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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

My Vampire and I

BLOOD LURE

J.P. Bowie

Dedication

For all of you who have enjoyed this series – thank you for your good words, and for Phil, always.

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The Flash: DC Comics Universe Bud Light: Anheuser-Busch

Prologue

Hungary 1810

Jared Lantos was in a hurry. He had promised his father he would attend that evening's meeting of the Elders, and he was late, or was going to be late if the damned carriage driver didn't get a move on. Truth be told, he hated the meetings, and only attended out of familial duty, added to the fact if he didn't show up, his father would rant on for hours about dereliction of duty and insubordination, *ad nauseum*. If only to spare his mother those tantrums, Jared attended the meetings as often as he could.

Jared was a lawyer, and a busy one, something his father had yet to understand. Janos Lantos had never quite grasped the idea his son had important clients who just might need his services more urgently than an Elder meeting.

Elders, he thought grimly. An arcane society that had no place in modern Hungary. A group of men who dabbled in the black arts, who gave all their time and money to the furtherance of communing with the dead, and as far as Jared knew had not once conjured one spirit. He shook his head in frustration. Another wasted evening lay ahead, listening to nonsense, watching the old codgers nod sagely as if they understood every silly word spoken. Surely they did not believe every worthless spell and incantation cast by the Head Elder, whom Jared considered no better than a street hawker of tawdry baubles, would actually bring forth good fortune for all present, arming them with magical shields to ward off those who would do them harm. Yet, sadly, Jared knew that was exactly what they did believe, his father included.

Ah well, tonight would be the last time he would attend one of these asinine affairs. It was his intention to inform his father that, as of next month, he would be moving to Budapest to take up a position as a partner in a larger law office. A far more prestigious company than the one in which he was presently employed.

He stretched his long legs out in front of him and gazed at the passing scene from the carriage window. The open window brought in a warm breeze that ruffled his long golden

hair. He glanced at his fob and sighed. Yes, he was late, and there was little he could do about it. The carriage shuddered, throwing him to one side as it came to an abrupt halt.

"What is it, cabbie?" he yelled, straining to see what had caused the sudden stop.

"Body in the street, sir..."

A body? He climbed down from the carriage and walked towards the small crowd gathered around a prone figure on the ground. The victim looked to be young, a young man, his clothes of a decent cut and material. Not a vagrant then...

"Is he dead?" he heard someone ask.

"Looks like it," came a reply. "Just waiting for the militia."

"Stabbed, he was..."

"No one's safe these days."

"Robbers and murderers everywhere..."

Jared suddenly felt as though he were being watched. He looked around the assembled crowd and caught the eye of a tall, handsome man who smiled at him and raised a hand to the brim of his hat in salute.

Do I know you? Jared wondered, returning the man's smile. Perhaps they'd met at one of the many business soirées he'd attended recently, but surely he would remember one as comely as this. The man moved towards him and touched him gently on the arm. A visceral thrill coursed through Jared's body at the man's touch.

"We're not needed here," the man said, steering Jared away from the crowd and into a darkened alleyway. A door opened, and they stepped inside. A long hallway stretched before them, dimly lit with a faint pinkish glow, and lined with several doors. "Here..." The man pushed open a door and stepped aside to let Jared enter. Jared did so without thought, without fear, even though he found all this to be very strange. A tiny prickle of excitement, of anticipation, coiled on the nape of his neck.

The man removed his hat and cloak, signalling that Jared should do the same. As if in a blur, he was suddenly standing so close Jared could taste the man's sweet-scented breath on his lips.

"I have need of you, my beauty..."

Whatever words Jared would have spoken in reply remained unsaid as the man took his lips with a kiss that stole Jared's breath, sent his senses spinning out of control, and made him cleave to the man's body with a lust he had never before experienced. The moan that

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escaped his lips turned to a groan as the man nuzzled at his throat. The sharp sting of the bite inflicted on him drew a cry of pain from Jared. He wanted to push the stranger away, free himself of the steel-like embrace, yet he could not. He knew his blood was being sucked. He could feel it leave his body, and with it his will to struggle, replaced by a sensual rush so intense it brought him to the brink of orgasm.

He gasped—his whole being seemed to be caught in this one thrilling moment. He raised his hands and cupped the back of the young man's head, holding him pressed to his neck, grinding his crotch into the man's hard arousal, giving himself up so completely and utterly to the sensations that rippled through every fibre of his body. He cried out as he came, his semen erupting into his undergarment. At any other time he would have been embarrassed by ejaculating so quickly, but as the man licked the blood from Jared's neck and gazed deeply into his eyes, Jared felt nothing but euphoria and the hope that this would not be their only encounter.

"What – what is your name?" He scarcely recognised the voice as his own.

"Michael. Michael Berés. And you are Jared Lantos, yes?"

"How do you know that?"

"You told me."

"No, I'm sure I didn't..."

Michael smiled, showing the tips of his fangs. "Jared, what's in a name? By any other, your blood would taste as sweet." He chuckled. "Excuse my paraphrasing the Bard, but you must know you are very beautiful, and your blood – exquisite."

"You are a vampire," Jared said, with only the slightest tremor in his voice. "Why am I not afraid of you?"

"Because I have you in my thrall, but never be afraid of me. You have nothing to fear from me."

Jared believed him, but could not quite credit what had just happened. Vampires were the stuff of myths, were they not? Yet here he was in the embrace of such a one, and he certainly was no myth. Michael Berés was real flesh and blood—his body solid, strong, and his face extremely handsome. At that moment Jared wished to be nowhere else—especially at a mindless Elder meeting. His father would just have to get over it.

Michael kissed the corner of Jared's mouth, a gentle teasing touch from lips that were soft and sensual. He unbuttoned Jared's shirt. His eyes flicked over the sculpted chest he'd revealed, the dusting of golden hair, the tiny pale brown nipples.

"Too beautiful to hide behind clothing," he murmured and Jared gasped as his clothes fell from his body. He stood, naked and vulnerable before the vampire who now dropped to his knees and took the glistening head of Jared's cock between his lips with an appreciative murmur. Jared grew hard instantly, feeling a certain amazement that his body had reacted so swiftly after his orgasm of only moments before.

The vampire sucked on him, long, deliciously slow strokes of lips and tongue that left Jared weak at the knees, glad of the wall behind him to lean against. Once again he gave himself up to the incredible sensations the man kneeling before him brought him. His hips bucked and the pleasure was mingled with a slight unease as Michael's fangs gently scraped the base of Jared's cock. Michael, as if sensing Jared's apprehension, released him with a smile. He stood and led Jared to a couch, upholstered in a dark blood red fabric.

How appropriate, Jared thought as Michael pushed him gently onto the couch. A slight shrug of his shoulders and Michael's clothing fell from his body.

Jared's gaze swept over Michael's finely honed olive skinned physique. A soft moan of admiration and longing escaped his lips. As Michael lay over him, never had Jared felt so powerless to resist, so completely willing to give himself, body and soul, to this man-no matter the cost.

Despite his euphoria, he became aware that another man had entered the room, and now stood smiling down at Michael and Jared. Michael glanced up, and returned the man's smile.

"Andrew... Jared, this is my brother Andrew. Would you like him to join us?"

Jared gazed into the most beautiful pale blue eyes he had ever seen. Could this really be happening? In a flash of intuition, Jared knew these men represented so much more than just the mere pleasures of the flesh, however fantastic it would be. Whatever was about to take place in this room was going to change his life forever, and he would be inextricably bound to both men for as long as they all should live.

Andrew's beautiful eyes seemed to bore through to his soul, and in them Jared saw his future. He nodded his acceptance and held out his hand, shivering slightly from the sensuous sensation of Andrew's cool grip. Andrew knelt by his side. His lips, soft and moist,

covered Jared's with a kiss that seared itself upon his flesh with an intensity he would carry in his memory for all time.

Michael and Andrew pulled Jared to his feet, Andrew's clothes seemed to shimmer, then disappear, and the three of them embraced, arms encircling one another's naked bodies, lips nuzzling at each other's flesh, the thrill of it like nothing Jared had ever known before. Innately, he knew he should offer Andrew his blood, and without a word, he arched his neck under the vampire's questing lips. Again, the bite brought exquisitely combined pain and pleasure, and Jared felt a heated rush envelope his body, pooling in his groin, filling him with an almost unbearable desire. His erection throbbed against Andrew's thigh. Michael knelt before him and Jared's body bucked and trembled as his cock was taken into the warmth of Michael's mouth.

Andrew licked and sealed the wounds on Jared's neck then took his lips in another long and deeply erotic kiss that had Jared gasping into the vampire's mouth, yet willing it to never end. Their tongues danced and tussled, their breath mingled, the vampire's sweet and spicy, intoxicating. Andrew's hands ran the length of Jared's spine, caressing the smooth warm skin. He cupped Jared's buttocks, his fingers slipping into the cleft, teasing the moist hole until Jared breathed his entreaty, "Yes, fuck me..."

While Michael's clever tongue continued to bring Jared ever closer to the brink of release, Andrew slipped behind Jared, parted his ass cheeks, then pushed inside him. What should have been white hot agony without some form of lubrication was instead a breathtaking ecstasy, so intense Jared's guttural cry of pleasure echoed throughout the room. His head fell back onto Andrew's shoulder, his lips seeking Andrew's mouth for yet another soul searing kiss. Andrew held him, his arms around Jared's chest while he slowly, with long measured strokes, thrust in and out of Jared's pulsing hole.

Jared had never experienced so many incredible sensations at once. This was not the first time he'd had sex with two men at the same time, but these men, these vampires took him to a threshold of rapture he had never believed possible. Their scent, their taste, the feel of their magnificent bodies overwhelmed him, and he gave himself up to their power—he was theirs to do with him what they willed. He gasped as he felt yet another climax build inside him. Liquid heat poured through his blood. His eyes rolled back, and he thought he might just soar to the heavens in their arms. With one hand, he raked Michael's hair, with the

other he cupped Andrew's ass, pulling him ever deeper, if indeed it was possible, inside himself.

Again, his cries filled the room, and he came in great body-wrenching spasms, his seed filling Michael's mouth at the same instant he felt the burning heat of Andrew's semen surge inside him. He thought he might just fall to the floor, a weak and limp pile of flesh, but the vampires' strong arms supported him, crushed him between their bodies, their lips scouring his sweating skin. For a long moment they remained locked together, the only sound, that of Jared's rasping breath.

Finally, Michael's deep, soft voice broke the silence. "Shall we reward him now?"

Against the skin on the nape of his neck Jared felt Andrew's lips move as he smiled at his brother. "He deserves it as no other ever has."

"Reward?" Jared could barely push the word from his lips.

"Given to very few. But you, Jared, you have touched what is left of our souls."

He watched as Andrew bit deep into his wrist then presented the bleeding wound to Jared.

"Drink from us and be forever bound by our love and loyalty."

He hesitated for a moment, then cautiously licked at the dark red liquid flowing from Andrew's wrist. The pungent, spicy taste was like nothing else, not even the finest wine. Greedily, he lapped at the blood, gripping Andrew's hand, sucking long and hard, revelling in the sweetly sensuous waves of rapture that coursed through his body, until with a gently murmured, "Enough for now..."Andrew removed his wrist from Jared's mouth. Jared, dizzied by the rich potency of Andrew's blood, was only dimly aware that Michael now offered him the same gift. This time he did not hesitate, but latched onto Michael's bleeding flesh with a gusto that had both vampires chuckling with delight.

"You belong to us now," Andrew whispered, before kissing Jared's bloody lips. Jared returned the kiss with a fervency instilled in him by the powerful blood of the vampire brothers. He turned to Michael who claimed his mouth, and Jared's mind was filled with the thought that nothing else he could ever experience in his life would eclipse the memory of this thrilling encounter.

Part One

Chapter One

Los Angeles: Present day

The vampire hungered. His senses flared at the scent of blood – human blood, close by, very, very close, coming nearer. In the shadows he waited, still and silent as one of the many statues in the Piazza Fortuna, ready to strike, to take that which he needed in order to survive.

Footsteps clacked on the cobbled street – the sound came to him after the scent. His body tensed, his long-nailed fingers stretched in readiness. A shadow fell in front of him, elongated at first, growing smaller as the human approached. A soft whimper of anticipation escaped the vampire's throat and his snake-like tongue slid over his lips – soon, soon he would feed again. The rich, potent blood of the human would fill his mouth, renew his strength, give him reason and purpose to continue.

