrust deeply into him. He parted his lips, seeking the still bleeding wounds he'd left behind. And as Andrew struck a spot inside him which made him almost scream, Zachariah's fangs pierced the tender skin once more.

Andrew groaned loudly. He held Zachariah even harder and moved him up and down, forcing Zachariah to ride

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him, which Zachariah did, with abandon, drinking with renewed thirst, a cloud of lust consuming him whole.

A hand went around his cock. Andrew jerked him off swiftly in time to his thrusts. Zachariah strained and bucked and cried out. Blood trickled down Andrew's neck.

Zachariah lost all sensation of surroundings and time. There was only this. The focus of his world. For sure, he was bewitched

He screamed as he came and Andrew held him hard as he fell back, losing consciousness.

Zachariah blinked, looking around, recognising his bedroom. He was in his bed, naked, and beside him was his naked meal, looking a little pasty around the gills but very much alive. Zachariah's mouth worked like a goldfish, unable to speak. He thought he might have dreamed his male AB negative meal. The first meal ever to fuck Zachariah into oblivion.

"Do you always pass out when you make love?"

Zachariah shook his head. "Never. But sometimes I pass out when I drink too much. It makes me giddy." It was a lie and they both knew it.

Andrew smiled but didn't challenge him. "Hmm, don't I know," he said dryly. "I'm not sure there's much left." He leaned down over Zachariah, fingertips trailing over his cheek. "Us AB negatives, we're the best. Don't you forget that."

"I don't think there's much danger of that." It was a hoarse whisper. Zachariah had lost his voice along with everything else. "Did you...know me before this?"

Andrew grinned, showing perfect teeth. "Sure I did. I've seen you in that vamp club you go to. You never once looked at me. I swore I was going to change that. Make you see what you were missing."

Zachariah swallowed. "I see all right."

"Good. Glad we understand each other. I'd ask that you be a

Just One Bite: The Unlikely Vamp bit more careful next time though." He indicated the wounds on his neck.

Zachariah blushed with shame. "I'm sorry."

Andrew smiled. His blue eyes glittered. He pressed close to Zachariah, torso against his, a hard thigh pushing between his, so Zachariah shuddered with sudden renewed arousal. "Because it's you, you're forgiven."

Zachariah returned the smile hesitantly. "Perhaps I can make it up to you?" He couldn't believe his own boldness. Where was this coming from?

Andrew rubbed his nose against his and planted a kiss on his mouth. "I've never met a more unlikely vampire than you before, Mr. Sayle," he declared. "I think I'll have to give you lessons in being a real one. Real vampires don't apologise and don't offer to make up for their bad behaviour. They take what they want and to hell with the lot of you."

Taken aback, Zachariah said in a small voice, "But I'm not like that. My mother brought me up to have good manners."

Andrew laughed loudly. "Oh I like you Zachariah, I like you a lot. You're a breath of fresh air. Don't ever change." He pulled Zachariah into his arms and kissed him breathless.

# Sacrifice by J.L. Merrow

Damien had been eleven years old when his parents took him to the stone circle at Castlerigg. He'd been enchanted by it, by the way it had looked so jagged and uneven, quite unlike the orderly arrangement of building blocks at Stonehenge. "Like dragon's teeth," he'd whispered to his mother, who'd smiled at him and said, "Yes, exactly like."

Had he been just a little bit younger, Damien would have run around the circle, threading the stones like a needle, whooping in his still-unbroken voice. But he was old enough, now, to know his father's moods. His father would soon tire of the place, as he did of most things that brought him neither money nor prestige. Best to stay quiet and watch the setting sun bathe the hills around them with uncanny warmth.

"They used to perform magic rituals here," his mother said, in a tone that meant she was teasing him.

"What for?" Damien asked.

"Oh, the same thing all men want, I expect. Wealth beyond imagining. I expect they sacrificed a few virgins, too."

Damien blushed, being old enough to know what a virgin was.

"Stop filling the boy's head with nonsense!" his father snapped, and his tone made it quite clear the visit was over.

"Can't we stay a little longer?" Damien pleaded.

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It was strange, how none of the sun's warmth seemed to touch his father's handsome face. "No. Come *on*, Rebecca!"

They left, Damien dragging behind despite the fact he knew he'd pay for it later.

He'd never forgotten that day.

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Rafe sipped his pint, the bitter taste a potent contrast to the sweet sight in front of him. He put the kid's age at around twenty, twenty-one. Slender figure, just short of Rafe's six foot two, floppy blond hair and moon-pale skin Rafe could almost taste from across the room. Trying to look relaxed and confident, but his feet were twisted around the legs of his bar stool and his fingers kept playing with the beer mats.

And those grey eyes of his might be chilly, but they'd been staring at Rafe all evening.

It was getting on for last orders now. Time to make a move. Rafe didn't bother with the dregs of his pint, just set down his glass and walked over to the bar. "Seen something you like?"

The kid flushed. "Maybe."

Even in that one word, Rafe could hear centuries of wealth and privilege. Rafe's ancestors had probably tugged their forelocks to this boy's great-great-granddad and stood aside while he made free with their wives. Ah, well. Looked like it'd be just the one night, then. Shame, really, because close up those eyes didn't look as cold as all that.

"Would you like to go for a walk with me?" the kid asked, the words coming just a little too fast.

Rafe raised a pierced eyebrow. "Holding hands in the moonlight?"

Shades of pink were still tinting those smooth cheeks. "I thought we could go up to the stone circle. There'd be nobody there now. I'm Damien, by the way."

"Rafe. And yeah, why not? It's a warm night. You driving?"

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Damien nodded, his hair flopping over his eyes. He pushed it back without even seeming to notice. Rafe wondered if he did that in his sleep. "My car's out the back."

The car didn't fit with the rest of him—a banged-up Ford Escort Rafe might have driven himself at that age. "Your other car a Porsche?" Rafe asked sardonically.

In the moonlight, he couldn't tell if Damien flushed again. "I'm not rich, if that's what you mean. I work in a shop."

Rafe laughed. "Buy that public school accent there, did you?"

About to unlock the car, Damien stopped. "I went to a public school, yes. And then my father found out I was queer. Happy?"

It wasn't often, these days, that Rafe got to feel ashamed of himself. There was a tightness behind his sternum and a shiver in his throat, like he'd drunk a bad pint. "Sorry." He'd have put a hand on Damien's arm, but there was the thickness of the car between them

After a moment, Damien nodded, and they got in.

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Damien yanked the car into gear, and pulled out of the pub car park with a scrape of loose grit. Thank God he'd only had the one glass of whiskey—even that was making his stomach churn. His hands slipped a little on the steering wheel, and he wiped them, one by one, on the legs of his jeans. God, he hoped Rafe hadn't noticed. But Rafe probably noticed everything, with those sharp blue eyes underneath expressive ginger brows.

Rafe wasn't what Damien had been expecting, when he'd screwed up his nerve to go to the pub with the dodgy reputation. Much better looking, for a start—Damien had been bracing himself for some furtive, middle-aged queen with bad breath and a pot belly, not a tall, broad-shouldered stud with piercings and a ponytail. Right now, Damien wasn't sure which he'd have preferred.

But at the end of the day, it didn't matter who. Just that it

# Just One Bite: Sacrifice happened, tonight, in the way he'd planned.

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Rafe was beginning to wonder about Damien. He was as nervous as a bride on her wedding night, as Rafe's old granddad used to say—bloody hell, was that it? Was this his first time with a bloke? Rafe looked over at him—lips tight, arms rigid on the steering wheel. Ah, well. Wouldn't be kind to call him on it. "Been up here long?" he asked instead.

"A-about a week," Damien said. "Annual holiday—I've got another week after this."

"Spending it all in the Lakes?"

"Yes."

So much for conversation. "I've been up here nearly a year, now. I work at the red squirrel reserve up at Whinlatter—for some reason, they seemed to think I'd fit right in." Damien didn't react to the joke about Rafe's colouring. Probably didn't even notice it. "The turning's up here on the right."

"I know." Damien seemed to realise he wasn't being very friendly. "Thanks."

He parked the car by the side of the road, and they got out. The moon was high and full, limning the hedge with silver and casting velvet shadows. Rafe decided against making any jokes about werewolves.

Damien grabbed a rucksack from the boot of the car—it looked like he'd planned ahead, brought a blanket. Bloody hell, he'd been determined to get laid. Odd to think that if Rafe had stayed in and watched the telly, it'd be someone else up here with the kid.

They walked through the gate, the stone circle spread out in front of them, with its panoramic views over the Cumbrian hills. Rafe often wondered if there was Northern blood in his ancestry, the way those hills called to him.

The best views were from the circle itself, Rafe knew. Casting a smile back at Damien's white face, he strode forward.

# J.L. Merrow

Damien's hands trembled a little on the straps of the rucksack. He was so close, now. So close to regaining all that he'd lost, with his father's rejection. Wealth beyond imagining... Had his mother known more than she let on? Or had it merely been something half-remembered, a whisper from days long gone?