Now! Like a wraith appearing from the darkness, the vampire sprang, winding his arms around his prey, his fangs poised to strike. The man he imprisoned was young and comely with long blond hair, his body compact and virile. His only slightly startled blue eyes stared back into the vampire's dark, hypnotic gaze. With a strength that took the vampire by surprise, the young man wrenched himself from the unbidden embrace.

"Vampire," he said, stepping back, a cold smile touching his lips. "You have chosen unwisely this night."

A growl escaped the vampire's gaping mouth – a growl that changed to a groan, then to a shriek, as, with the speed of someone endowed with supernatural powers, the fair-haired man plunged a wooden stake through the vampire's heart.

"Die, vampire, die," the man chanted, gloating as the vampire's face began to dissolve, his fangs falling from his mouth, bones melting, what little blood left in him turning to a brownish powder that was swept away by the sudden breeze that had sprung up around them.

"So die all vampires," the blond-haired man said, laughing as he leered into the camera.

"Oh, wow..." As the screen credits rolled, Joey Ryan turned to the young guy sitting next to him in the movie house and grinned. "Was that the worst vampire movie ever made, or what?"

Joey, expecting at least a nod of agreement, was surprised when the guy, whom he didn't actually know, glared at him and said, "I thought it was pretty good!"

He stood and stalked towards the exit as though Joey had insulted him personally, instead of his taste in vampire movies. Joey sighed and slumped back in his seat, unwilling for the moment to get up and leave, even though he knew the cleaners would be coming through to pick up after the crowd left.

Not much of a crowd to be sure. The movie was a total bomb. A wry smile lifted the corners of his lips as he thought of how his best buddy Chris and he would have giggled all the way through the dreck he'd just watched. Another sigh, and he lurched to his feet, hands deep in his pockets as he made his way to the exit.

He missed Chris. True, he had other friends, but none of them enjoyed going to horror movies, and very few of them seemed to have the same sense of humour he and Chris had shared. Chris and Joey had been buds since junior high, two gay boys supporting each other when the 'fag baiting' got rough. Together, they'd faced the ugliness some of the kids at school were only too capable of.

In his late teens and early twenties, Joey had shown some bad judgement in his choice of boyfriends, and Chris had always been there to supply the shoulder for Joey to cry on, along with the advice that he should start being 'a tad more choosy'.

Well, Chris would be proud of him now. Not only had he vowed to be 'a tad more choosy', he'd decided to give up on the boyfriend scene altogether for the foreseeable future. Celibacy wasn't a word he was used to, but maybe it was time to give it a go. He had more serious things to think about right now.

This was another, even more personal, reason he missed Chris.

He missed him for the support he knew Chris would give him when he found out his father had recently been diagnosed with dementia. That had been rough, especially for his mom who refused to have his dad committed to a home, saying she would take care of him until the day he died.

His dad had always been a little off the wall, thoroughly believing in the supernatural, in ghosts and vampires, and things that went bump in the night. Chris and Joey had loved it

when he would go off on one of his flights of fancy, regaling them with lurid tales of stuff they knew wasn't true, but that curled their hair and their toes anyway. Strange thing was, he would never go to see a horror movie with them, no matter how many times they asked him to.

"Who needs that make-believe crap when I've seen the real thing with my own eyes?" he would say, much to the boys' amusement.

Now it looked like his dad was deteriorating more quickly than the doctors had predicted. According to his mother, his father's out-loud ramblings had become more frequent.

Joey had promised her he would visit at the weekend. He only wished Chris was around to go with him.

Damn it, Chris, why do you have to keep flying off to the Continent or South America with your boyfriend all the freaking time?

Joey couldn't help but to admit to himself if he had a wealthy boyfriend who looked like Carlos Galeano, and who wanted to fly him around the world, he wouldn't give a toss for anyone else's feelings either. No, wait, that wasn't fair. Chris had told Joey on several occasions how he wished he could include him in his and Carlos' travel plans, but as they were usually business trips, it just wasn't practical.

He'd only met Carlos twice—the man was always so darned busy—and on both occasions Joey had been totally charmed by the handsome Spaniard with the mesmerising golden brown eyes.

Joey had never seen eyes like that on any other man, had never seen another man's eyes glow like Carlos' – nor had he known any other man to look at him the way Carlos looked at Chris. They were so in love, and Joey was happy for his friend. He'd be even happier if *he* could meet someone as great as Carlos. But then, he would have to give up his vow of celibacy...

His cell jangled in his pocket as he exited the movie complex. After glancing at the ID screen he answered, "Hey, Jack, what's up?"

"Me'n' Lorenzo are over at the Blue Moon. Wanna join us for quick drink? Only we can't stay late, Lorenzo has an early morning business meeting."

"Sure, sounds good. I'll see you there." Joey was glad of the invitation, hoping it would dispel the depression that had so quickly settled on him. One of the reasons he'd gone to see

the vampire flick was in the hope it would help put him in a better frame of mind. Too bad it hadn't worked!

The Blue Moon, situated on Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, was the bar that generations of gay men had regarded as a home from home. Even in these days of internet dating, it still remained a popular spot, considered a safe meeting place for guys hooking up on the 'net'. It also boasted some of the hottest men in town among its clientele. Chris had told Joey he'd met Carlos in the Blue Moon. Good enough reason to keep going there. Not that he was going to have his head turned by any of the eye candy on parade. After all, he could still go to a gay bar and not be tempted – couldn't he?

Jack and Lorenzo were friends Joey had made during their first year in LA. They'd all been on a business management training course together, had hit it off immediately, and Joey had introduced them to Chris. The four of them had been tight—actually, Jack and Lorenzo had become very tight, now celebrating their third year together as lovers. And now Chris was gone so much, Joey had been glad of the couple's company on more than one occasion.

He gave the handsome pair a wave as he entered the bar. They had secured a table, and a tall vodka martini, Joey's favourite drink, was waiting for him when he sat down.

"Hey, guys. Thanks for asking me to join you."

"How's your dad?" Jack asked.

"Pretty much the same. I'm going up to visit my folks at the weekend."

"Well, give him and your mom our love, won't you?"

"Sure will."

"Where were you when we called?" Lorenzo asked. "At home?"

"No, I went to see that new vampire movie, *The Darkness*, at the multi-plex. I was really looking forward to it, but it was kinda bad."

"You and your horror flicks," Jack said, chuckling. "You must miss Chris's company when you go to those things. Can't stand 'em myself."

"Some are really good." Joey could hear himself sounding slightly defensive. "But I can't deny this one was pretty terrible."

Lorenzo shook his head sadly. "You need a boyfriend."

Joey took a long sip of his martini, then paused to appreciate the flavour of the good vodka. "I've kinda sworn off boyfriends and dating for a while. Don't faint, but I'm gonna go for celibate."

Jack almost choked on his beer, and Lorenzo raised an eyebrow. "Why?"

"Because..." Joey grinned at his friends' shocked expressions. "As my dear buddy Chris loved to point out, I was a bit of a slut for a few years. Only, I wasn't—well, not really. I just couldn't find the right guy." He paused with a rueful sigh. "Even though I must have interviewed more than a hundred of them over the years."

"Interviewed." Jack laughed out loud. "That's a new word for it."

"Well, you know what I mean." Joey sighed again, this time with a touch of the dramatic. "I've always been a sucker for a beautiful face and bod."

"And how." Jack gave him a mischievous leer. "Sucker is right."

"Hey, I didn't sign up for this abuse." Joey attempted to look hurt. "Anyway, I thought I'd cool it for a while. I figured that if I stop looking, maybe Mr Right will drop out of the sky when I least expect it." He grinned. "Yeah, I know, and pigs might fly."

"West Hollywood is full of great looking guys," Lorenzo remarked, his eyes straying across the bar.

"Yeah..." Joey snorted. "Guys with that 'Sorry, you're not hot enough for me' attitude."

"That shouldn't be a problem for you," Jack said, grinning. "You're as cute as can be. All those curls and flirty blue eyes."

Joey hooted. "That made me sound very girly, Jack."

"Well...?"

"Oh, come on." Joey made a pretence of being offended. "I work out nearly every day. Look at this." He flexed his biceps. "What girl do you know that has this kind of muscle?"

"Have you seen Cindy recently?"

After more laughter Lorenzo leant closer to Joey. "Don't look now, but I think your muscle flexing has really impressed the blond Adonis sitting in that booth over there. I've noticed he hasn't taken his eyes off you since you sat down."

"Where?" Joey turned in his seat to take a look at the 'Adonis'.

"I said, *don't look now*," Lorenzo whined. "Oh jeez, too late. Now he knows I was talking about him."

Joey looked across the bar at the man Lorenzo had pointed out.

Oh, very nice. Better than nice – beautiful.

A classically handsome face was topped by a mane of golden hair—*blond* didn't really do it justice—pulled back into a long ponytail. Even though the man was seated, Joey could tell he was tall, his long, lean, jean-clad legs stretched out in front of him under the table. His shirt was unbuttoned enough to reveal a smooth sculpted chest, with just a trace more of that golden hair.

"Wow," Joey breathed, wondering what colour the man's eyes were. He couldn't quite make them out at this distance. Anyway, what did it matter? He wasn't interested in diving into the dating pool again.

Still, the guy is gorgeous.

Feigning disinterest, he started to turn away when somewhere in his mind he heard the words whispered, "*Come to me...*"

Joey got to his feet.

"Where are you going?" Jack hissed.

"To talk to him."

Jack leant back against the back of the booth, and rolled his eyes as Joey left their table. "And he wasn't into having another boyfriend. Going for celibate, he said."

Lorenzo shook his head. "I would have given that decision at least a couple of days. He just broke his own record."

The man smiled as Joey approached his table, indicating Joey should sit by his side. As Joey slid into the booth, the man moved towards him. Their thighs touched, and an electric tingle surged through Joey's body giving him an instant hard-on. The man's cool hand on his made Joey shiver with delight, and a certain apprehension.

"H-hi, I'm J-Joey," he managed to stutter, hating himself for sounding like an immature adolescent.

"I'm very pleased to meet you." The man's full lips parted in another smile. "My name is Jared. Jared Lantos."

"Oh, oh yeah. Joey Ryan." Joey gazed into the man's eyes. They were the darkest blue he'd ever seen, and strangely, for no reason he could quite fathom, they reminded him of Carlos' eyes. Why? They were an entirely different colour, yet they held that same

mysterious glow. Joey found he couldn't tear his gaze from Jared's. Didn't *want* to was more like it.

He felt as though he could look at this man for hours and never tire of studying the pale, smooth planes of his face, the lush lips, and those dark enticing eyes. Joey had a sudden vision of himself wrapped in Jared's arms, their lips locked in a kiss that filled Joey with such need he had to fight to silence the whimper that rose in his throat.

Wait, where had that 'staying celibate' resolution gone? Now it seemed totally laughable...

"So, Jared..." Joey cleared his throat and shifted slightly on the leather seat, his hand giving what he hoped was a surreptitious tug at his crotch to relieve his painfully hard cock. "I haven't seen you in here before."

The corner of Jared's mouth lifted with amusement. "That's because this is my first time here. I actually live in New York."

"You don't sound like a New Yorker."

"Originally I am from Hungary."

"Ah, that explains the, uh, accent." Joey had been going to say '*sexy* accent' but thought better of it at the last moment. "Are you on vacation?"

Jared nodded. "A working vacation and visiting friends. They are meeting me here. In fact," he added, glancing at his watch, "they are a little late."

"Oh, well..." Joey did his best to hide his disappointment. "I don't want to interrupt anything."

"You are not interrupting anything."

Jared's smile, along with that husky, sexy voice, only served to make Joey's cock harder. "You are keeping me company until they arrive, when I will be only too happy to introduce you to them."

He glanced over to where Jack and Lorenzo sat, trying unsuccessfully to appear disinterested.

"Perhaps your friends would like to join us?"

Not wanting to make a show of the fact he was sporting a raging hard-on, Joey didn't stand up, just waved his friends over. "Hey, guys, come and meet Jared."

Jack and Lorenzo ambled over, introductions were made, but Jack declined Jared's invitation to sit. "Lorenzo has an early morning meeting," he explained. "So we'll head home. But it was nice meeting you, Jared."

Joey groaned inwardly as Jack winked at him.

Could he possibly be more obvious?

Jared stood to shake their hands and Joey couldn't resist a peek at the tall man's crotch.

Oh yeah, just like the rest of him – a perfectly beautiful bulge.