He'd been up here at sunset, making all the preparations he could. He'd had to hope no one would come along and disturb his carefully placed herbs, the oils with which he'd anointed the stones. It had taken years of research to reconstruct the ritual. The last few things he'd need—the oil, and of course, the knife—were in his backpack along with, absurdly prosaic, a packet of condoms and a blanket.

Rafe stood in the centre of the circle now, his arms outstretched. He spun, slowly, like some rough Celt from prehistoric times. "You can feel the magic in these stones, can't you, Damien?" he said, in his warm, low voice.

Damien shivered. He'd grown sensitive, over time—but it was rare to find anyone else who wasn't blind and deaf to the ancient power. At least he was positive no one had been here to defile the place.

"It's not the stones," he said. "At least, it wasn't in the beginning. It's the place. People think the place is magical because of the stones, whereas really it's the other way around. My mother told me all about these places," Damien added absently. "She died when I was fifteen." He'd been inconsolable, when they'd told him the news at school. His teachers had seemed to think his depth of feeling admirable—they hadn't realised he wasn't crying for her, released from a painful illness. No, he was crying for himself, left alone with a disappointed father already beginning to suspect his true nature.

"Must have been hard," Rafe said. He'd stopped turning now. "Why don't you come here?" he said in a softer tone.

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#### Just One Bite: Sacrifice

As soon as their lips touched, Rafe was sure Damien had never been kissed before. Was that even possible, these days? Rafe had had his first kiss aged fourteen, from a girl who'd lived down the road. She'd offered to show him her knickers, and after he'd politely said, "no, thanks," hadn't spoken to him for a month. His second kiss had been from his older brother's best mate, and had been a rough, stubbly thing tasting of illicit cigarettes and scrumpy.

Damien tasted of whiskey and nerves, and there wasn't a hint of roughness in the delicate lines of his chin. It wasn't a turn-off. Rafe liked all sorts, but he had a weakness for delicate, pretty things that often had him wondering if he might not be straight, after all. Damien's body was warm in his arms, his form slender and supple. As Rafe pressed their bodies together, he felt a hardness against his thigh that excited an answering stiffness in his own cock, reminding him that no, he wasn't that straight, as it happened. He heard a *thud* as Damien's backpack dropped to the ground. Part of him noted it seemed pretty heavy for just a blanket. Maybe Damien had a bottle of something in there as well

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Damien was drowning. He hadn't expected to *feel* so much. The roughness of Rafe's stubble on his skin, the tightness of his big, strong arms—and the hardness poking into his stomach, making it churn with fear. Rafe was too quick for him, pressing kisses to his lips, invading his mouth with his tongue, then breaking contact to nip rasping kisses along his throat. Then one of Rafe's hands left Damien's waist to knead gently at his arse, and the other pushed up between them to squeeze a nipple.

Desperate for air, Damien pushed Rafe roughly away. "Stop!" In the treacherous shadows cast by the moon, Rafe's face looked more ghoulish than worried.

But his tone was soft, reassuring. "Going too fast? Hey, I won't do anything you don't want, okay?"

Ashamed, Damien crouched down to open the rucksack,

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using the flap to conceal its contents from Rafe. "I just thought... we should get the blanket out. Do this properly."

"I'm all for doing things properly," Rafe said, and Damien could hear the smile in his voice.

"But there's no need to rush."

There was every need to rush, before Damien's nerve broke completely. He spread the blanket on the ground and sat on it awkwardly, while Rafe dropped down to join him with rough grace. He cupped Damien's chin with one hand, and kissed him more gently this time.

It was easier, now Damien knew what to expect. He found the courage to kiss back, to start undoing the buttons of the plaid shirt Rafe was wearing. Rafe's chest underneath was smooth, like Damien's, and suddenly Damien needed them to be flesh-toflesh. Stripping off his t-shirt, he pulled Rafe closer, both of them on their knees.

Rafe's body was warm, smelling of clean sweat and ale. When Rafe's hands started to undo Damien's jeans, he didn't flinch, just kissed harder. He shuddered as Rafe licked a trail along his collarbone. "Sweet as moonbeams," Rafe said with a grin.

Dimly, Damien realised he had to get Rafe naked before it was all too much. He tugged at Rafe's jeans, getting them undone more by luck than judgement, and gasped as his hand met another man's cock for the first time in his life. So hot, and God, so big...

He couldn't fail now, even if his stomach clenched painfully at the thought of what was coming. "L-lie back," he said, hating the tremor in his voice. Rafe looked at him quizzically, but obeyed. Damien scrambled to take the last of his clothes off, then pulled the rucksack closer, bringing out the condoms and oil. He sheathed Rafe's cock in latex then slicked it up clumsily but thoroughly, and then dried his fingers off on his shirt before reaching behind himself. His teeth clenched involuntarily as he removed the plug.

### Just One Bite: Sacrifice

"Bloody hell, you really were determined to get laid tonight," Rafe said. There was a trace of sharpness in his tone, but he didn't resist as Damien lowered himself carefully onto Rafe's cock. Holding it with one hand, Damien pushed his hips down until he felt it breach him. There was discomfort—but not the searing pain he'd been dreading.

"Shhh," Rafe said, stroking Damien's thigh. Had he whimpered? Damien didn't know. Scrunching his eyes shut, he pressed down harder, feeling himself stretched and filled. "That's it, that's good," Rafe whispered, and suddenly it was good, it was more than good, and Damien's eyes opened wide as his mouth made a soundless "O" of astonishment.

"Yeah, that's it, keep that angle, fuck, yeah," Rafe was saying, his hands on Damien's hips forcing him up and down, up and down. Rafe's face was screwed up, his words losing their coherency, and his piercings glinted in the pale light as he moved. Damien did his best to keep up the rhythm despite sparks going off behind his eyes every time the tip of Rafe's cock hit him just right. He'd heard it was horrible, the first time, just something to get through, but this was beyond wonderful, this was magical, why the hell didn't everyone do this? And then Rafe's hand was on his cock, and there were no words for how Damien felt. As he shuddered out his climax, his whole body clenching around his balls, Damien was barely aware of Rafe doing the same deep inside him.

"Bloody hell," Rafe breathed in his ear, and Damien realised he'd collapsed onto Rafe's chest, both of them slick with sweat. "Quick learner, aren't you?"

Damien stiffened. Had it been that bloody obvious? But it didn't matter. He needed to complete the ritual, or it wouldn't work. You had to give, to receive. It was one of the oldest precepts there was, in magic. So Damien would give. Blood. His virginity. He reached shakily into the rucksack, and found the knife by touch. "Close your eyes," he whispered.

As Rafe did so, Damien drew out the knife and, biting his lip against the pain, cut a score across the palm of his left hand.

#### J.L. Merrow

Blood welled, and started to drip. Hastily, Damien held his hand out to one side so that the blood would fall on the ground, and not upon Rafe's skin or the blanket. He hoped it would be enough.

"What the fuck?" Rafe snapped, his eyes now open.

"It's magic," Damien whispered. "A symbolic sacrifice, to bring wealth beyond imagining." Carefully, he laid the knife aside.

"You think that's going to work?" Rafe asked, sounding calmer now

"It has to. I can't go on—knowing what I've lost, having to scrape for every penny—" He broke off. There was a rushing in his ears. "You hear that?"

Rafe was frowning. Calloused hands pushed gently at Damien, who flushed as he remembered they were still connected. Carefully, he rose, wincing at the slight soreness. They both stood, naked in the moonlight—but that was not the only light, now. Strange balls of light seemed to bob and hover above each of the stones, like moons in miniature orbiting uneven, craggy earths. "It's beautiful," Rafe breathed, his voice hoarse with wonder.

Damien couldn't speak. He could see his mother's face, paler even than his own, in one of the orbs, and she was smiling at him. The rushing in his ears increased, and it felt as though a great darkness was being sucked out of him—all the bitterness, the sense of betrayal, the loneliness and the envy—and devoured by the lights. He felt clean, cleaner than he'd ever been, and tears ran down his cheeks to drip upon his bare chest as the blood from his hand still dripped upon the ground.

"So beautiful," Rafe said again, and this time he was looking at Damien. Slowly, they came together, embracing in the benediction of that soft white light. Rafe kissed him softly. "Hey," he said. "Your magic. Did it work?"

Wealth beyond imagining...

Just One Bite: Sacrifice "Yes," Damien breathed, smiling through his tears at his lover. "It worked."

# One Last Wish by Josephine Myles

I awoke at his touch. There was none of that frenzied rubbing that some guys give; some of them go at it so hard it's a wonder they don't get blisters. No, this was a slow, sensuous caress, lubricated with something slippery, and I rather fancied meeting the owner of the hands.

It had been a good couple of centuries since I was last summoned forth from the lamp, so I took my time getting ready. Since my new master was being so attentive I thought I should probably make an effort, and went for the oiled bare chest and fine silken trousers, in a lifelike, solid form. I've never favoured the transparent look - to be frank, I've always wanted to be made of flesh and blood - and my legs are one of my best features so I'm damned if I'll hide them in a tail of smoke.

What would be the most impressive entrance I could make? An explosion? A puff of smoke? His hands flowed so smoothly it inspired me to flow myself, squeezing out through the spout and reforming from the head down. It was all going perfectly until I got carried away and formed my foot before it fully escaped from the spout. I winced, jerking my foot out of the lamp and trying not to fall over.

He sat on the floor, giving me that stunned expression like they always do the first time. Nice to know I still had what it took. I had to hide my own surprise at his appearance, though. He was young, golden haired, and had barbarian patterns inked Just One Bite: One Last Wish

on his lean arms; an exotic combination I found oddly compelling. I puffed out my chest and glared.

"You summoned me?" I said, in my most impressive tones.

"Wow! Are you seriously meant to be a genie?" He asked, before collapsing in a heap of giggles.

I stared at him. I was prepared for awed wonder, delight, even fear – I've had my fair share of grown men cowering under tables. But laughter; that was a first. Then I caught the fragrance of hashish.

"Sorry man, sorry." He recovered himself, but his lips still twitched and his eyes danced. "I just never imagined a genie would look like he'd walked off the set of a gay porno."

I'd never heard of this "gay porno" before, but judging by his leer it was something carnal. "I am the djinni of the lamp, young man, and I'll thank you for a bit of respect." Okay, so he was my master, technically, but I didn't see any reason to let him in on that yet. It would only be for a short while, anyhow; most young guys squander their wishes in hours, if not minutes.

He was staring in a way that made me uncomfortable, which was ridiculous seeing as how I was the magical being and he was merely human. I stretched, flexing my muscles and watching the way his eyes darkened as he ran his gaze down my body.

"Cool," he breathed. "So, does that mean I get three wishes?"

Here we go, back into familiar territory. This I could handle. "That's right. Anything you want; riches, fame, beautiful maidens, they're all yours."

He wrinkled his nose. "Nope, not really into any of those."

"You're not?" Okay, so maybe I should have guessed about the beautiful maidens by the way he was looking at me. But surely everyone wanted riches and fame?

"Great beauty, then. Artistic talents. A singing voice that can make grown men weep. A larger manhood. You name what you want – I can give it to you."

# Josephine Myles

He shrugged and stood, walking over to his bed with feline grace and perching on the edge. Perhaps he didn't need his beauty enhancing, after all. In desperation I looked around. The room we were in was small, a cluttered table and chair monopolising most of the remaining floorspace.

"Somewhere a little more spacious, perhaps. I can give you a palace. Wouldn't you love a palace of your own?"

"What, and leave all this? You'd have to be mad to give up a view like that."

I turned at his gesture, and the panorama froze me in place, stirring up long-buried memories. The whole wall was made of glass, and beyond . . . beyond was a path, leading between sand dunes and down to a beach with azure waters beyond. A lump rose in my throat. It was like a vision from the land of the Djinn; the land I had long been banished from.

"Beautiful, isn't it? That's where I found the lamp, washed up on the beach."

I pushed myself back from the yawning chasm that always opened at thoughts of everything I had lost. I'd spent far too long staring into it at the bottom of the sea bed. "It's not bad, I suppose. There must be something I can do for you, though."

"Scott. The name's Scott." He gave me an expectant look. "Well? Don't tell me I'm going to have to spend one of my wishes just to find out your name."

"Xavier," I said, feeling like I was giving him something precious. Not that Scott noticed.

"Well, Xavier, I can think of one thing I might enjoy." Scott's voice dropped low and sultry, but it wasn't until his hands reached out to me that I realised what he was doing.

"No! You'll burn!" I jumped to the ceiling, cowering up in the corner. "I'm made of spirit fire. You can't touch me. I've lost my protective shell."

"How come? I thought you could do magic."

I gazed on Scott's guileless face, so open and trusting. I didn't want to tell him about my shameful past, but I didn't want

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to be responsible for him making another attempt to touch me just because I hadn't been honest.

"Some of my powers were taken from me as punishment."

"Bummer, man. Punishment for what?"

"It doesn't matter. It was a long time ago." I wanted to crawl back inside my lamp. Although it was a prison, right now it felt like a refuge. I was out of my depth with Scott; he wasn't acting like any of my past masters. "Just wake me when you're ready to start wishing."

I fled to safety.

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Time passes strangely in the lamp, but even I could tell that Scott hadn't waited long before calling me forth again. For a start, he was still dressed in those bizarre, brightly patterned britches, and the shadows in his room had barely moved.

"You have your wish ready?"

"Uh, yeah. Hi Xavier," he waved at me. "I decided I want . . . I want you to have your protective magic back."

"You do, Master? Why would you spend a wish on me?" Damn and blast! I hadn't meant to call him Master, and now he was pulling the most peculiar expression.

"Um, well, you're pretty ripped, you know. And I thought maybe we could get to know each other a little better, if I could touch you." He raised his brows, his eyes pleading with me.

"You want to get to know me?" I cursed myself for sounding like a parrot, but this was unprecedented. I scowled to hide my confusion.

"Oh come on, I know you're interested. I can tell. My gaydar's infallible."

"Gaydar?"

"Yeah, you know. For telling when guys are into other guys."

I gave Scott a long stare, which he refused to back down from. It felt like he was ripping the secrets from my soul, and I

### Josephine Myles

didn't like it one little bit. Maybe sharing the pleasures of the flesh would be a welcome distraction after all. I sighed, rolling my eyes to look up at the ceiling. "You need to say 'I wish', and state it clearly."

My body tingled as Scott made his wish. I was still chained to the lamp, as Faizah had made sure I would be for the rest of my immortal life, but some of my powers returned, enabling physical interaction with my surroundings.

Physical interaction . . . with the lithe young man who was now standing right up close. He was a few inches shorter than me, and his breath tickled my neck.

"So, is it safe for me to touch you?" Scott asked.

I answered him by reaching out and clasping his shoulders with my hands. The sensation of warm flesh under my hands made my eyes prickle with tears. How many years had it been? But I didn't want to remember Omar and his merry eyes, so I blotted him out by pulling Scott to me and kissing him.

As his lips yielded to my questing tongue, Scott made a soft noise that quaked through me. He sounded so grateful, when really I was the one who should be demonstrating my gratitude. I sank to my knees in front of him, and applied my hands to his peculiar trouser fastenings.

"You know, I was planning on going down on you first."

I gazed up at his flushed face. "If that is what you wish, Master"

"Umm, no, this is good too. But what's with this Master business? It's a bit freaky, you know?"

"I'm not happy with it either, but you summoned me, therefore you are my Master." I freed the clasp of his trousers, and pulled them down so that his cock sprang forth. It was a truly magnificent specimen: long thick, and veined. It made me feel somewhat inadequate, but one of the great things about being a djinni is you can alter your physical form at will. I made myself longer so that I could compete. "I can see why you didn't wish for any enhancements here."

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Scott grinned. "Yeah, I've never heard any complaints. Mind you, I do get a bit sick of always being asked to top."

"Top?" I asked, before swiping my tongue over the gleaming tip. He tasted so good. Humans always have the most wonderful scents and flavours. I buried my nose into the hair at his groin, smothering myself in his briny musk to make up for all my years alone.

"Top. Yeah. Uh, the one who does the fucking, you know? God, that's good, don't stop."

I thought about what Scott had told me as I continued licking and teasing him with my fingers. Did this mean that he would welcome me sinking my shaft into him? The idea made me swell further, and I took his whole cock into my mouth in an attempt to distract myself from the prospect. It wouldn't do to peak too early.

As I sucked down Scott's massive length I almost choked. A quick bit of emergency throat reshaping saved me the embarrassment, and I was pleased to manage to fit the whole thing in after all. What a sensation! He tickled the back of my throat, and I swallowed around him, digging my fingers into that succulent rear of his.

"Oh-my-God-you've-got-a-deep-throat!" Scott's hands twisted hard in my hair, but even the pain was glorious after so many years without it.

I continued to suck him down, before pulling back and swirling my tongue around his cockhead. I teased the slit, hungry for his climax. I knew it was approaching when Scott's hips began to twitch, and I relaxed my throat, pulling hard on his hips and grunting to give him the message. He understood, grabbing my hair and thrusting hard into my mouth. It bruised and chafed, but my cock ached even harder than before and soon I was rewarded by his his hot seed spilling over my tongue. I lapped it down, every last drop of it, my body thrilling with Scott's shuddering moans.

Scott collapsed as I released him, and I caught him in my arms, lifting him up and arranging him on the bed. He made an

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appealing composition, lying on his back with his legs spread wide. I licked my lips, staring down at him. Dare I take my pleasure? It had been so, so long, but I didn't want to risk hurting him with the strength of my need.

"Oh God, Xavvi, that was amazing! Just . . . just give me a minute, all right?"

Xavvi? Omar had called me Xavvi. I slumped onto the bed, sitting with my head in my hands. Memories of our time together flashed before my eyes. Time had done little to dim their brilliance

"Hey, what's wrong?" Scott sat up behind me, his hands kneading my shoulders.

I shrugged him off. "I don't want to talk about it."

"I wish you'd tell me."

I spun around. "You want to spend your wishes on this? You want me to dredge up all that pain just so you can get a bit of entertainment?"

Scott dropped his gaze, and when he looked up again they shone bright. "That's not what I meant. Christ! It's just, it's healthier to get that sort of emotional crap out in the open, you know? Not bottle it all up inside and let it fester."