Jared chuckled as he sat down again. "Your friends were anxious to leave us alone."

"They must have been getting my telepathic messages," Joey said, grinning. "Go home, go *home*."

"And it worked." Jared moved closer, his gaze searching Joey's face as if he were about to ask him something, then he suddenly turned away to look at the two tall men approaching their table.

Holy crap, Joey thought, did someone sprinkle this place with even more beauty dust tonight? These guys are amazing!

Both men were dressed casually in jeans and polo shirts, yet there was an unmistakable air of elegance about them that immediately set them apart from the other men in the bar. Except, perhaps, Jared, who wore his navy denim shirt and jeans with a graceful flair. Joey wished he'd dressed a little more carefully, but going to the movies on his own had only called for cargo shorts and a T-shirt.

"Jared," one of the men said, his slightly accented voice deep and melodious, "so sorry we are late." Green eyes flicked towards Joey. "But I see you're being entertained without us."

"Joey, these are my good friends, Marcus Verano and Joseph Meyer." Jared stood again to give the men welcoming hugs. He turned to smile at Joey. "Marcus and Joseph, meet my new friend, Joey Ryan."

The men each murmured a greeting and took Joey's hand in firm grips, but he could sense a certain tension from them.

They're probably wondering what Jared's doing with someone as ordinary as me.

Joey figured he could pass for how Jack had described him, 'cute' – and he'd had some of his past conquests even refer to him as 'hot' – but there was no way he could compete with these guys. They, and Jared, were most definitely in a league of their own.

Marcus was endowed with that rare quality, a masculine beauty unflawed by any trace of weakness in his mouth or eyes – magnificent eyes, green as shining emeralds. The other,

Joseph, had a quiet intensity about him that had Joey thinking perhaps behind those amazing silver grey eyes there lurked a wariness of strangers.

Now where on earth had that thought come from? he wondered. What is it about these men that makes me sense I'm somehow a part of them? Is it simply their friendly attitude that makes me feel so relaxed in their company – or is it something more?

He had to make a conscious effort to pay attention to what Jared was saying.

"Are Roger and Micah not joining us?"

Marcus' lips twisted in a wry smile. "They wanted to see the new *vampire* movie that opened tonight."

"Oh, was it *The Darkness*?" Joey asked, paying attention again. "I just saw that one."

"That sounds right." Joseph smiled at Joey. "I'm afraid their fondness for horror movies leaves Marcus and I cold."

Joey chuckled. "It's not very good. In fact, it's probably the worst vampire movie I've ever seen."

"You've seen many?"

"Just about every one ever made. I love vampires. Don't you? My friend Chris and I..." He paused, aware of the amused expressions on the men's faces. "Sorry, I can tell you're not into it."

"No, no, go ahead." Jared touched Joey's hand lightly. "You were saying that you and your friend Chris..."

"Oh...yeah." Joey tried to ignore the effect Jared's touch had on him. His erection was positively aching. "Uh, he and I would take in every horror movie we could, but our favourites are vampire movies. Vampires are sexy, you know? Better than werewolves with that wet dog smell, or zombies with all that pus and drool."

All three men laughed, then Jared asked, "And where is your friend, Chris, tonight?"

"Oh, he's overseas right now with his boyfriend, Carlos, so I had to see this one on my own. Too bad, 'cause he would've hooted as much as I did."

Jared smiled, but Marcus stared at Joey intently. "Your friend Christopher – would that be Christopher Jeffries?"

"Why, yeah. You know him?"

"And his, uh, boyfriend is Carlos Galeano?"

"That's right."

"What a coincidence." Joseph glanced at the other men. "Carlos is an old friend of ours."

"Wow, it is a small world, isn't it?" Joey relaxed even more. "I've only met Carlos a couple of times, but he seems very nice, and loves my buddy a lot."

Marcus nodded. "Yes, he does. They went through much hardship to be together."

"There was what I thought of as a definite case of denial there for a time," Joey said, agreeing. "At one point he wouldn't acknowledge that he even knew Carlos. Kept telling me I was imagining it all." He looked at the empty places on the table in front of Marcus and Joseph. "Hey, can I buy you guys a drink? And, Jared, looks like you're almost finished with your wine."

"That's very sweet of you, Joey." Marcus pushed his chair back and stood up. "But let us treat you. A martini is it?"

"Please, vodka."

"Shaken, not stirred?" Joseph teased.

Joey grinned at him. "Any way it comes, with an olive."

Marcus and Joseph walked over to the bar to order the drinks, while Jared moved closer to Joey again. "It seems we won't have much time alone together tonight," he murmured, his lips close to the shell of Joey's ear, causing Joey's cock to react shamefully by threatening to burst through the denim of his jeans. "I wondered if perhaps you would care to join me tomorrow night. I have two tickets for The Music of the Night concert at the Hollywood Bowl."

Joey beamed at him. "That sounds great. I'd like that very much." So much for his 'no dating' resolution, but he'd actually wanted to see that concert, and hadn't been able to get tickets.

Besides, who in their right minds would turn this guy down?

"It's a date then." Jared was smiling that sultry smile at him, and once again Joey felt himself enthralled by simply gazing into Jared's dark blue eyes. He couldn't remember another guy having this almost instantaneous effect on his libido.

On a sudden impulse – or was it that he was being drawn in towards Jared? – he leant forward and kissed Jared on the mouth. The contact was like nothing he'd ever experienced before. As Jared's soft, full lips met his, Joey felt as though he'd been zapped with a thousand volts of energy.

His eyes flew open and he clutched at Jared's shoulders for support. Jared drew him into an embrace that brought Joey to the brink of orgasm. The feel of the man's hard, muscular body, his spicy scent, had Joey writhing against Jared, caught up in a welter of sexual ecstasy.

He almost didn't hear the clearing of throats behind him, then the soft chuckles that followed.

"Sorry, we're interrupting." Marcus set the drinks on the table.

"No... Oh, gosh, sorry." Joey felt flustered and embarrassed by his sudden move on Jared. What had he been saying earlier to Jack and Lorenzo about not really being a slut? Just as well Chris wasn't here. He'd be rolling his eyes as if to say, 'Haven't changed, have you?'

Jared didn't look at all embarrassed. He simply gave Joey another of his killer smiles, and ran his fingertips through Joey's curly hair. "Joey has accepted my invitation to a concert tomorrow night," he told Marcus.

"Very nice. I hope you both enjoy it. So, Salud..." He raised his glass of red wine. "We are happy to make your acquaintance, Joey."

Joey sipped his martini thinking how formal these guys were. Their exotic accents, stellar looks, and gracious manners seemed to belong to a bygone age. An age where manners mattered, a gentler age perhaps, far from the crassness of modern times and mores. Still, he couldn't really judge others on their bad manners after his earlier display of putting the make on Jared, and only knowing him for less than half an hour. He was just glad that Jared hadn't seemed to mind at all, returning his kiss with a great deal of pent-up ardour.

Maybe, tomorrow night, they could take it to a higher level. There he was, thinking like a slut again, but what the hey? How many more times in his life was he going to meet another man like Jared?

Most likely, not one.

Chapter Two

"We had an interesting meeting tonight," Marcus told his lover, Roger Folsom, when he returned home after seeing the movie *The Darkness* with his friend Micah Fitzgerald. "Joey Ryan, a friend of Christopher Jeffries."

"You're kidding." Roger was wide eyed with interest. He flung himself down on the couch next to Marcus, kissed him on the cheek, then turned to smirk at their house guest. "You're doing?"

Jared laughed quietly. "As if you hadn't just read my mind."

"Roger." Marcus frowned at him. "I've told you about that a million times before. It is rude to invade a friend's privacy."

"I only did it for a second. I already had an inkling Jared met someone tonight. He has that pleased as punch look on his face, like he'd got some."

"He is very attractive and sweet, even if he does like horror movies," Jared said. "But I must disillusion you, Roger. Sadly, I didn't get some, as you so elegantly put it."

Roger grinned. "Horror movies, eh? That means he has good taste. Though if he liked the one Micah and I saw tonight, I'll retract the bit about good taste."

"He did see it and hated it. He said it was the worst vampire movie he'd ever seen."

"The guy *has* taste. It was, without a doubt, the worst—"

Still frowning, Marcus interrupted, "I sensed something about him."

"Oh, yeah?"

"He's been with one of our kind, but he has no memory of it," Marcus continued. "There is a trace of vampire blood in his veins. You didn't sense it, Jared?"

Jared nodded. "I sensed *something* even before I asked him to join me. I have to admit, without embarrassing both of you I hope, that the taste of his lips was like no other mortal's I have kissed."

"Wow." Roger looked suitably impressed.

"Vampire blood never goes away." Marcus fixed Roger with a long look. "You know something about this, don't you?"

Roger sighed and ran a hand over his blond hair. "You know, if there's one drawback to having you as a lover, it's this '*all-knowing*' thing you do. How can I ever hide anything from you?"

"You should not wish to hide things from me, Roger. Our minds should be like open books to one another."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. All very well for you, Mr Never Did a Stupid Thing in His Life Verano, Master Vampire, love of my life—"

"Roger."

"Oh, all *right*. That time when Micah and me wanted to get Christopher back into Carlos' life – "

"When Micah and *I*—and I believe that was all *your* idea." Marcus tapped Roger on the head. "Micah simply went along with your foolish actions, after you gave him no other choice."

"Yeah, well, I exchanged blood with Christopher, as you know, so I could get in his head and do a PR job for Carlos, and, uh...Micah did it with Chris's friend, Joey. Micah *said* he only gave him a drop or two."

Marcus sighed. "More than that I think, but even a *drop or two* would remain in his blood for the rest of his life. You see, Jared, what I have to put up with? Think very carefully, my friend, before you select any mortal as your forever companion!"

"I will definitely think hard about it," Jared said with mock seriousness, "should I ever consider such a thing. But you know me, Marcus, I like the single life."

"Well, I don't think you've done so badly, Marcus," Roger huffed. "Just 'cause I like to spice it up now and then. You don't hear Joseph or Jean-Claude, or Carlos for that matter, complaining about *their* mortal – or should I say – *ex* mortal lovers."

Marcus chuckled and pulled Roger into his arms. "You are quite irresistible when you pout like that. Now, would you care to pour us all a glass of that rare Chateau Lafitte-Rothschild I had delivered yesterday?"

Roger kissed Marcus on the cheek and bowed low before him. "I hear, Master, and I obey."

Marcus swatted Roger's butt. "Good, let's keep it that way." He smiled at Jared. "Shall we sit on the veranda and talk? We still have to decide on how we will address the Council regarding the charges brought against you." Jared's expression turned grim. "Yes, I'm sorry to burden you and Joseph with this, Marcus. I really didn't know who else I could turn to."

"It is no burden, my friend. When you, or any one of us is unjustly accused, friends must rally to our sides. That is the way of it." He led Jared out onto the huge veranda that ran the length of the living room and master bedroom combined. From there, the lights of Los Angeles below were just visible, sparkling through the late night mist that covered the hillsides.

"Joseph says he knows Andrew Berés, the man who accuses you of murdering his brother, Michael. He also says he is quite surprised to hear that Berés is so adamant in his accusation."

"Andrew believes it to be true." There was a trace of sadness in Jared's voice. He looked away, over the veranda wall, as he remembered his last conversation with his one-time friend and lover. For a time he stared at the moon scudding behind dark clouds.

"He and I have spoken of it. I tried to have him believe that I would never do such a thing. To kill another vampire without the authority of the Council is unforgivable, not to mention a punishable offence. But apart from that, I loved Michael Berés. As you know, he was the one who changed me. We were friends for nigh on two hundred years. I would never harm him, let alone kill him."

"And have you any idea who did?"

"I have my suspicions." He paused as Roger arrived with their wine. "Thank you, Roger." He took the proffered glass. "Salud."

"Salud." Marcus savoured the wine for a moment or two before asking, "Why does Andrew think you murdered his brother?"

"Michael had fallen in with a circle of mortals in New York who held gambling parties. Even when we first met, I knew Michael loved to indulge in the habit. Unfortunately, he was having a run of bad luck and was heavily in debt to one member, a Bernard Fieldman. Fieldman is an influential businessman and an associate of the Mayor's. He moves in powerful circles, feels he is above the law, and was certainly not above threatening Michael.

"Michael was not afraid of the man, but of course, he didn't want Fieldman, or any of the other gamblers, to know he was vampire. He felt that if the man used his influence to do some background checking, he would discover that Michael was not what he seemed. So he asked if I would lend him the money." "And did you?" Marcus asked.