"No, I don't know, but since you've wished for it I must obey. There was a man I loved who called me by that name, and he was taken from me, cruelly." I studied the floor as I spoke, wishing it could swallow me up. Why was I forever doomed to grant the wishes of others, yet never my own? "His name was Omar and he was human. It is forbidden for djinn to take human lovers, but many of us defied the law. Omar and I were just unlucky enough to be chosen to make an example of. Not only because we were both men, but he was a favourite consort of Queen Faizah and she resented me stealing his affections. She was a cruel and wicked woman." I flinched, recalling her smile as Omar's body was pulled apart by horses.

I felt Scott's weight shift behind my back, and his legs and arms wrapped around me. It was comforting to feel the warmth

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of another body, and I let my memories flow, wondering if Scott was right about it being better to let them out.

"My own punishment was eternal banishment from the land of my people, and imprisonment in the lamp, doomed to forever grant the wishes of others, and never my own. That, and having to watch Omar's execution."

Scott's breath was warm against my neck, and I sighed deeply. Strangely, it did feel as if something had shifted inside me – as if the constricting bands around my heart had loosened.

"I'm really sorry, Xavier. That truly sucks. What a bunch of homophobic bigots."

I didn't understand all of his words, but the empathy was clear and I relaxed into his arms, feeling the beat of his heart strong and steady against my back. We sat there for some time, just the two of us, until a change in Scott's body tension stirred me into awareness.

"I have my final wish," he said.

I frowned. I had known it would come to an end soon, but I had wished for just a little more time in his company.

"I want to check it with you first, though. How about if I ask for the curse to be broken, and for you to live out a normal life as a human, freed from all this genie bullshit. How's that? Xavier? Is that all right?"

I couldn't speak. He would spent his last wish on me. No one had ever thought to do that before in their lust for wealth and power. He watched me expectantly.

"Please," I said, hearing my voice crack. "Please, Master."

Scott's eyes flashed. "No, there'll be none of this 'Master' crap. You're your own man, and you won't owe me anything. I don't want a slave, I want a . . . a lover. One who's with me because he wants to be, not because he's under some stupid fucking spell." He hugged his arms around himself tightly, and then he spoke his wish.

I felt my spirit body hardening, changing into Earthly matter. It itched, and prickled, and in the final stages it felt as if I

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was being crushed under a great weight, yet I rejoiced in it. I pulled in my first real breath, reeling with the giddy rush of it.

It took me some time to return to the room, and find myself cradled in Scott's arms.

"You know what I'd ask for, if I had one last wish?" Scott asked, his voice a husky whisper. "I'd wish for you to stick around so we could get to know each other better. I'd want to teach you how to surf on the sea and the net, and stay up late watching movies and playing Resident Evil."

I had no idea what he was talking about, but I liked the idea of sticking around.

"I can grant you that wish." I cut off any further chatter with a blistering kiss. My mortal body responded to the taste of him with a flood of desire, sweeping through me and setting my very substance alight. And Scott yielded, pulling me down onto the bed and anointing me with strange oils, before welcoming me into his body. I was truly alive. Every rasp of my breath, every slap of our flesh, every drop of sweat was a treasure. As I peaked on an incendiary rush of exquisite joy, Scott cried out, following me into oblivion.

It took time for our breathing to settle, and I listened to the song of his heart, pounding next to mine.

"God damn-it, Xavier! That was amazing! We are so doing that again."

"I hope you don't mean right away. I'm not sure this mortal body can handle it. I wish to try again later, perhaps after a sleep." The pillow looked remarkably appealing.

Scott grinned. "Yeah, I reckon that's one wish I can grant for you."

End

# Mayan Time by Erik Orrantia

Shane could hardly believe the humidity as he pulled a small towel from his backpack and wiped the sweat from his brow. He had known that the jungle of Chiapas in southern Mexico would be beautiful and hot, but not this hot. He was accustomed to Seattle—and the rain. Still, he wouldn't have missed this for the world. The great Mayan prophecy, the merging of two worlds, was right around the corner in 2012. Many people said that energy was converging now in the many Mayan ruins.

After finally graduating from college, getting a real job, and saving up for a long-deserved vacation, there had been no question about where he was going to go. For him, this was hardly a vacation, actually. It was the answer to a calling that he had felt since childhood. He knew he had Mexican roots in his blood, ancient Mexican roots, but his family had lost its ties with them in their time in the vast melting pot of the United States. But when he took a class on the history of Mesoamerica, he couldn't get enough; he had finally begun to understand what that calling was all about.

Mike wasn't thrilled about it. Of course, he wouldn't have been thrilled about anything that would mean that Shane was leaving him for a while. So Mike used his typical tactics: he glommed on to Shane's family's fears about him going so far from home and about the rumors of the Zapatista guerillas that

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would kidnap tourists to fund their rebellion. When that didn't deter Shane, Mike threw a drunken tantrum, which included broken dishes and all night sobbing. But Shane made it clear that he was going no matter what. So Mike finally succumbed, and insisted on domineering Shane's travel plans and itinerary. And he topped it off with a gift of five hundred dollars. The real gift, Shane knew, was that Mike didn't figure out a way of coming along.

A pair of *pizotes* came out of the jungle and onto the trail; the badgers, or White-nosed Coati, at the entire site were so used to people that they approached Shane fearlessly, stood up on two feet, and wiggled their noses, hoping for a food donation. But Shane had a long day ahead of him, and a lot of stairs to climb; he'd have to keep his food for himself.

Palenque was full this time of year. Shane had carefully studied his guidebook and tourist map, and knew that the summer solstice, especially just before 2012, would attract many visitors. Some seemed to come for spiritual reasons—they stood atop the high pyramids and meditated, closing their eyes as if to breathe in the surroundings. Yet others were here on an outing with their children: white tourists and Mexican families with numerous youngsters who ran about indiscriminately and noisily. That was why Shane was determined to steer away from the centerpiece of the site, the Palace with the famous pagoda-style tower. He'd follow the Otulum River south, beyond the Acropolis, and to the Temple of the Jaguar. He checked his Bulova. It was already one o'clock. He heaved his backpack up on his shoulder and began walking double time.

He walked half an hour before he reached the temple. It was smaller than the rest, perhaps less impressive, but it was quieter, not a single soul in sight. This was the solitude that he yearned for.

Shane walked to the base of the broad stairs, twenty or so in all, that led up to what looked like a single chamber atop a small sort of pyramid formed by concentric squares of stone. Grass grew on the ledges formed by the squares, though the earth and Just One Bite: Mayan Time

rubble had not been removed in some parts, which reminded him that, before these temples were excavated, they appeared to be nothing but small hills. Every hill around here could be another forgotten temple.

Halfway up the stairs, Shane stopped for a drink of bottled water. The face of an iguana protruded from a hole in the grey stairs but retreated quickly when Shane turned its way. Great black birds looked down on him from the high branches of the surrounding trees.

Shane looked up to the Temple of the Jaguar which now seemed to beckon him. There was a wide opening separated into three by two rectangular columns. The stone frieze was dark and stained by time; any adornments had disappeared long before. On top of the roof was a strange stone structure of shelves and columns; they formed dozens of tiny nooks that might have been intended for statues or carvings though they were filled only with moss and plants that now grew there. Shane thought of pulling out his camera but was more compelled to enter the chamber and answer the beckon.

As seemed apparent in most of the ruins, the rock inside the chamber was rough and worn. But the back wall of the chamber, protected from the sun and weather, was incredibly intact. Shane stepped in closer toward it, his eyes adjusting to the shadow. He looked up to the vaulted ceiling where brown bats squeaked and squirmed in the highest reaches.

"Bahlum," he heard whispered. He looked about the small chamber but no one was there. He chuckled at his imagination.

There was a mural on the wall protected by a chain link fence in a makeshift wooden frame about a yard from the wall's surface. It was the red figure of a Mayan ruler with a jaguar mask atop its head. It stood beside another man whose head was bowed and who grasped at his side a green serpent as if it were a staff. Surrounding the figures was a number of hieroglyphs painted in rows and columns; they were symbols still not deciphered by the leading archaeologists of the Mayan realm.

Shane stared at the glyphs and he began to feel faint. His

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eyes followed a sequence of them across the top two rows and then diagonally to the bottom. He felt enlightened, as if he had just solved the most difficult Sudoku puzzle, and his heart began to race.

"Bahlum," the whisper again from inside the dark chamber.

He put his hands on the fence but needed to be closer. He pulled off his backpack and fumbled with the zipper. A Leatherman. He had a Leatherman inside. He found it at the bottom of the bag and pulled it from its leather case. He folded out the pliers and checked outside the chamber and down the stairs. There was an older couple across the courtyard and up the trail. He doubted that they'd climb the stairs.

He began to work on the fence, fixated again on the glyphs that seemed to jump at him. The nails on the wooden frame didn't budge so he began to cut the fence with the wire cutters. He squeezed down hard on them, pain and desperation overtaking his hands. His brow dripped with sweat. A bird squawked loudly from outside as the heavy wire snapped. Finally, he cut a hole big enough to enter.

"Bahlum."