"I did, but he was soon in debt again to the same man." Jared's lips twisted in a wry grimace. "I told him that as he was so unlucky at the games they played, perhaps it was time for him to give them up. He promised me he would as soon as this debt was paid. This time, in order to lend him the money, I had to arrange for funds to be transferred from Zurich, and during that time, Michael was murdered.

"He must have revealed his true self when he tried to defend himself, or Fieldman had indeed discovered Michael's secret. Whoever killed him knew enough to ensure he did not rise again. He was decapitated. What was left of his body bore a message. 'Death of a debtor.'"

Marcus stared at Jared over the rim of his wineglass. "At what point were you accused of the murder – and by whom?"

"Andrew's uncle, Lazlo Marek, knew I had lent Michael money. He must have informed Andrew and somehow convinced him I had murdered his brother. Andrew railed at me, saying I had demanded repayment, and had killed Michael when he could not pay. Even when I showed him the receipt from Zurich showing a pending transfer, he would not believe me.

"Every imagined slight, every petty jealousy he had harboured for years against me were manifested in his hatred for me at that moment. He attacked me. We fought. He was like a madman."

Jared shuddered as he recalled this confrontation with Andrew. "It took all my strength to subdue him, and when I had my hands on his throat, he spat at me, 'Yes, go ahead, murder me as you murdered Michael. That is the only way you will survive this!'

"I told him again that I did not murder Michael, then I left him, unhurt, on his living room floor. Later, I received this summons to appear before the Vampire Council."

"You did the right thing by coming to Joseph and me for guidance," Marcus said. "You said you had your suspicions."

"Yes. Bernard Fieldman, the man to whom Michael owed the money. I am convinced he murdered Michael—or at the very least, arranged it. But he has an alibi and witnesses to prove him elsewhere at the time of Michael's death. And of course, there is the fact that I could not go to the police."

Marcus nodded. "So we have to have the man investigated ourselves."

"I tried that, Marcus." Jared's wide shoulders slumped a little. "I confronted Fieldman with my suspicions, but he merely laughed and presented me with his alibi which he said can be corroborated by many people." Jared bared his teeth in a grimace. "His gambling cronies, of course. Believe me, at that moment, I wanted to tear him limb from limb. He owes his life to you, Marcus. To you and your philosophy of non-violence."

"And your self-control will be rewarded, I assure you," Marcus told him. "Don't worry, Jared. Joseph and I will accompany you when you appear before the Council. I think there is already enough doubt to allay any sentencing."

* * * *

When Jared left his friends and retired to one of the guestrooms just before dawn, he felt easier in his mind now he had spoken with Marcus. He had spent so many restless days wondering how he could convince Andrew, and the Council, of his innocence.

Especially Andrew.

How could the love Andrew had once professed for him turn so quickly to hatred? Jared could still remember the joy he'd felt that day when Michael had introduced him to his handsome brother, when they had engaged in the most incredible intimacy Jared had ever known.

Andrew was blessed with hair that shone like a raven's wing, his skin smooth with a burnished olive sheen. His luminous eyes, a startling pale, almost icy blue, had gazed at Jared on their first meeting with a sensual intensity he'd found impossible to ignore. After that first encounter, Andrew had pursued Jared with a relentlessness that Jared found at first to be flattering and exciting, but he'd been honest from the start, letting Andrew know that after he'd been changed, a forever companion was not something he desired.

Yes, the sex had been good, better than good. Each and every time they had pleasured one another, it had been completely fulfilling. But Jared had always been a loner, and had explained that to Andrew many times during the time they spent together. He supposed Andrew had thought he could be the one to change Jared's mind, but in the end, hope had turned to bitterness. Harsh words were thrown at Jared, and the distance he placed between himself and Andrew in order to avoid further, furious confrontations, never seemed vast enough. Now this. The jealousy and rage that still tormented Andrew had led him to make a groundless accusation, based on nothing more than rumour and his determination to see Jared suffer. If he could not have him, he had once told Michael, then no one would.

Words spoken in anger perhaps, but now Michael, the only one who could refute Andrew's accusations, was dead, and Jared blamed for his murder. Jared could only hope this would soon be over, that with help from Marcus and Joseph he would be found innocent, and could get on with his life.

Which brought him back to the more pleasant thoughts of his meeting with Joey, but also to Marcus' warning, however light-hearted, about being involved with a mortal.

They could be trouble without a doubt. He'd seen some of the results of botched love affairs, tears, vows of revenge and retribution, and worse, sometimes the final death of the vampire, betrayed by his or her mortal lover, dragged into the sunlight as they slept, or stabbed with a silver spike through the heart.

Not that he imagined someone like Joey capable of anything quite so dastardly, he thought with a slight chuckle, but at the same time, he knew very little about the young man, except that he was the best friend of Carlos' lover—and a very good kisser.

Jared smiled, remembering the sudden passion in Joey's kiss, the ardour he had expressed in those all too brief meetings of their lips. And when Jared had held Joey, trapping his lithe body in a fierce embrace, something had stirred in Jared—an indefinable something. A longing, a sensual hunger he had not felt in many, many years.

The scent of Joey's blood had been intoxicating, the sweet lure by which mortals often entrap a vampire. His instincts had been correct when he'd thought there was something different about Joey—Marcus' assertion that Joey had at one time exchanged blood with a vampire, being confirmed by Roger.

Amazing that Marcus could tell from just shaking Joey's hand, Jared mused, but Marcus was unique among vampires, possessing powers honed to perfection over many centuries. Jared had been a vampire for only two hundred years, and never in all that time had he given his heart to any man, mortal or vampire. Yes, there had been dalliances, some sweet and worth remembering. Even the time he'd shared with Andrew, most especially that, in the beginning. But Jared preferred the solitary life, preferring to make his way through the world alone. Like so many fledgeling vampires before and since his changing, Jared owed his existence to Marcus, who it seemed never tired of teaching young vampires how to survive the strange, and often dangerous netherworld in which they found themselves after the change. Jared had been no different, ready to exercise his new-found strength, his sexual prowess, his ability to fly, without thought of his own safety. Michael had not deterred him from this path, feeling the blood he'd endowed Jared with was powerful enough to afford him protection from all foes.

Not until Jared had faced the possibility of the final death when a gang of vampire hunters tried to stake him, did he realise he was immortal only for as long as he used his head, not just his courage and strength. Fortunately for him that night, he was not alone. An older, wiser and immensely more powerful vampire was at his side to aid him in his fight against the hunters. With one sweeping motion of his hand they had been brought to their knees, weapons falling uselessly from their grasps, their minds cleansed of any memory of what had just occurred.

Jared had stood speechless with admiration for the stunningly handsome vampire who had saved him. "What can I do to repay you?" he'd asked. "Ask anything of me."

Marcus Verano had smiled and stroked Jared's face gently. "Promise me you will learn from this, and survive long enough to be my friend throughout the centuries to come."

Jared had promised, had listened to Marcus, and had been inducted into his tight circle of friends. Something for which he would forever be grateful.

His thoughts returned again to Joey. In another hour it would be dawn, and his new young friend would still be fast asleep. Jared envisioned him that way, his sweet face reflecting the sensual thoughts Jared now sent him, his soft lips parted to receive Jared's kiss.

* * * *

Earlier that evening, Joey had hated saying goodnight to Jared. Even the promise of their date for the following night had not been quite enough to satisfy the need he'd felt build inside him each time Jared smiled at him, or gently touched his arm or hand. They had managed a goodnight kiss, standing in the shadows of the alleyway next to the Blue Moon while Jared's friends waited patiently, or otherwise, for them to say their goodnights. It was over too soon for Joey. He could have stayed in Jared's arms all night, kissed those luscious

lips over and over, gone down on him right there in that alley, throwing all his good intentions to stay celibate, at least for a while, to the winds.

Joey moaned in his sleep, and his eyes fluttered open. It was as though he'd felt a hand caress his naked chest. He'd been dreaming of Jared, of holding the hard wall of muscle that was Jared's torso in his arms. He could still feel the strength of Jared's arms around him, the press of Jared's erect cock against his own. His hand strayed to his aching erection. He'd been hard so often throughout the night, it was only right to give the poor thing release, or else he'd have the blue balls from hell to contend with all next day.

"Jared," he whispered, enjoying the sound of the name. A good name-strong, vital, like the man himself. "Jared..."

With his thumb he spread the copious pre cum that leaked from the slit over the head of his cock. He pumped the rigid, pulsing shaft, slowly at first, enjoying the friction of his hand over the hard flesh. He closed his eyes, bringing the image of Jared's handsome face into focus, only somehow he had managed to undo the leather tie that held Jared's hair back. Now it hung like a golden curtain around his face, down over his shoulders. It felt like silk between Joey's fingers. He raised a lock of hair to his lips, inhaling the spicy scent caught in the strands. Like an aphrodisiac, the scent inflamed his senses, hardened his cock even more than he thought possible.

His breath rasped in his heaving chest, the movement of his hand quickened, the friction increased, and he felt a liquid fire pulse in his blood. His body shook and shuddered and he cried out as he came in great jolting spasms.

"Jared," he whispered again on a trembling breath, before sinking once more into a deep and dream filled sleep.

Chapter Three

Joey had just enough time after work to get home, tidy the place up, shower and change for his date with Jared. He couldn't remember ever feeling this excited about any one date he'd had in the past. Sure, he'd known many hot guys—*too* many, as his friend Chris had told him on numerous occasions, but none of them had filled Joey with the incredible rush of anticipation he now experienced.

Jared had called earlier saying he'd pick him up at his apartment at six-thirty. He'd spent the rest of the afternoon envisaging that moment when Jared would step inside, immediately take him in those muscular arms of his and kiss him like only he could. If memory served him right, and he knew it did, the guy was one hot kisser.

Okay, he thought as he lathered up under the shower spray, *if I play this right tonight*, *I just might manage to get Jared back here after the concert*. Funny how all thoughts of going non-boyfriend for a while had gone out the window the moment he clapped eyes on Jared. But it wasn't funny how his cock was reacting to the idea of Jared there in the shower with him, that toned muscular body pressed to his, those dark blue eyes holding his gaze with a promise of hot and sensual passion. He looked down at his burgeoning erection pulsing between his soapy hands and thought ruefully, *Better not be tempted to jerk off right now, even thinking of him. Besides, Joey boy, you don't have time*!

He pushed the shower door open and grabbed a towel, drying himself briskly enough to make his skin tingle—or was that still the effect of the Jared fantasy? He towel-dried his hair then ran his fingers through the chestnut brown curls, adding a touch of gel to make them bounce even more disarmingly.

"Tonight, tonight," he hummed as he slipped on a pair of bikini briefs, pushing his still semi-hard cock to one side. "I'm gonna see Jared tonight..." God, he hadn't felt this exhilarated in ages. He chose a blue polo shirt from the rack in his closet and a pair of khaki pants. He was just ramming his feet into his shoes when his cell rang.

"Hello?"

"Joey, it's Jared. I'm here and I have a cab waiting for us outside."

"Oh, you do?" He tried not to let the disappointment he felt creep into his voice. "I-I'll be right down. *Shoot,*" he muttered, closing his phone.

Now I'm going to have to wait 'til after the concert for that kiss.

Jared was standing by the cab when Joey exited his apartment building.

Oh my God, he's even more beautiful than I remembered.

Jared was wearing black jeans, black cowboy boots, and a dark blue denim shirt open just enough to be sexy without being tacky. His hair, which he'd let hang loose, hung about his shoulders like a golden halo.

"You look wonderful," Jared whispered, opening the cab door.

"You look even more than wonderful." Joey brushed the back of his hand over Jared's fly as he climbed into the cab.

Okay, that was tacky...

"Hollywood Bowl, " Jared told the driver, slamming the cab door as he got in alongside Joey. He reached for Joey, pulling him into his arms, taking his lips in a scorching, sensuous kiss that sent Joey's senses on a roller coaster ride he didn't want to get off.

"The cabbie..." His muffled protest was ignored by Jared who had started to unbutton Joey's shirt, peeling it back from his shoulders and diving on Joey's already perky nipples.

Oh, dear God.