He bent the fence back and stepped one foot inside without questioning what he was doing—vandalizing the sacred site of a foreign country. He'd surely be hauled off to jail and flogged. But he had always lived within a safe and tight set of rules. It was time for him to dig deeper. He meant not to destroy anything, only to discover that which was calling him. He pulled his other foot inside as the fence caught his backpack and tore the vinyl. He did not care. He now stood face to face with the mural, the red men, and the many hieroglyphs.

He put his right hand on the painting and traced the curved nose and the voluptuous lips of the standing figure. They were not like Mike's lips, little pink lines that closed like a Ziplockbag. Then his hand descended below the turquoise neckpiece to the naked ruddy chest. It seemed familiar to him. He closed his eyes, breathed in deep, and let it calm his heart.

A faint voice came from outside which startled him.

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Somebody might be coming. He couldn't be caught inside this fence. He looked over at the glyphs and touched them in the order he had sensed—across the top two rows and diagonally to the bottom. Then he stood back till his backpack hit the fence, almost expecting for lightning to strike and the world to split open. But nothing happened. He chuckled at himself again. What am I doing but carrying myself away?

The voices down the stairs were approaching, maybe some people ascending as he had. He started to climb back out of the enclosure.

"Bahlum." It was that whisper again. This time more distinct.

Shane looked over to where a beam of sunlight pierced through a small hole in the ceiling and illuminated a stone slab on the floor in the corner of the chamber. He hurried over. There was a crack between the square slabs in the floor. He pulled the Leatherman again and began to pry the corner stone. It resisted for a moment, but he forced it up. The people were closer now.

He propped the heavy slab up against the wall and revealed a black hollow. His heart pounded again, but he could not resist. He pulled off his backpack and dropped it into the darkness. It did not fall far. He dropped his legs down into the hole, lowering himself slowly until his legs hit his backpack and solid ground. He was barely waist deep. He grabbed at the top of the leaning slab and pulled it down to close the trapdoor before any others might see him.

He was alone in the blackness. The space was musty and dank. He felt for his backpack and pulled out a small flashlight. If anything, he had come prepared.

The light revealed a crawlspace about half the size of the chamber above him. He moved about the space and found an opening on the far side. Stairs as steep as a ladder descended deep into the darkness beyond where the light from his flashlight could reach. I must be crazy to do this. But I've come this far. There's no turning back now. He dropped his legs down again and followed the slippery stairs into the earth.

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He went nearly straight down three flights before he hit a landing. He turned to see a hallway, vaulted like the ceiling of the temple chamber, but the rock walls were not worn like the rest of the ruins. They were smooth and seemed freshly painted. There was a dull light at the end of the tunnel that drew Shane toward it.

"Bahlum." The voice was no longer a whisper but a delicate, inviting tone. It did not scare him.

He turned off his flashlight and walked down the hall to a doorway. The light was brighter as he approached. The room was amber for the yellow light of a couple of oil lamps on the walls. Water trickled from a small spout into a ceramic basin on a stone table on one side of the room. In the center was a stone slab as big as a bed, about knee high, mostly covered with brown furs. On the other side of the room sat a young man in an ornately carved chair.

When Shane stepped into the room, the man stood up and came closer. His almond eyes were big like those of a wanting child. His nose and lips were the majestic features of the Maya. He wore a neckpiece that was an intricate mosaic of turquoise. His chest was hairless and brown, not red like the men in the mural, and his skin looked smooth and soft.

"Bahlum," he said softly as he looked at Shane, "you have finally returned."

"I don't know what you mean," said Shane. "I am not Bahlum."

"Then why do you understand me?" the man asked.

Shane could not answer that. The man was speaking neither English nor Spanish. He should not have understood.

"You see, Bahlum. It is you. You have returned."

"But I am not Bahlum. My name is Shane."

The young man smiled. His teeth were large and white. "Yes. I knew it was you. Chan. Chan Bahlum. You must remember me. I am Hanab and you are Chan Bahlum." Hanabstepped closer and put his hands on Shane's face. He

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touched his forehead and nose and mouth. "I admit that you do not look like I remember. You are much paler. You must have been in a very cold place."

Shane also lifted his hands and began to trace the man's face with his fingertips. That nose and those sensual lips, he remembered them.

"You decided to go on, into the future, Chan. But I told you that I would wait forever. Now, before the merging of the worlds, you have finally come back to me." He pushed the straps of Shane's backpack off his shoulder and let it fall to the floor. He pulled Shane's shirt up and over his head. "But I can see that you can hardly remember. You have become lost in a new time with all of these strange things. Do you still not remember? You have even left your favorite shoes here." He pointed beside the stone throne to where a pair of leather sandals lay.

Hanab drew him in so that the two were chest to chest. Their foreheads were together, their eyes closed. Shane did not remember exactly, yet he felt as if there was nothing unusual about this place and this man. Hanab's scent had belonged to him one day long ago. Hanab removed his neckpiece and Shane rested his head on the man's shoulder. He embraced him as they stood for unknown time in the dim room. Their lips finally met. Yes, he was home.

Chan shed the rest of his clothing and pulled Hanab to the stone bed. They fell onto the furs and held one another and kissed. The two were naked and took in every part of each other's body until they were one again. They drifted into the ancient galactic rift and drank the eternal solstice sunlight. They soared above the great jungle and dove from the heights of the waterfalls into the clear pools below. Their arrows pierced the great beast. They burned with passion and penetrated the depths of their shared universe until their desire was quenched and they returned to the amber room and the sound of the trickling water in the basin.

"It is late, Hanab. I cannot stay," said Shane, looking at his Bulova watch.

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"Chan," he answered, "You have become a slave, haven't you? Remove that shackle on your wrist. Remember, you are home now."

"What do you mean? I am no slave. I have a new life, far from here, and those who depend on me."

"You may have grown in science and modern inventions. You may feel quite prepared. Yet you have lost your ability to comprehend the wisdom of timelessness." He went for the sandals beside the throne, knelt before Chan, and slipped them on his pale feet. "You have gone into the future. Now come back to the past. Feel it and remember it."

Shane looked again at his watch and at the darkness of the hall through the doorway. "But my family, my job, and Mike. I have appointments to keep, and obligations to meet."

"You are consumed by time, Chan, when all you need is here. You must sacrifice your fixation on this limitation that you have adopted." Hanab pulled at the watch on Chan's wrist. "Do you want to complete your journey? Your destiny lies not up those stairs or down any hallway. It is in no secret temple or great city. The resolution of your journey lies inside you. Do you not know? You released yourself from here once, and now you must free yourself again. You don't need more time because you have forever. And when you release yourself, you will be one with me, and those you love, and our ancestors, and the entire universe. They will feel you and know you are there as surely as you will be here with me."

Shane looked down at his feet. The sandals were a comfortable fit. The room was a place of unity: earth, fire, water, and air came together here. His watch felt cold and heavy on his arm. He had felt a calling and now he understood. The calling was not to visit but to return. He was Chan Bahlum, the jaguar serpent. He slipped the watch off his wrist and dropped it on the hard floor. Chan looked at Hanab and into his starry eyes. He held Hanab's hands in his and pulled him back down beside him on the furs. The trickling of the water ceased, the flames of the

Just One Bite: Mayan Time oil lamps extinguished, and there, in the darkness, their two worlds merged again and for the rest of time.

# Fire Can Make It Rain by Nix Winter

A ritual marriage to appease the gods - a prince and a bard - their passion might bring back the rain.

Bards judged the passing of time in years, months, days, measured with writings on paper. The plain soul folk Jewls called family judged the passing of time, if they did at all, by counting the first day of spring. By either count, he was thirty-five. Bards were expected to see a hundred and fifty winters, often made it to a two hundredth spring, so he wasn't exactly old. He stood on the Queen's balcony, wearing only a long silk robe. His hair hung to the floor, unbraided, flame red. His skin was pale as the very slightest touch of pink the sunrise kissed the unwilling clouds with. His eyes were the violet of twilight.

Bards were forbidden to lie. He had lied twice in his life though, and he hadn't died either time. He was old enough to know truth in the world. Good people lied sometimes. His mother was a princess who became a bard who loved a man who loved no one. His father was a man who left destruction as proof of his passing. His master, the man who had raised him, was a drunk and a gambler who had been good at one thing only, but he had been very good at being a parent. Love was what healed everything.

He understood why so many people hated red hair. If you walked north, past Shahaylen Lake, just kept going, there was a

Just One Bite: Fire Can Make it Rain war. There were people with flame red hair, hair the same color as his, and they raged, painted themselves with other people's blood, spoke a language no one from the south understood, and every child they begat had red hair. If the father or mother had red hair, the baby had red hair, and no one from the south would ever touch someone with red hair. He hadn't liked the north.

There were only two red headed bards. One was the founder of the Bard Guild, a demon that haunted people's darkest imaginings. The other was a thirty-five year old virgin who had maybe, finally grown into a man.

He turned as the door to his chamber opened, admitting the man who would be his husband. Today it would be just the two of them.

Queen Ionwe was his best friend. She would not chose a man who would not match him well. It was his duty. Today would end the drought. The Gods would bless the country and the people. Jewls' stomach wanted to tie into knots.

The man who stepped through his door was tall, still wet from the bath. He had short dark hair that stood on end. His chest was smooth, with pink nipples, but powerfully built, well defined muscles that made Jewls think of a great and powerful warhorse. Narrow hips, still covered by a thin silk wrap. The build of his legs sent a flush of sexual hunger through Jewlsand he wondered...why he had waited so long.

Still on the balcony, he held his own silk robe closed, a tight fist at his throat. "Greetings, Honorable-husband."

"Hello, Beautiful," the man said.

Jewls had never seen him before and they stood there, taking stock of each other. Habit took over, tradition, his own line of tradition because he'd forgotten everything he'd read about how this marriage celebration was supposed to work. He pulled back his sleeve, displaying his Bard marking, a brand and tattoo that stretched from inside his wrist to the inside of his elbow. He bowed gracefully, though he almost stumbled because he forgot his hair was unbound. "I am Jewls the Lucky of the House of Fire, Guilty of Contempt."

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When he looked up, his husband had crossed the Queen's Chamber, a ceremonial chamber that allowed those with the obligation to watch a marriage consummation to do exactly that. The dark haired man reached out to touch the brand. "It looks old. Did it hurt?"

The touch caught his breath in his throat. "Um," he said, lashes of gold and pale ruby fluttering a little. "I was thirteen. It was a long time ago, and yes, it hurt."

"I've never spoken with a bard before." His voice was sweet, a musical, if untrained, voice, deep with a slight accent that Jewls didn't recognize.

"I have. They're arrogant dicks, for the most part. What's your name, Honorable-husband?"

The man took a step back, bowed politely, but not with any of the Bardic nuances. "I am Prince Rand of Valion or I was. Now I am Rand, husband of Jewls the Lucky."

"Would you rather be a prince, Rand?"

"No," he insisted, drawing Jewls' palm to his lips. "I may have had my concerns, but from the moment I entered, I have wanted only you."

Jewls arched an eyebrow. He reached out to touch dark soft hair. "You have beautiful eyes, so dark and deep like the forest. Did they tell you that I have spoken for the dead one hundred and ninety-three times? If you lie to me, I will know."

Rand drew Jewls' hand towards his cock, hard and thick under the thin silk wrap. "Was I lying?"

"No, but I will ask you again later." Color burned on Jewls' cheeks, almost as bright as his hair, darkening full lips, soft curvy lips, the lips of a woman or a Bard.

"You may ask me every day. The answer will be the same. Disrobe, husband of mine." Rand took a step back, hungry eyes watching Jewls' every subtle move. "I wish to see every secret."

Jewls tucked his chin, blush still very bright on his cheeks. There had been a man he had wanted once, a tall and rough man who had left him years before. He held his lower lip between his Just One Bite: Fire Can Make it Rain teeth, and forced himself to relax his hold on the robe. It fell away, gliding over his skin as it went, revealing a slender, pale body. His was a body that could walk across a continent, dance and play music for days at a time, but with which he'd kept all sexual desire to himself. Even his pubic hair was flaming red, if a little darker than the hair on his head. His body, so long denied physical intimacy, hardened under the exploring gaze of his husband. He tried not to think of those that he couldn't see who were obligated to watch. "I don't have any secrets."

"Of course, you do." Rand said. He unfastened his own wrap, letting it fall to the floor.

Jewls' mouth dropped open, his eyes fixed on the thick cock, darker skin, thick vein. "That will never... fit," he whispered.

"Yes, it will," Rand promised. "The rain won't start until I find release within your virgin body. There must be rain. Beyond that, trust me. I won't hurt you."

Years of fear, of having to protect himself from people who hated him for his hair coloring, feared him for his connection to the Gods, all of that welled up and Jewls took a step back, towards the rail. "I can't."

"I trust you," Rand said. Faster than such a large man should have been, he cut between Jewls and the railing. Rand held out his hands, instinctive show of having no weapons. "The scars on your back. You were whipped."

"Three times," Jewls whispered. He gathered his hair up in arms, backing away from the beautiful prince. "Do you not fear me? I can see your lies! I can call down the power of the gods on you!" He puffed up a little, daring this man to still want him.

"Then you can see that I have never lied in my life. It is the truth when I tell you that you will feel great pleasure in our joining. Your body already responds to me." Rand pointed out, reasonable.

They glared at each other for moments. Jewls intimidation tactic collapsed. He narrowed his eyes and snapped, "My body

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responds to spoiled milk as well. It does many things without my permission!" Jewls sidled up to one of the great posters at the corners of the bed, beyond the lush red velvet drape.

Rand trapped him there, between the great oak pillar and his hard unyielding body. Very slowly, as if reaching for a wild animal, Rand let his hand travel down Jewls' body to tenderly wrap his fingers around his virgin cock. "So no one's ever touched you here?"

"I didn't say that," Jewls hissed angrily.

"This," he said, stroking Jewls' erection, "is not how a man's body responds to sour milk."

"Stop!"

"No," Rand coaxed. "Do not be afraid, Jewls. It will only hurt just a little at the beginning. If you fight me, I will have to bind you. You agreed to this marriage. You trust Queen Ionwe, do you not?"

Jewls inched just a little farther away, but there was only so much give between him and the oak pillar. With the red velvet drape to hide his face in, he cried softly. "I have always trusted, Ionwe," Jewls said, not really following why that would matter.

"I love you," Rand promised. He pressed kisses to Jewls' shoulder, nuzzling in under the thick red hair. "You're beautiful. You're brave. You're going to fit perfectly to my body. We will dance in the rain."

Jewls looked up, violet eyes glittering with tears. "How can you love me? I've never seen you before."

"But I have seen you before. I have seen you perform at ten festivals. I have desired you for years. I will not hurt you, Jewls. I will protect you and love you."

Rand motioned and a silent servant moved close, carrying a tray with a silver container of warm, scented lubricant. The prince took the container and motioned the servant away. He set it on the tall bed, thumbed open the cover and sank his fingers into the sweet grease.

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"What if it doesn't work? What if the rain still doesn't come?" Jewls whispered, so very uncomfortable with being unsure

Rand kissed his neck again, hid his face against Jewls' neck. With the clean back of his hand, he moved hair, finding his way to the virgin cleft of Jewls' ass. Jewls gasped started forward, but ran into Rand's unmovable arm. A single firm finger circled around the tender pink entrance of Jewls' body. Jewls rose up on the balls of his feet, mewled, wiggled, but the finger pushed into him anyway, slicking him, explaining to his body what was to come. There was no room to kick or struggle and one finger became two, spreading reluctant virgin flesh for the prince. "Now that doesn't hurt, does it?"

"No," Jewls whispered, hiding his face so that Rand couldn't see. "It's strange."

"Yes," Rand agreed. He moved his fingers, fucking Jewls tenderly, until the stubborn bard started to relax a little, at least to not pull away as much. "I may have a servant insert a large bit of this slick oil into you when I am to visit you. This is not the only time I will sow my seed into you, Jewls. Every month on the full moon, I will come back to you, ride your beautiful body so that the Gods are pleased with us. Do you want me to slick you as I'm doing now, or have you bend over and a servant gently insert my promise to attend to you."

"No, no servant," Jewls begged, though Rand felt Jewls' body heat as he spoke, felt the beautiful red head's cock jump and twitch.

"You're an entertainer. Everyone will find you so beautiful as you're being fucked today. Your pleasure will make the Gods even more pleased with us." Rand looked right into Jewls' eyes, studied him. "You want me to bind you, don't you?"

"Yes."

The powerful prince picked Jewls up, easily moving the Bard to the center of the bed. His cock brushed over his beautiful captive husband as he moved to the head of the bed. He guided Jewls arms up, fastening them in velvet cuffs. At the

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same time, on impulse, he grabbed a silk cloth and covered Jewls eyes. Jewls mewled, twisting in his restraints, his own cock swaying against his tight belly. "Please!"

"I intend to please you, my love, many times, even when the moon is not full," Rand said. He took hold of Jewls' legs, pulling them up over his shoulders as he lifted slender hips. "You're more beautiful to me, more beautiful even than rain. For the good of our countries and these people, do you consent to suffer for my pleasure?"

"Yes," Jewls said, loud and clear, the required ritual response. There had never been any question about which of them would be taking in the other. "I plead with the Gods to restore their favor to all people."

Rand took hold of Jewls' hips, a tender and gentle grip, but both of them knew that neither of them could falter. What was to come would come. The thick head pressed to Jewls' tender entrance, the sensitive pink pucker that he'd guarded against all comers for all his life. Now it surrendered as it must to the thick implacable member. He was spread open, burning no matter how he tried to relax. Deeper into his most intimate space, Rand took him, so slowly, entering a body that could never be virgin again, that could never unhave this experience.

Jewls cried out, bucking in sudden fear, but the experienced prince held him, held his legs so that they stayed on his strong shoulders. Deeper, penetrating, forcing him open, forcing his whole body into surrender, until he was deep inside the bard. "Relax, Jewls, please, you're so tight, so hot. It feels so good for me. I wish it to feel good for you. I will always love you, always care for you. Accept me, please."