Joey's cock flared to immediate attention, straining the tented fabric of his khakis. Jared's mouth was everywhere, taking Joey to the edge of delirium. Despite his disbelief that he was actually doing this in the back of a taxi, Joey was ready to throw caution to the wind and enjoy every second of this incredible experience. The sound of his zipper being pulled down seemed to fill the interior of the cab, but Joey was beyond caring. The sensation of Jared's lips enclosing the head of his cock, and his tongue slowly circling the slit to make teasing little dips inside, almost forced a scream from Joey's throat.

His hips bucked, and Jared's lips slid down the length of Joey's shaft taking all of him in one long electrifying swallow. This time Joey did cry out, and cast an anxious look at the back of the cab driver's head, but fortunately the man seemed to have no idea what was going on in the back of his vehicle. Joey closed his eyes and gave himself up to the exquisite feel of Jared's lips gliding up and down his aching erection, to the touch of Jared's hands stroking and caressing his writhing torso. Joey groaned, his back arching in ecstasy, driving his cock deep into Jared's throat. His climax was explosive, the force of it almost lifting him off the seat. Jared's hands slipped under Joey's butt, holding him imprisoned in the wet heat of his mouth while he sucked the last drop of cum from Joey's pulsing cock. Joey fell back as Jared released him. Panting, he stared up at the man who had just shattered all of his well-intended vows of celibacy and singledom.

Celibacy – what the hell was I thinking?

Jared smiled at him then leant in, taking Joey's lips in another hard, scorching kiss. His tongue swept inside Joey's mouth, sharing the taste and scent of Joey's own cum. Joey felt his cock jump in response.

Again so soon? This guy is sensational!

"Here we are, gents."

The cab driver's cheerful voice brought Joey back to reality.

How could he not have noticed what we were doing?

"Hollywood Bowl. Hope you enjoy the show."

"Thanks." Jared paid the driver, while Joey hastily adjusted his clothes.

They got out of the cab and joined the milling mass of people for the long climb up to the Bowl's auditorium. Joey couldn't shake his mind free of what Jared had done to him in the cab. He'd had sex in a variety of places over the years, but never in the back of a taxi cab with the driver possibly watching through the rear view mirror. He glanced up at the handsome man at his side, and felt a surge of longing course through him. He couldn't wait for the time when he and Jared were alone and he could return the favour.

"Would you care for a drink before the show?" Jared asked as they approached the wine bar.

"Oh, yes, but let me get the drinks. You bought the tickets and everything."

"And it's my pleasure." Jared smiled and touched Joey's cheek lightly with his fingertips. "But a glass of Burgundy would be nice."

"Great." Joey ordered two glasses of Burgundy and they stood side by side enjoying their wine and each other's closeness, oblivious to the crowds surrounding them. Joey couldn't remember enjoying another man's company quite as much. Maybe Chris's, but that didn't count in the same way. Jared was different from any man he'd ever dated before. There was something about him he couldn't quite put his finger on, something he'd felt the

night they'd met, in the company of Jared's friends, something he was drawn to, something *unique*.

He looked up and caught Jared's intense but warm gaze. "What?" he asked, smiling at the beautiful man.

"I want to kiss you again."

"I'd really love that," Joey said, then stepped back in surprise as Jared leant in for the kiss.

"Here?" Joey all but squeaked. "There's a million people all over the place, and –"

"They can't see us," Jared murmured, taking Joey's hand and leading him to the side of the wine stand. "It is impossible for me to stand here looking at you and not kiss you, Joey."

"Wow..." No one, *no one*, had ever said that to him before, and if Jared wanted to kiss him right there in front of everyone at the Hollywood Bowl, he'd damned well let him.

As of one accord, they set their wineglasses down on a nearby table and fell into one another's arms. Joey lifted his face to Jared's and surrendered to the rapture of Jared's kiss, to the all consuming passion those luscious lips filled him with, to the burning lust that sent fire through his blood and made him harder than a steel pipe.

Jared's hands cupped Joey's butt and pulled him in against his crotch, grinding their erections together. God, but this was heaven, Joey thought. Obscene, indecent maybe, in the eyes of those he was sure could see them writhing together, but pure heaven, and he didn't give a damn. Let them watch – they might learn something.

"Joey, Joey..." Jared's breath on his lips had Joey so fired up he could scarcely think. Oh, why the hell were they in this stupid place? They should be back in his apartment, fucking their brains out!

"Don't worry, Joey..." He was barely conscious of what Jared was saying. "We *will* fuck each other's brain out. I promise you."

"Now, do it now," Joey begged, then was brought back to reality by Jared's soft chuckle and sweet kiss.

"Later, Joey... I promise."

"Oh, yeah. Whew... you had me going there."

Joey glanced around, relieved his unruly behaviour seemed to have gone unnoticed by the people that milled around them, laughing, talking, drinking wine, oblivious to the two men who had practically been having sex in front of them. "Uh... Maybe we should go get our seats?"

Jared's smile was enough to set Joey off again, but he merely said, "Yes, that is a good idea."

The concert was good, but Joey had neglected to take a jacket, forgetting that California nights can turn sharply chilly after sunset. Halfway through the first part of the concert, he shivered, and Jared put an arm around his shoulders, pulling him in close to his body. It was strange, Joey noted, that Jared's body didn't feel warm, yet there was a definite comfort in being pressed to his side.

He rested his head on Jared's shoulder and let the swell of the orchestra's symphonic string section carry him into another world, another time. In his mind's eye they were standing on the marble floor of a vast veranda. Moonlight flooded the space, empty but for the two of them as they danced—danced—slowly across the floor, their bodies swaying together, Jared's right hand on the small of Joey's back, slipping down to caress his butt. *Oh, yeah*...

Just as before, he lifted his face to Jared's, craving his kiss.

Joey blinked, shaken from his dream-like state by the sound of applause around him. He looked up at Jared who was smiling gently at him, and Joey had the uncanny thought that Jared knew exactly what he'd been dreaming about.

During the interval Jared disappeared on the pretext of visiting the restroom. When he returned he was carrying a sweatshirt with the logo '*Music of the Night*' emblazoned across the front.

"Here." His smile was disarming. "This will keep you warm during the second half."

"Oh, wow." Joey was touched by Jared's thoughtfulness. "But you shouldn't have."

"I can't have you catching a cold on our first date," Jared teased. "Besides it will serve as a souvenir of our evening together. One I hope you will always remember."

"Are you kidding? I'll never forget tonight." Joey slipped the sweatshirt over his head then shook out his rumpled curls.

"How do I look?" he asked, imitating a model's pose.

"Beautiful," Jared murmured, his dark eyes gleaming in the soft light cast from the decorative lanterns overhead. "And so very desirable I have to exert every ounce of my self-control in order not to ravish you right here, right now."

Joey felt emboldened by the obvious lust in Jared's smile and words. "You will come home with me after the concert, won't you?"

"Wild horses wouldn't keep me away."

All right. Joey thought he could just about wait through the concerts second half.

* * * *

Joey gave Jared a puzzled look as the taller man paused in the doorway to Joey's apartment. "Are you having second thoughts?"

He hoped the teasing inflection in his voice masked the apprehension that Jared had, after all, changed his mind.

You have to invite me in...

"Of course you're invited in," Joey blurted, not realising until after he'd said the words that he hadn't actually *heard* Jared's request. It had been more like a thought. The moment was immediately forgotten when Jared stepped inside and took Joey in his arms. Jared's lips on his created such an overwhelming surge of desire in Joey that he found himself trembling in Jared's arms. Trembling with the longing to be taken body and soul by this man, to be filled by him, to give himself unconditionally – and *forever*.

Joey was momentarily startled by that last thought, but the power of Jared's kiss overtook his senses again and he gave himself up to the sensation of the man's tongue skimming over his, reaching each and every part of his mouth. Joey eased himself back a little, shucking off his new sweatshirt before tackling the buttons on Jared's shirt. He wanted to feel Jared's bare skin pressed against his own, *needed* it more than he'd needed anything in his life. He gasped as what was left of his clothes simply fell from his body.

What the – ? But there was no time for further thought, caught as he was once more in the snare of Jared's arms, their naked bodies writhing together, their lips locked in another rapturous kiss. Jared scooped Joey up into his arms and carried him through the bedroom's open door. They fell onto the bed, their naked limbs entwined, their tongues still exploring

each other's mouths. Jared's kisses seemed to act like a sensuous drug on Joey's senses, heightening them, drawing him into a state of rapture that, until then, he'd never known.

Jared's mouth latched on to Joey's left nipple and Joey groaned out his pleasure as Jared nibbled and licked at the sensitive, hardening flesh, before trailing his lips over to feast on its twin. Joey bucked and writhed under Jared. "Want to taste you," he managed to gasp. "Want you in my mouth."

Jared straddled Joey's chest then leant forward, the head of his cock brushed Joey's lips, the scent and spicy taste of his pre cum bringing Joey to near ejaculation. Joey opened wide, taking the glistening head into his mouth, his tongue swirling up and down the length of the hard pulsing shaft. Joey's hands caressed Jared's thighs, slid up the sides of Jared's sleekly muscled torso, then down the length of his spine to cup his buttocks and pull him deeper into his mouth.

A long groan escaped Jared's lips. His body shuddered as he repressed his urge to come. He wanted more from this first time with Joey. Although he knew his powers would make him ready again soon after his climax, he wanted to take his time making love to Joey, to bring him sensations that perhaps he'd never experienced.

He already knew Joey was far from innocent, that the young man had bedded many partners over the years, yet there was nothing blasé in Joey's approach to sex. Joey enjoyed sex, and Jared knew he was enjoying it very much with him. He wanted Joey to enjoy it even more. He looked down at his engorged cock sliding in and out of Joey's mouth, at the expression of bliss on the young mortal's face. Their eyes met, their gazes suffused with want and need, and in that moment Jared knew this was the man who would change all his previous thoughts of a future lived alone.

He pulled back, releasing his cock from Joey's mouth, despite the mumbled protests. He traced a random trail of kisses over Joey's forehead, his nose, his mouth, the hollow of his throat, scraping lightly at the soft skin with his fangs. Joey writhed under him, pushing his body upward, presenting his ass to Jared's rock hard erection. Joey clung to Jared's muscular body, arms and legs wrapped around him, binding them together in a passionate embrace. Jared's fangs pricked gently at Joey's throat. Drops of blood pooled on Jared's tongue, inflaming his senses, bringing his cock to an almost impossible hardness. He licked the blood

from Joey's throat, sealing the tiny wounds. Joey groaned, tightening his legs around Jared's torso as he reached for a condom.

"Fuck me," he whispered, tearing at the condom wrapper with his teeth.

Jared's dark blue eyes gleamed with desire as he quickly sheathed himself. He raised Joey's legs to gain access to his small puckered hole, kissing his way up both Joey's thighs until he reached the prize he sought. His tongue swirled around the entrance, then probed deep inside to bathe the soft, silken membrane with his saliva.

Joey bucked under him, a whimper escaping his lips, his hands clutching at Jared's shoulders. Jared guided his cock into the cleft between Joey's butt cheeks, pushing beyond the tight ring of muscle surrounding Joey's opening. Joey's body stiffened and he cried out, but Jared knew that what was spinning through Joey's mind and body was not the sensation of pain, but of sheer rapture.

Joey flung his arms around Jared's neck, arching upward, impaling himself on the full length of Jared's cock. The vampire gasped as he was imbedded in Joey's hot depths. He shuddered and waves of ecstasy rolled over him. He lifted Joey up and onto his lap. Joey's legs encircled his slim hips and they fucked, chest to chest, lips to lips, the rhythm they created increasing with a preternatural power and intensity.

Jared crushed Joey's body to his, and his young lover cleaved to him, meeting every thrust from Jared's powerful body with his own eager downward plunge. They were both moaning now, tongues meshing and tussling in each other's mouths. Joey's arms tightened around Jared's neck. A strangled cry escaped his lips, and Jared felt the heat of Joey's climax as his cum spurted up between their tightly pressed torsos. Jared's own orgasm ripped through him seconds later, the force of it sending him even deeper inside Joey as he emptied himself into the condom.

Jared fell backwards onto the bed's comforter, holding Joey tightly clasped to his body. Their mouths sought each other for another hungry kiss that seethed with raw passion. Joey mumbled words into Jared's mouth, unintelligible words of wonder and longing, formed in his mind and known only to Jared.

* * * *

At some point in the wee small hours of the morning Joey awoke to the pleasurable touch of Jared's fingertips gently stroking his chest.

"Can't you sleep?" he asked, snuggling against Jared's hard body.

"I'm restless at night," Jared admitted. "Usually I fill the night hours with work or reading, and catch up on my sleep during the day."

"Really?" Joey flipped on the bedside lamp. He turned in Jared's arms to kiss his lips. He smiled. "Isn't that what they call nocturnal?"

"Exactly. " Jared returned Joey's kiss before intoning in a low, sexy voice, "I am a creature of the night."

Joey shivered. "I like that. I knew there was something different about you."

Jared chuckled, then his expression became serious. "I have something to tell you, Joey. I have to go away for a few days. Some urgent business has cropped up. My friends Marcus, Joseph and I must attend a meeting in Alberta, Canada. I'll be out of town for a few, perhaps even several, days."

"Oh..." Joey tried to hide the crushing disappointment that welled inside him. "That...that's too bad. When d'you have to leave?"

"Tomorrow evening."

"That soon. Maybe we could meet for lunch tomorrow?"

"I'm afraid not."

"What time are you leaving? Can I drive you to the airport?"

"Uh, no. That has been taken care of. But thank you for offering."

"I feel like you're suddenly giving me the brush off."

Jared kissed Joey gently. "I most certainly am not. I'm sorry I had to spring this on you so soon after our wonderful time together, but I will make up for it when I return."

"Promise?" Joey stared into Jared's dark blue eyes, hoping against hope he wouldn't see an awkward, averted gaze.

"I promise, and I will call you every day that I'm gone." Jared's hand caressed Joey's face then slid down the length of his torso to hold Joey's burgeoning erection in a light grip. "Now that you are awake, perhaps I can start making up for it right now."

"Mmm..." Joey hooked a leg over Jared's thigh. "Sounds like a plan to me."

Just before dawn, Jared stood by Joey's bed, gazing down on the young man's face, sweet and free of care in repose. He trailed his fingertips over Joey's mouth.

"Szép almokat," he murmured, in his native Hungarian. "Sweet dreams."

He walked through to the living room and onto the balcony beyond the sliding glass door. For a moment or two he stared out into the still darkened sky, and wondered if he would ever see Joey again. Tomorrow his chances of continued immortality would rest on the mercy of the Vampire Council. Until after their decision, his future was uncertain, and if he was found guilty and the sentence was death, he would ask Marcus to erase all memories of himself from Joey's mind. He could not let Joey think he cared so little for him that he had simply walked out of his life. No, better Joey forgot him, never knew him at all...

With a sigh he jumped atop the balcony rail then launched himself into the chill morning air. As he streaked towards the Hollywood Hills, not even the quickest eye would see him in flight.

Chapter Four

Joey's original disappointment when he'd wakened and found Jared gone after their night of lovemaking had been soothed when Jared phoned in the late afternoon. He'd been sweetly contrite, and Joey, not wanting to sound petty this early in their relationship, had told him it was okay and to have a safe trip.

Jared's unexpected departure from Los Angeles prompted Joey to take a couple of days off work and spend the time with his parents earlier than he'd planned. After a quick phone call to let his mother know he'd be in Santa Barbara later that evening, he called Jared's cell to let him know he'd also be out of town.

Seemed like a good idea, just in case Jared got back to LA earlier than he'd originally thought.

His mother had sounded tired. No wonder, he mused, as he drove north from LA. Coping with his dad's failing mental health was a tremendous strain on her, not to mention the sadness she must feel watching the man she'd loved for thirty years deteriorate with every passing day. His dad wasn't even that old, not quite fifty, but the last time Joey had been home, Bob Ryan had looked like a shadow of his former self. The man Joey remembered as tall and vital, with a ready smile and a slightly off-centre sense of humour, had been reduced to a shambling, old beyond his years man, with an unfocused stare and little conversation—little that made any sense, that is.

Too bad that with all the modern technology available, they still couldn't come up with a cure for people like his dad.

His mother was out front watering her beautifully cared for flower beds when he pulled into the driveway of the house in which he'd been raised. The house that, with a little help from their parents, his mom and dad had bought just after they were married. Just two blocks away was the house where Chris and his parents had lived until they'd taken over the winery left to them by Chris's grandfather. He'd have to remember to drive over there and visit them while he was home.

"Hi, Mom..."

Arlene Ryan's careworn expression was quickly transformed by her smile of delight on seeing her son. "Joey, I'm so glad you could come for a longer spell. Your dad will be so pleased."

They hugged and Joey came close to tears as he held her. She'd lost weight. Now he could feel the bones in what had been a robust and athletic body. Both his parents had enjoyed a healthy lifestyle until his dad's recent illness. Swimming, tennis and long walks were regular parts of their regimen, but his mother had told him that walking to the corner on her arm was as much as his father could manage.

"How is he?" Joey asked, reluctantly releasing his mother from his embrace.

"The same, maybe a little worse. But come on in. He'll be so happy to see you."

"Be right there. I'll just grab my bag from the trunk." Joey had dreaded this. The look of defeat behind the smile on his mother's face told him she thought his dad was slipping away from them. This was not something Joey had ever thought he'd have to contend with, at least not for many more years. Frustration fuelled his anger as he grabbed his bag and slammed shut the trunk of his car.

"Dammit! Why them?" Why anyone?

He took a moment to calm down, then trudged to the open door and stepped inside. He fixed a smile on his lips as he entered the living room where his father sat by the fireplace.

"Hey, Dad." In the month since Joey had last been home, his father had aged even more, his shoulders thin and bony, his once dark brown hair now liberally streaked with grey.

"Joey, son. Where've you been?" His father squinted at him through red-rimmed blue eyes. "I've been looking for you all day. You and that friend of yours been running around together, have you? What's his name again? You know, the one you hang out with at school all the time..."

"Chris," Joey said, giving his dad a kiss on the cheek.

"That's him." He held Joey's hand in both of his. "How you been, son?"

His heart close to breaking, Joey said, "Good, Dad. I'm here for a few days to visit with you and Mom."

"Visit? Don't you live here anymore?"

"I live in Los Angeles, Dad."

"Oh, that's right, I forgot. Forget so many darned things these days." He shook his head slowly and closed his eyes. "Be forgetting how to get up in the morning, one of these days."

Joey forced out a chuckle. "Don't think Mom will put up with that. She doesn't want you lying in bed all day." He sat at his father's feet. "So, you thought up any more of your fantasy stories lately?"

"Fantasy?" For a moment his father's eyes seemed to clear and focus. "Not fantasy, Joey. What I tell you about is real, very real. It's just that most people don't want to believe."

Joey caught the warning look in his mother's eyes. "Right, Dad. So, maybe later, after dinner, you can tell me all about your latest adventure."

"If I'm still awake."

"You want to unpack before dinner?" his mother asked.

"Yeah..." Joey jumped to his feet and squeezed his father's shoulder. "Be right back after I unpack."

"Unpack? You been somewhere?"

"Los Angeles, Dad. I live there, remember?"

"Oh, right. I forgot."

* * * *

Jared and Marcus stood in the centre of the crowded Vampire Council chamber while Jacob Quince, their elected leader, conferred with Andrew's uncle, Lazlo Marek, the vampire who had claimed the right to represent Andrew Berés' accusation that Jared had murdered Michael.

Trials of this nature were rare among the vampire community. The murder of a fellow vampire was considered worthy of the final death by all members of the Council. If found guilty, the verdict would be unanimous. Such trials were generally reserved for 'rogue' vampires, those who had set themselves above vampire law. If the accused failed to appear before the Council, an executioner would be dispatched to eliminate the offender, no second chance of a formal trial offered. But Jared, a respected member of the vampire community, and friend to Marcus Verano, was no rogue vampire, and was deemed worthy of his defence being heard by his peers. Jared caught sight of Andrew Berés standing on the other side of the chamber and his heart filled with sadness. The handsome vampire had studiously avoided making eye contact with Jared even though he was aware of his estranged friend's presence. Jared reached out...

"Why do you hate me so much?"

For a moment Andrew's beautiful blue eyes met Jared's, then he quickly looked away. "You know why!"

"All of that is in the past."

"My brother's murderer must pay for his crime."

Jared sighed. "I agree. But I did not murder Michael, and in your heart, Andrew, you must know that."

"The plaintiff will step forward." Jacob Quince's husky but imperious voice, commanded everyone's attention. Quince was an imposing figure. Of Yugoslavian descent he was tall and slender. His long white-blond hair hung almost to his ankles, an affectation not too many men could carry off, but Quince did, and wore the long robes of his station with an easy elegance. "Andrew Berés, you have accused Jared Lantos of murdering your brother, Michael Berés. Do you stand by your accusation?"

Andrew straightened his shoulders and said clearly, "Yes, Sire, I do."

"And Jared Lantos, how do you plead?"

"Not guilty, Sire. But I think I know who murdered Michael."

Quince raised a patrician eyebrow. "Indeed?"

Lazlo Marek, an older vampire, his dark hair touched with silver, stepped forward to stand by his nephew's side. "Why was this not brought to our attention earlier?"

Marcus held up a hand. "May I speak for Jared? Joseph Meyer and I have offered to stand by his side and speak in his defence."

"And where is Joseph?" Quince asked, with a small smile, looking around the chamber. Quince, Marcus and Joseph were old friends and allies, and Marcus knew he would be granted a certain amount of leeway from Quince. The leader of the Vampire Council had a particularly soft spot for Joseph, something Marcus had teased his friend about on more than one occasion.

"He will be here shortly."

"Then, proceed."

Marcus afforded Quince a slight bow. "In their haste to condemn Jared, Andrew Berés and his uncle, Lazlo Marek, have failed to consider other possibilities," Marcus said calmly. "As the accused, Jared made it his business to investigate the circle of gamblers with whom Michael was involved. Michael was heavily in debt to a certain Bernard Fieldman. Jared had already loaned money to Michael in order that he pay off Fieldman, but it seemed it was not enough."

"Is this true?" Quince demanded of Marek.

"There were some gambling debts, yes," Marek agreed, "but that is exactly the reason we believe Jared Lantos killed my nephew. Michael could not repay Lantos who killed him in anger, and left a note on his body that read, 'Death to all debtors'."

"Again, you are ignoring the possibility that Fieldman had Michael killed and left that note." Marcus turned to speak directly to Quince. "Jared confronted Fieldman, but the man has a bevy of cronies who swore they were with Fieldman at the time of the murder. Fieldman is mortal, but he obviously knew of Michael's secret. He sent his henchmen well prepared to deal the death blow to a vampire."

"This is sheer conjecture," Marek blurted. "And how do you propose to wring a statement of guilt from this mortal? We can't accuse him in public, now, can we?"

Marcus shrugged. "No, but we can accuse him here, in this chamber."

"Again I ask," Marek hissed with impatience, "just how do you propose to do that?"

Marcus didn't answer right away, but paused for a moment as if listening, then he smiled. "Ah yes, Joseph has arrived. The answer to your question is about to be revealed."

The doors to the council chamber were swung open and Joseph appeared, holding by the scruff of the neck an overweight, shivering, and very terrified mortal man.

"Joseph, perfect timing," Marcus exclaimed as his friend dragged the gibbering man in front of Quince and Marek.

Joseph marched straight up to stand before Quince. "This is Bernard Fieldman, Sire. I have brought him here so that you can hear his confession from his own lips."

Quince let out a loud guffaw. "You *flew* him here, Joseph? Can the man speak, or have you scared him speechless?"

A ripple of laughter ran through the assembled vampires, while Fieldman looked close to fainting.

"I think I can coax some words from him." Joseph shook the quaking man. "You have something to tell everyone here, do you not? Speak clearly so all can hear you."

"Just a moment!" Marek stepped forward. "A confession coerced from a man obviously terrified for his very life cannot be used to defend Jared Lantos. I will not allow it."

"You will not allow it?" Quince glared at Marek. "Do I have to remind you that only I allow or disallow here? Joseph has gone to a lot of trouble to bring this man here. The least we can do is hear what the man has to say. Now..." Quince leant forward and bared his fangs at Fieldman. "What *do* you have to say, mortal?"

Fieldman shrieked and tried to break free from Joseph's grip. Failing, he sagged his bulk against Joseph and started to weep.

"Did you kill Michael Berés?" Quince bellowed, getting a squeak of terror from Fieldman.

"Sire, I must object," Marek interrupted.

"*Silence*." Quince waved a dismissive hand at Marek. "The mortal will answer. Now what is it, yes or no?"

"I didn't mean to," Fieldman snivelled. "I wanted my money, that's all. He was stalling, threatened me, bared his teeth at me, said he would drain me dry - "

"He's lying," Jared said. "Michael had his faults, but he would never say those things. The only truth this man has spoken here is that he had Michael killed. The rest is lies."