The burning lessened as Rand held his taken ground. Tears ran down Jewls' cheek, under the silk, but he nodded. "Most Honorable-husband, my master," Jewls whispered.

Rand groaned, a trembling hand moving to stroke Jewls' very hard cock. "That's my beautiful bard, my master, my heart." He growled, shifting, so that he lay behind Jewls, arms around him. This second penetration went smoothly and Jewls'

Just One Bite: Fire Can Make it Rain breath caught, sped up as Rand took him the second time. He melted back against his husband, forgetting all about rain, about his duty as a bard, only the heat of his lover mattered. Kisses warmed his throat, his shoulder. Hands still bound above his head, he relaxed into being fucked by this prince. Passion rose. His first ejaculation with another person, with a lover, came way too quickly. His body arched in Rand's embrace, clenched tight on the thick shaft still holding possession of him, but he was coming back to awareness when Rand's orgasm left him clinging to Jewls, crying against his shoulder. "Jewls!"

He'd waited all his life for this, for this union. He slipped his wrists free of the bonds and ran his hands over Rand's arms, reaching back to touch his hair, caress and encourage him. "I will love you always, in every realm where the sun shines, there my love for you will always be."

Rand clung to him. "I was so afraid you would reject me!"
"No, it was for you that I waited," Jewls said, realizing that
this was true

Rain pattered, slowly at first, hitting the dry marble of the Queen's balcony, then louder, soaking the land beyond.

The Gods were happy.

# The Hunter & the Hunted by Stevie Woods

I knew he was nearby, I could sense him. I could smell him. It wasn't the fear that I scented from most humans when a vampire was close. This human wasn't afraid of us at all. He sought us out because to him we were the hunted and he the Hunter. He had been chasing me for many months now and time and again I let him get close, let him become more desperate. Then I would let him believe he'd caught me – but only for a short time. I enjoyed this game, though, of course, to him it was no game. He had only one desire now, to wipe me from the face of the earth. At least that was what he told himself, yet when I touched him I knew different. I had a hold over him that he didn't want. And that was why he hated me, because somewhere deep inside he kept another emotion hidden.

When he first tracked me down and thought of me as just one more target, just one more tick on his scorecard, I dismissed him as just a fool who thought too highly of himself. There had been Hunters almost as long as there had been vampires and while some of them were very good, the majority was not as clever as they thought. I had lost count of how many Hunters I had killed across the centuries and I was only one vampire. I doubt anyone knew how many we had killed over the years, but neither did I know how many of my kind theyhad killed. The risk of death didn't stop them coming. I never really understood how these men – and women – were recruited, why they were

Just One Bite: The Hunter & the Hunted willing to spend their lives pitting themselves against creatures so much more powerful than they were.

This one though – Aaron Beamish – was special. We vampires might not have any kind of hierarchy, we all lived solitary lives, hunting where and when we wished without having to account for our actions to anyone, but that didn't mean there was no communication between us. Eventually, what one knew we all knew, especially if it concerned a danger to us all. The Hunters were a topic of high concern, especially a Hunter like Aaron Beamish. He was too good, too dangerous and no matter that his name had been at the top of our 'wanted' list for some time, he was still alive, still hunting, and vampires were still dying.

He became of more interest to me a few months earlier when it seemed I had become his latest target. I could clearly visualize the first time I had seen him. He wasn't easy to forget. A tall man at six feet, though I was an inch taller. He had dark brown hair, longish but not as long as I'd have liked it. I enjoyed a man with long hair so I could wind my fingers in it to pull his head back as I fed. His eyes were lighter than I expected with his hair so dark. They were pale green with brown flecks as I discovered when I got a good look at them. His face was angular, his nose narrow over a generous mouth. He wasn't exactly handsome, but somehow he was very attractive, at least to me. I planned to enjoy his body very much before I drank from him.

I didn't know then who he was. Even when I knew I underestimated him.

My first sight of him was across the dance floor in a small club. The place was full of hot, sexy men, gyrating to loud music before me, yet my only interest was in this one man who leaned against the bar. He drew me like the proverbial moth to a flame. I should have remembered what happened to the moth.

He was sipping his drink but his eyes were on me. As I approached him, he put his glass down and smiled at me. I smiled back and let my gaze drift over him, my message clear.

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He flushed but held my gaze. I was confident that I had an easy target for the night. I even thought that if he was good enough, if he satisfied my body as well as my hunger, I might keep him for a night or two. Sometimes, it was too easy.

"You're not dancing?" I asked, brushing against him.

He drew in a breath. "I was thinking about it, until I saw you."

I smiled. "You have a different activity in mind now?"

"Maybe." He pressed closer. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Damian."

He grinned, as if at a private joke. "Seems appropriate," he said, looking me up and down.

I presumed he referred to my looks and attire. I have dark hair and eyes and I was dressed all in black. Yes, very appropriate. "And you are?" I asked.

"Aaron."

Could it be him? I dismissed the chance as being infinitesimal

"Now the introductions are over, you want to go somewhere?" I asked.

"Where?" He raised an eyebrow and looked merely amused. I preferred the arousal.

"Washroom or alley out back," I almost growled.

"Out back"

I draped my arm around his shoulders keeping him close as we wove our way through the crowd. The alley behind the club was cleaner than some I had seen, but still the smell assaulted my senses. I ignored it and concentrated on my companion instead. I sensed his excitement, his sexual need was coming off him in waves now, but there was something else too that I couldn't quite pin down. It didn't matter. I was the hunter, he was my prey. I pushed him back against the wall and he went easily.

Just One Bite: The Hunter & the Hunted "Face the wall," I said.

"No, I want you to suck me first," Aaron demanded. "I want to watch my cock slide down your throat."

Why not? Tasting his semen before his blood would be an aphrodisiac. I smiled and went to my knees. He was already opening his pants. I pulled his cock free and flicked my eyes up at him. His eyes were heavy-lidded as he watched me. His cock was full and heavy, just waiting for my touch. I licked the tip and he sucked in his breath. I licked some more before putting my lips over the bulbous head. I sucked him slowly into my mouth. The taste of him exploded in mouth. I wanted more. I wanted it all.

"Yeah, like that," Aaron muttered as his hands slid through my hair. I swirled my tongue around his cock, allowing my teeth to graze him slightly. I could take a little blood from him now. One of my fangs pierced him, just enough for a drop of his blood to – drip away as I was abruptly pulled off his cock.

"Your time's up, vampire," he said harshly and I was shocked to see a stake in his other hand. I had let my confidence blind me to the possibility. I was a fool.

My hesitation might have killed a lesser vampire as Aaron swept his weapon toward my chest, but instead the stake found only the night air.

Aaron staggered forward and I lunged for him, intending to finish it quickly. I'd have preferred the sex first, but my main concern was to feed so I went to grab him by the throat. However, he was surprisingly fast as he ducked out of the way and I slammed into the wall. I heard the harsh breathing behind me and swung to find the stake winging its way in my direction with unerring accuracy. I caught the sharpened wood out of the air and threw it far out of his reach. He cursed, but reached into a back pocket and pulled a small gun. I raised an eyebrow but did not move.

"It has silver bullets, I assume?"

"It'll hold you long enough to stake you," he said coldly.

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"Only if you hit my heart."

"I'm an excellent shot."

He should never have engaged in conversation with me. He lost the momentum and I laughed as I leapt high in the air, grasping the drainpipe far above him.

"Fuck!" he shouted as his bullet struck the wall where I had been standing.

I looked down long enough to see him scrambling for a better position for a second shot at me.

"Maybe next time," I called as I continued to the roof. "I'll remember your name, Hunter."

"There will be a next time," he yelled after me. Even from the roof I could see the frustrated anger in his eyes.

Oh yes, I decided, there would. His skin had tasted of heat and sweat, his pre-come had been both sweet and spicy, and that instant when my fang had broken his skin, that one miniscule taste of his blood... it had been heady. There was power in that man; I had tasted it for too short a time. I'd had Hunters before and I knew their blood was different, was more. I wanted him and I was going to have him.

I decided that I would become the hunter now, I would find Aaron and I would have him.

That was how our dance had begun and it was splendid.

I had tracked him down to his abode two nights later and tried to take him there, but he fought me like no other. We'd more or less wrecked his place by the time I finally held him down on his own bed, watching the pulse beat furiously in his neck. He bucked and struggled and any other man would have been tossed off, but I wasn't a man. I held him tight and I tasted him. He screamed and my nails dug deeply into his wrists as he struggled to free himself. Then as I drank he calmed. It was always that way, but with Aaron I didn't want that simple surrender. I wanted his struggle, I wanted his passion. I had seen the look in his eyes as we fought and I knew he got off on it. As much as he fought me I believed he wanted this too. Not to die at

Just One Bite: The Hunter & the Hunted a vampire's hand, no, to really know he was alive. He needed to be on the edge to know how much he wanted to live.

I licked his wound to heal it and pulled away. I stared at him, watching as his will returned. There was fear – and excitement in those pale green eyes. And passion, so much passion. I took one hand from his wrists and brushed it across his groin. I had felt how hard he was as I'd pressed him down into the mattress. His cock was no less full now as it pulsed against my touch.

"You want me as much as I want you, Aaron," I murmured.