"So..." Quince beckoned Andrew over. "Here is your brother's murderer. I think you owe Jared an apology, don't you?"

"So it would seem." Andrew's face was set in stiff lines, nor did he look at Jared as he muttered, "I apologise."

"Hardly sincere," Marcus murmured.

"But what to do with him?" Quince mused aloud. "Do we want his blood on our hands?"

"Please, no," Fieldman whined, but no one was listening.

"Actually..." Joseph released the quivering fat man who sank to his knees in front of him. "The mortal is also guilty of many other murders. Some poor souls who owed him money, and could not repay him. He, uh, *confessed* this to me before I brought him here. So far he's managed to cover it up, but if we were to furnish the police with the proper information, it would lead to his arrest and ultimate sentence." Joseph's silver grey eyes glinted with contempt for the man at his feet. "Death or life without parole, what do we care, so long as he is punished?"

Quince nodded. "What do you say, Andrew?"

"I'd like to rip his throat out." Andrew bared his fangs at Fieldman who squealed and wrapped his arms around Joseph's legs, whimpering for mercy.

"That could cause awkward questions to be asked," Quince said. "Although your reaction is understandable. Take him back, Joseph. Erase all memory of this confrontation, hand him over to the police. Let them deal with him."

Quince rose from his seat, effectively dismissing any further discussion.

Joseph picked up Fieldman again by the scruff of his neck as though he weighed no more than a child. He grinned at the terrified man. "I hope you'll enjoy your return by vampire express again."

"No, no!" The look of terror at the thought of being flown more than a thousand miles in the arms of a vampire caused gales of laughter as Joseph hustled Fieldman from the chamber.

Marcus turned to Andrew. "I think your apology to Jared lacked a certain sincerity. Would you care to correct that now?"

For a moment Andrew's icy stare faltered, then Jared touched Marcus' arm. "That's all right, Marcus. Andrew has other reasons to hate me."

Marcus looked from one to the other, then nodded. "Ah, I understand."

Jared knew he had no need to explain further. Marcus was now cognisant of his affair with Andrew Berés. Marcus gave Jared's arm a gentle squeeze. "Perhaps you should take a moment to talk with Andrew. His mind is still full of grief and torment."

"I will, if he will allow it." Jared took the few steps that separated him from Andrew who was in heated conversation with his uncle. "Andrew," he murmured. "May I interrupt?"

Andrew wheeled on him, his handsome face grim, his startlingly beautiful eyes once more cold and unforgiving. "No, you may not. You and I have nothing further to say to one another. You may have triumphed here today, Jared, but in my heart, you will always be the cause of my brother's death. How I will deal with it is to imagine you no longer exist."

"Andrew."

"Go away," Andrew hissed, his fangs bared in anger. "Go, before I forget where we are, and strike you down!"

Marek gave Jared a haughty look. "I think you had better go," he said with a dismissive air.

Without another word, Jared turned on his heel and walked quickly back to where Marcus stood conversing with Jacob Quince. Marcus cast him a look of sympathy while Quince's expression, though welcoming, held a warning.

"Make sure you avoid any future contact with Berés. He is not satisfied with what happened here. My impression is that he wanted you convicted no matter what the truth was. I will talk with him myself, threaten him with censure if he harms you in any way."

"Thank you, Sire, but it's doubtful that I will ever see Andrew again."

"Come ..." Quince took both Jared and Marcus by the arm and led them from the chamber. "Share a glass with me before you leave. I have secured something rather sweet, and warm... I am only sorry that Joseph saw fit to leave in such haste."

Jared would have liked nothing better than for him and Marcus to return to Los Angeles immediately, but Quince was not one he could refuse easily. He was, after all, their elected leader. Besides, Joey had left a message saying he'd gone home for a few days. A glass of Quince's 'wine' to celebrate his vindication wasn't such a bad idea after all.

From the other side of the council chamber Andrew watched Jared leave accompanied by Marcus and Joseph. His eyes welled with unbidden tears and the anger he'd held in his heart for so long evaporated, leaving him with a feeling of loss and emptiness.

What had he just done?

Apart from the humiliation of being proved wrong in his accusation, he had most likely alienated himself from Jared forever. He should cry out, stop Jared from leaving without giving him a proper apology. He had not missed the contempt in the eyes of Marcus Verano, a man whom Andrew greatly admired, when he had failed to do so earlier.

Oh, Jared, I am an unmitigated fool, and an even greater one for letting you walk away like this.

Sensing Andrew's despair, his uncle gave an impatient snort of displeasure. "You are too sentimental by half, Andrew." He gripped Andrew's arm, trying to lead him to the door. "Jared Lantos is not worthy of your concern." "Is he not?" Andrew jerked his arm free of his uncle's grip. "Then why can't I help but feel that in addition to losing my brother, I have also lost the dearest friend I ever had?"

* * * *

When Joey awoke the following morning, his first thoughts were of Jared. He had dreamed of him all night. Dreams that seemed so real at times he imagined he would find Jared lying next to him, the erotic sensation of his cool, smooth body pressed to his, the softness of Jared's lips nuzzling his neck and shoulders. The ecstasy that Jared had brought him. He groaned. His morning wood throbbed in his hand...

"Joey, breakfast's ready!" His mother's call from downstairs had him quickly jerking his hand away from his cock. He chuckled. Even now his mom could make him feel guilty about giving himself a hand job. He rolled out of bed and headed for the bathroom. A pee would help cool his carnal thoughts about Jared.

Wonder how his meeting's going?

His parents were sitting at the kitchen table when he bounced downstairs.

"Morning, Mom, Dad." He gave them both a hug then sat at the table, helping himself to a bowl of cereal.

"Did you sleep well, dear?"

He smiled at his mother and nodded. "Yeah, like a top."

"Tops spin," his father said. "Doesn't sound like a good night's sleep to me."

Joey grinned. "Just an expression, Dad."

"You had a vivid dream, didn't you?"

"Huh? Oh yes, a dream. Funny, usually I can never remember what they're about."

His father fixed him with a look. His eyes had lost their usual vacant stare and seemed as sharp and focussed as they had been briefly the night before.

"You remembered this one though, and will for a long time."

"Dad..." Joey forced out a weak chuckle. "What the heck are you talking about?"

His father sighed, his shoulders sagging as he looked away from his son's puzzled expression.

"What were we talking about?"

"Just finish your coffee, darling." Arlene rose from the table pausing to stroke her husband's hair as she passed by his chair. "It's a beautiful day, so I thought we'd go sit in the park later. Will you join us, Joey?"

"Of course. I'll just run upstairs and have a shower first. See you in a few minutes."

His father looked up at him as Joey got to his feet. "Dreams," he muttered. "Sometimes they're all we're left with."

As he stood under the hot spray in the shower, Joey pondered what his father had been trying to say earlier.

'Dreams – sometimes they're all we're left with,' and, 'You'll remember this one for a long time...'

Could it be his dad was himself remembering something he'd dreamed of, or had a memory of, but in his confused state couldn't quite bring into focus?

Damn, but he wished he could help him. Surely there was something that could be done that would bring him back from that twilight zone he lived in most of the time. Twice, Joey had seen a glimmer of lucidity in his father's eyes. If only he could hang on to it long enough to say what he was so obviously struggling with.

Drying himself quickly and throwing on a T-shirt, shorts and flip-flops, he suddenly remembered he hadn't checked his cell for messages. Darn it, but there was one from Jared he'd missed. He hit the voice mail button then smiled as the warm, sexy voice caressing his ear made his toes curl while he listened.

"Joey, my meeting came to an earlier conclusion than I anticipated. I will be in LA Friday night. I know you're visiting your parents and I hope you are having a lovely time. Please call me when you return. I miss your sweet lips on mine. *Csokolom*, Joey. That means, Bye, Joey."

He sat down on the edge of his bed and replayed the message. He'd decided that not only could he look at Jared forever, he could listen to him for just as long.

I miss your sweet lips on mine.

No man had the right to have such a sexy voice. He was hard again. He quickly punched in the number he'd programmed into his cell. Disappointed to hear the voice mail service answer, he left a message.

"Hey, Jared. I'll be back Saturday night so if you're not busy, I'd love to hook up. I'll call you later. Miss your sweet lips too."

He waited for his hard on to subside then ran downstairs to find his mother settling his dad in his wheelchair. "It's too long a walk to the park," she explained.

"Okay, I'll do the pushing. Let's go, Dad!"

His father raised a fist in the air. "*Charge*," he yelled as Joey pushed him through the door and down the driveway at top speed.

"Boys, slow down," his mother cried, but they were half way down the block before Joey slowed to wait for her.

"Good, huh, Dad?"

His father turned his head to look up at him. "Joey, son..."

"What is it, Dad?" His heart constricted as he watched the light of recognition die in his father's eyes.

"Nothing. Something. I just can't seem to remember."

"Joey..." His mother had caught up with them. "You'll give me a heart attack making me rush like that."

"Sorry. I'll slow it down."

They walked at a leisurely pace for a while down the street lined with age old plane and cypress trees that towered over them. Joey could remember imagining these trees as giants when he was a little boy, and even now that he was a full grown man they still seemed majestic, and just a little threatening. How many times had he and Chris played hide and seek in and out of their immense trunks, leaping out at each other and giggling for hours when either one of them would shriek with feigned surprise.

Thinking of Chris, he asked, "Have you seen Chris's mom and dad recently?"

His mother nodded. "We were over at the winery a couple of weeks back. Anita's unhappy he's gone so much. She said it was bad enough when he went to LA, now he's halfway round the world all the time."

"It's his job," Joey said. "He's a lucky so and so to have such a great job, and a great boss, who is also his boyfriend."

"Yes, Anita did say she was very impressed when she met, uh..."

"Carlos," Joey prompted.

"Right. Of course, Anita still has a hard time thinking in those terms. In her mind Chris is still going to get married, and get her some grandchildren."

Joey grinned at her. "Well, he could adopt, I guess."

Arlene smiled at him. "Have you got yourself a boyfriend right now?"

Not for the first time, Joey considered himself lucky that both his parents were so comfortable asking him about his dating habits.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I met someone a few nights ago. His name is Jared. He's Hungarian. Strangely enough, the night I met him, he introduced me to two of his friends who just happen to know Chris and Carlos."

"Small world," his mother remarked.

"They're preparing the way." His father turned to look up at him again.

"'Scuse me, Dad. What did you say?"

"What did I say? I've forgotten..."

Arlene sighed. "Don't worry about it, darling. Cross here, Joey, it's safer."

For the next couple of days, Joey spent as much time with his father as he could. He kept getting the impression that his dad wanted to tell him something. He would look at Joey, a momentary gleam of anticipation in his eyes that would fade as soon as the words he reached for failed to materialise. It was almost as frustrating for Joey as he knew it must be for his father.

On Joey's final day at home, his father grew agitated. Nothing Arlene said would calm him down. Joey knelt at his feet and held his hands, urging him to tell them what troubled him. But Bob seemed to drift away, the only sign of whatever emotion he was feeling at that moment were the tears that squeezed from between his closed eyelids.

Joey left, promising he would return the following weekend. "If I can get off sooner, I will," he told his mother as he hugged her goodbye. "And if he gets worse, call me right away."

Chapter Five

Joey couldn't get over the depression of seeing his once fun and athletic father reduced to a man who could no longer retain a coherent thought, and who was failing, physically, along with his deteriorating mental state.

As much as he wanted to see Jared he didn't want to start their evening together looking gloomy and upset. Staring at himself in the bathroom mirror after he'd showered, his reflection attested to the fact he looked decidedly out of sorts. Maybe he should call Jared tomorrow when he might be feeling a little better?

His cell ringing made the decision for him. "Hi, Jared," he said after glancing at caller ID.

"Joey, how was your visit home?"

As always Jared's husky voice made Joey's breath hitch in his chest.

"Okay."

"I can tell from that tone it was not okay. What is wrong?"

Joey sighed. "Oh, Jared, I don't want to burden you with my family problems."

"But I insist you do. I'll be over in a few minutes." With that, he cut the connection.

Oh, God. Was there an easier way to lose a potential boyfriend's interest than to regale him with a tale of family woe? If there was, Joey didn't know what it could be.