He held my gaze and I saw the moment when he acknowledged my words. Acknowledged his arousal at my touch. It both shocked and angered him. He knew it was true and he hated himself for it. And me.

He cursed me and renewed his efforts to be free. I released him and leapt for the open window. "Until next time," I said.

I heard his shouts and something smashed inside the room behind me and I smiled. I hadn't taken enough blood that he would crave me, but enough that he would respond when I was near. Most of the newer vampires didn't understand how to control their prey, they just drank them dry. In too much of a hurry like most of the modern world. I was of an older ilkwho liked to savor blood like fine wine and Aaron was of the finest. I wanted to savor him for a long time.

It took me a while to realize that I was as much caught by his need of me as he was, but while he hated it, I reveled in it.

And this night, once again, he was near me. He would be drawn to me. He knew it, but still he hunted me. I presume he told himself he did so only to be free of me. But he would never be free of me, and, though he wouldn't admit it, he didn't want to be. Each time he came for me and we fought, I took a little more blood, tasted more of his skin, enjoyed the slide of his semen down my throat.

This time it was going to be different. This time I was going to take him, make him mine completely and never let him go.

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I saw him then, across another crowded club but I didn't think he was aware of me yet. I followed his gaze and saw him watching as a man – correction, a vampire – moved towards him. I didn't recognize the vampire but I didn't get much sense of power from him, he hadn't been a vampire for very long. I watched them talking, and followed them outside to yet another alley. Aaron was going to kill this one, I knew it. It didn't concern me. I slipped out of the door and secreted myself. I saw the vampire flick his eyes in my direction presumably sensing me, but not sure enough to investigate. He was more interested in feeding off Aaron.

I supposed I ought to have felt some sympathy for the young vampire, but I didn't. I just wanted to make sure Aaron was fine. It didn't take long. Aaron did the same thing he'd tried with me months ago and this time it worked. Aaron pulled the vampire up by his hair and slammed his stake into the vampire's chest before he could react. He disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"You can come out now," Aaron said wearily.

I smiled, not at all surprised he had sensed me at the same time as the vampire had, but he hadn't given the fact away.

I moved toward him. "Don't bother with the small gun, Aaron. You should know by now I can deflect the bullet."

"I wasn't going to. And no, I won't try to throw a stake."

"Just come with me. You know that's how we'll end up, together between the sheets."

Aaron sighed. "Why don't you just kill me? Why keep up this... this game you're playing?"

"Kill you? Oh no, my sweet. I'll never kill you."

"What do you really want, Damian?"

He seemed to be in an odd mood, one I couldn't quite discern. "Oh, Aaron, you know. You. All I want is you."

"I can't allow you to turn me, I'll kill myself first," Aaron declared.

I struck quickly then, not risking that Aaron might carry out

Just One Bite: The Hunter & the Hunted is threat immediately. Before he could react he was trapped in my arms.

"I never really had a chance, did I?" he asked.

"No." I smiled. "I want you, Aaron, I need you. Don't you understand?"

"Understand what? That you think of me as a *thing*, a... a *treat* when you feel like tormenting me. I have feelings, desires. I want what any man wants. It's you who doesn't understand."

"What don't I understand? Feelings? Desire? Love? You think it all went away when I was turned? Do you have any idea how long ago I was turned?"

Aaron shook his head. I met his gaze, made him hold it. "Twelve centuries," I told him. His eyes widened. "And in all that time I've never stopped searching, wanting."

"Wanting?"

"Someone special to share myself with."

Aaron frowned. "And you... want me to be that someone?" He sounded incredulous

"You are that someone. I've never." I stopped. What was the point? I shook my head and let him go. "And I can't force you. I hoped you would..." I laughed but there was no humor in me. I saw I had lost. "Perhaps you should use that stake on me after all. If you don't want to be with me, then what's it all been for?"

Aaron's mouth dropped open and he stared at me. "You mean... you would? God! I didn't understand. I thought... Oh God, I thought all you were doing was having fun with me. Wanting to show me how little I mattered. How you could kill me whenever you wanted. But when you touched me..." He stopped and dropped his chin to his chest.

"Aaron?"

He raised his eyes and looked at me intently. "You make me feel things I thought were beyond me. I thought I'd never..." He

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closed his eyes. I reached out and brushed his hair back from his forehead. He opened his eyes. After a moment he said, "Come home with me, Damian?"

"Will you come to my home instead? Make it your home?"

"Say it," Aaron demanded.

"I love you," I whispered.

"Take me home."

## About the Authors

**Scarlet Blackwell** likes cats and hats and firmly believes that the only thing better than one attractive man is two attractive men.

To learn more about Scarlet, visit ScarletBlackwell.com

#### Other works include:

And so is Love, eXtasy books
The Vampire's Prisoner, Torquere Press
Just Desserts, Samhain Publishing, Ltd
Beached Hearts, Dreamspinner Press
Life Class, Samhain Publishing, Ltd
Stand and Deliver, Total-e-Bound
The King's Man, Dreamspinner Press
Apathy, Dreamspinner Press
Captive, Dreamspinner Press

**J.L. Merrow** read Natural Sciences at Cambridge, where she learned many things, chief amongst which was that she never wanted to see the inside of a lab ever again. Her one regret is that she never mastered the ability of punting one-handed whilst

holding a glass of champagne.

She has had over twenty short stories and novellas published, including her latest novella Pricks and Pragmatism, available from Samhain Publishing.

To learn more about J.L., visit JLMerrow.com

### Other works include:

A Blast from the Past, Torquere Press
Pricks and Pragmatism, Samhain Publishing, Ltd
Snared, Dreamspinner Press
Angel, Dreamspinner Press
Pleasures with Rough Strife, Dreamspinner Press
Becoming the Spoils, Dreamspinner Press
Epiphany, Torquere Press
The Green Man, Torquere Press
Good Company, Torquere Press

**Joshephine Myles** is English through and through—addicted to tea and busy cultivating a reputation for eccentricity. She writes gay erotic romance because she has a particular fondness for British slang, and claims there aren't enough m/m books out there catering to her tastes.

To learn more about Josephine, visit JosephineMyles.com

**Erik Orrantia** was born in San Francisco in 1970 and lived in the San Francisco Bay area until 1997. By that time, he had earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and a Master's

Degree in Counseling at California State University in Hayward. His original intention was to build a practice in psychotherapy.

He then felt a calling to explore the world and entered an International Study Program in Mexico City where he earned a teaching credential. He currently works as a middle school teacher in San Ysidro, California, along the Mexican-American border. He was voted Teacher of the Year in 2008 for his school district

He has traveled extensively throughout Mexico. He now spends most of his time in Tijuana with his partner and dedicates his free time to writing.

Other works include:

Normal Miguel, Cheyenne Publishing

**Nix Winter** writes. There's some drawing too, and sometimes the two mix into manga. There were two daughters who are both grown and doing very well. Then there's history. French and Japanese and history always bleeds into story. Louis XV was a magnificent King. Naruto is the best story ever told. There's going to be some non-fiction proving both those points.

Nix likes to have pink hair, loves ties, and loves cosplay. There's probably some anarchist tendencies. Love, kindness, community, all really great things...or as Robespierre might have said, if he were Nix, Liberty, Kinship, and Equality!

To learn more about Nix, visit NixWinter.com Other works include:

The Pet, loveyoudivine

Zowie It's Yaoi: Kai Stubborn, Thunder Mouth Press The House of Silver Oak, Second Lagrange Point Press A Berth on Calista, Renaissance Ebooks

**Stevie Woods** is a Brit living in the Northwest of England and has recently been able to leave her day job behind though it's a quandary that there still doesn't seem to be much more free time in her day!

A long time avid reader of romance with a dash of adventure, Stevie only stumbled over slash pairings a few years ago and was an immediate convert. Having dabbled with writing on and off for years, it wasn't long before Stevie was tapping away on the keyboard inventing stories around two hot guys, gaining her first publication in the summer of 2007.

Stevie likes reading stories with a good strong plot and believable characters and does her best to create them in her own work.

Stevie has a soft spot for historical settings but also thoroughly enjoys SF and Fantasy, Paranormal and Contemporary, finding the similarities as intriguing as the differences. Stevie already has a variety of novels, novellas and short stories released by Torquere Press, Phaze Books and MLR Press.

To learn more about Stevie, visit StevieWoods.com

Other works include:

The Kiva, MLR Press West of El Pilar, MLR Press The Lost Temple, MLR Press The Hitch-hiker, MLR Press Past Shadows, MLR Press Binary Stars 5, Phaze Books Beyond the Veil, Phaze Books Drawing the Veil, Phaze Books Cane, Phaze Books Conflict, Phaze Books One Small Step, Phaze Books On Reflection, Torquere Books Zimaya Heights, Torquere Books Smoke Screen, Torquere Books A Million Pinpricks, Torquere Books Roll of the Dice, Torquere Books Fortune's Choice, Torquere Books The Wrong Path, Torquere Books Twists and Turns, Torquere Books Conversations, Torquere Books More Than Sex, Torquere Books Tactics, Torquere Books Tutelary, Torquere Books Bridging Time, Torquere Books