Damn. He should call Jared back right now and beg off until tomorrow. By then, he might just be in a better frame of mind. He flipped his cell phone open, but couldn't bring himself to punch in Jared's number. He did so want to see him, for Pete's sake. He wanted it more than he wanted anything else at that moment. Wanted to feel Jared's hard, strong arms around him, and to kiss those amazing lips of his.

Okay, he's on his way, so perk it up some...

He pulled a T-shirt and shorts from the dresser drawer and dressed quickly. Maybe a martini would help put him in a better mood.

Nothing more mellowing than a martini.

He was pretty sure he had some vodka in the pantry somewhere.

Yeah, there it is.

He poured a generous amount over ice, then added a whisper of vermouth and an olive.

Good...

A knock at the door had him slopping the martini on his T-shirt.

Damn, that was quick!

He ran to the door and threw it open. "What are you?" he exclaimed, excited at the sight of the beautiful man standing in the doorway. "The Flash?"

"The who?" Jared asked, stepping inside and taking Joey in his arms.

The kiss he placed on Joey's lips drove all rational thought from Joey's mind. All he could think of at that moment was how incredible it was to be held in this hard, strong embrace and to have his mouth scorched by Jared's luscious lips...

"The Flash," Joey said weakly, when they came up for air. He was already intoxicated by Jared's presence. "He's a comic book superhero who can travel at the speed of light."

"Ah, not quite the speed of light," Jared said, kissing Joey again. "But I got here as quickly as I could."

"God, you're wonderful. I think I have my own superhero-Wonder Man."

"I'm no hero, Joey. Just someone who cares for you very much, and who could tell you're upset."

"Oh, that." Joey sighed and pressed his face to Jared's chest. "You don't want to hear about that."

"Yes I do." He place a finger under Joey's chin and tilted his face up. His eyes were teasing as he said, "And if you don't tell me all about it, there will be no more kisses."

"Oh no, not that!" Joey buried his face in Jared's chest again. "Okay," he mumbled, "if you insist."

Jared tilted Joey's face to him again, and kissed him gently. "I do."

"Okay. But first, can I get you something to drink?"

"A glass of red wine if you have it."

"I think I do... somewhere." He plundered the pantry again and came up with a bottle of cabernet someone must have brought him. "How's this?"

Jared studied the label for a moment then said, "Very nice."

Joey had a feeling Jared didn't mean what he'd just said. "You sure?"

Jared nodded so Joey searched for a bottle opener.

"It's really nice that you dropped everything to come over so quickly." He opened the bottle and poured Jared a glass of wine. "Cheers." He handed Jared the glass.

"Salud," Jared said softly, smiling.

Joey's heart skipped at beat as he gazed into Jared's eyes. *Oh, what this man does to me*... "Let's sit on the couch."

They sat, and Jared put his arm around Joey to pull him close. "So, tell me what ails you, Joey."

"It's family stuff. My father – well, it looks like he has some form of dementia."

"I'm sorry."

"Thanks. It's been really hard on my mother. He was always so big and strong, so in charge, so protective of her—and me, when I was growing up and going through bad times at school. When my friend Chris and I came out to our families, my mom and dad took it much better that Chris's parents.

"Dad was so... cool about it, and told me if anyone bothered me at school or anywhere, to let him know. He'd deal with it, he said. I felt so, like, really *fortunate* to have such a caring father. A lot of kids don't get that kind of reaction from their folks when they come out – especially from their fathers. I always loved my dad, but right then, I loved him even more. Chris did too. He loved coming round to our house where there was no disapproval. Not that Chris's parents were mean or anything. It just didn't get talked about, and he had to be careful of the things he said in front of his mother. Then again, Chris and I loved listening to my dad's crazy stories about vampires and supernatural stuff. He'd keep us totally enthralled by those stories.

"Now, he's well... he's like just a shadow of that man, and can't seem to hold a thought in his head for more than a few seconds." Tears welled in Joey's eyes as he spoke. "Funny thing is, when I was there over the weekend, I kept thinking he was trying to tell me something. Something that, to him, was important that I know. He said something funny..."

"What was that?" Jared was staring at him intensely, as if he already knew what Joey was about to say.

"Well, I dreamed about you the first night I was there, about you and me, you know, making love, and it was as if he knew. Not so much what the dream was about, but that it meant a lot to me. He said, 'Sometimes dreams are all we have.' And he'd look at me, start to

say something, then it was like the light would go out from his eyes and he would just *go away*."

Jared kissed Joey's forehead. "What do the doctors say?"

"There's not much they can do. They've prescribed some kind of medication, but it doesn't seem to be doing much good. My mom looks after him the best she can. She wouldn't even consider putting him a home. They've been together for so long. God..." He shivered against Jared's chest. "I never thought I'd have to face the possibility of him dying, and my mom being alone, when they're both still quite young."

"No wonder you are despondent," Jared said. "I'm glad I insisted on coming over."

Joey smiled up into Jared's eyes. "I am too. I just hate being a downer."

"You are not being a downer, Joey. You are being a caring son. Are you going back home soon?"

Joey nodded. "This weekend. I promised."

"Then you must go."

"I suppose it's too soon to ask if you'd like to come with me?"

"As much as I would love to meet your parents, Joey, I think perhaps right now it's better you spend the time with them alone."

"Yeah." Joey sighed. "I was hoping you and I could spend more time together, but-"

"You and I will have lots of time to spend together, don't worry about that."

"You mean it?"

"Of course I mean it." He drew Joey into his arms and kissed him hard.

Jared held Joey pressed to him, his tongue slipping between Joey's parted lips, the scent of the young man's blood flowing just under his smooth skin an intoxication hard to ignore. But ignore it he must, at least for the time being, until Joey came to him, willing to give him the gift of his blood. Those few drops he had savoured the last time they were together had been exquisite, but would have to suffice, have to satiate his hunger for more until another time... soon.

He could cure Joey's father. He could give him the gift he needed in order to recover from his sad affliction. But how to do it? How to even approach Joey with the idea he should leave his father alone with him while he let the man drink his blood? "Where did you go?" Joey was gazing up at him, his moist lips still parted from their kiss.

"Sorry, I was thinking of your father."

"I've never asked you about your parents." Joey trailed his fingers down the curve of Jared's jaw. "I've been so wrapped up in my own problems. Are they still in Hungary?"

"They both died many years ago. When I was a child," he added quickly.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Do you have brothers or sisters?"

"No." He put his hand on his chest in mock sorrow. "I am alone in the world, Joey. Do you feel sorry for me?"

Joey chuckled. "As much as I'd feel sorry for anyone who looks as fantastic as you, and who seems so confident and self-assured."

"Ah..." Jared rubbed their noses together. "But looks can be deceptive."

"Not yours, I think. And then there's the way you blow my mind in bed—my mind, among other things. Speaking of which..." He leant in for another kiss. "I'd feel tons better if you'd take me to bed and fuck me silly."

Jared laughed lightly then gave Joey the kiss he sought. "I think that can be arranged."

Naked, they lay between the cool sheets, hands stroking and caressing each other. Their lips touched, teasing at first, then a firmer push of flesh on flesh, breath mingling, tongues tangling. Jared ran a hand over the curve of Joey's ass, savouring the delicious feel of the smooth skin beneath his fingers. Beautiful, mortal skin, warmed by the sweet blood that flowed through his veins. He lowered his body onto Joey's, his mouth seeking Joey's again, his tongue dipping between Joey's parted lips.

He inhaled the scent, the taste, so good, so intoxicating, this Joey, this mortal for whom he now lusted, wanted, needed in a way he had never wanted or needed any man, mortal or vampire. What was happening to him? What hold did this young mortal have over him? The blood lure? But it was more than that – much, much more.

He explored every inch of Joey's mouth as if for the first time. The plump lower lip, the corners so delicately formed, the finely arched bow of the top lip, tantalising, enticing, and his for the taking.

He brushed a kiss over those waiting lips then lifted his head to look at Joey. He felt a strange tightening in his chest as he looked into Joey's clear blue eyes, and saw the need and – dare he hope, love? – smouldering there in that steady azure gaze.

Was this love, then – this indefinable sensation that touched him each time he looked at Joey? Each time he held him like this? With every kiss and caress, the longing for Joey to forever be a part of his existence increased. Now he had been exonerated of Michael's murder, now that he was free to make plans for the future, could he dare to hope Joey would be a viable part of it?

"You're thinking again..."

Jared smiled, his lips lingering on Joey's as he said, "About you."

"That's good. I'd feel a tad put out if you were thinking of some other guy while you were kissing me."

"No chance..."

Jared lowered his head to lick at one of Joey's nipples. Joey shivered from the sensation and tightened his arms around Jared's neck, encouraging him to linger over the hardening nub, to take it between his lips, nibble gently at the tiny peak. Jared's mouth moved upwards, leaving a scorching trail over Joey's throat, before claiming his lips with an all consuming kiss. Joey's tongue met Jared's, the tip sliding over the moist surface, back and forth, sending ripples of lust and desire coursing through Jared's body. The sweet, spicy taste of Joey's saliva reminded Jared that Joey's blood held a trace of vampire, the combination of mortal and immortal a powerful and heady brew.

Joey whimpered, his breath gusting into Jared's mouth. He reached for a condom and lube. "Need you inside me..."

Jared pushed aside the longing to imbed himself in Joey's silken heat without a layer of latex between them, and instead gave himself up to the sensual touch of Joey's fingers as he eased the condom over Jared's cock. Joey leant forward and kissed Jared as he covered the condom with lube then coated Jared's fingers with the slick substance.

He lay back and raised his legs to give Jared access. Jared circled Joey's pucker with his lubed fingers then slipped one in, pushing until he made contact with Joey's sweet spot. Joey shuddered, his cock jumped and pre cum spilled onto his flat stomach. Jared bent to lick at the creamy essence, savouring the tangy, almost spicy flavour. At the same time, he removed his finger from Joey's hole and replaced it with the head of his cock.

Pushing in slowly he watched the expression on Joey's face change from a smile of anticipation to one of sheer bliss as Jared's pulsing flesh filled him. Hands planted on either side of Joey's head, his lips a mere fraction from his lover's he began a slow, steady rhythm, thrusting in and out of Joey's heat. Joey's eyes glinted with an almost feral light. He clutched at Jared's shoulders, raised his head to meet Jared's mouth, ran the tip of his tongue over the full lower lip. Jared caught the teasing tongue lightly between his teeth and sucked it into his mouth. Joey moaned with pleasure, his body arched up, drawing Jared deeper inside him. His hands slid from Jared's shoulders to behind his head forcing their mouths together in a kiss they would both remember long after this night was over.

Fired by the raw passion of that kiss, their rhythm quickened, became demanding, a harder, rougher pace. Jared grasped Joey's erection, pumping it in time to the movement of their bodies. Joey whimpered, moaned his ecstasy into Jared's mouth. His mind was ablaze with desire and longing and the uncoiling of his imminent orgasm. Jared could feel it, hear it, see it, and the intensity of it brought him over the edge in a rush of sexual release that drove him even deeper inside Joey as he exploded into the condom with great shuddering spasms.

Joey cried out as he came, his ass muscles clenching round the base of Jared's cock, wringing yet another orgasm from him, one that startled as well as pleasured him. He collapsed on top of Joey, covering his young lover's fever-hot body with his own cool skin. Joey touched his lips to Jared's in a gentle kiss, his sighing breath of contentment sweet in Jared's mouth.

He laid his head on Jared's chest and closed his eyes in blissful sleep.

* * * *

"So, how's it going with your new friend?"

Jared turned and smiled at Roger who had come to join him on the veranda. "Very well, thank you. We're getting to know one another. He is a very interesting young man."

"Interesting's good, but what's he like in the sack?"

Jared laughed. "Roger, are you always this indelicate?"

"Marcus would tell you, yes. Sorry, I just don't have that '*olde worlde*' mindset you guys do. Okay, you don't have to tell me... I just have to conjure up the memory of that first time." Roger gave Jared a mischievous smile. "Long as he keeps you smiling like you have these last few days, he's okay." He turned suddenly serious. "Bet you're glad that Council thing is behind you."

Jared nodded. "Very glad. I only wish Andrew had not been so unforgiving."

"He sounds like a jerk to me."

"He really is not. When we first met many years ago, it was a joy to be in his company. So witty and sweet."

"How did you two meet anyway?"

"The day I met Michael, Andrew joined us in... uh... a-"

"A three-way, eh?" Roger grinned at him. "How was it?"

"For me, probably because I was still mortal, ,it was the most incredible time of my life."

"Yeah, nothing quite like that first time with a vampire, is there?" Roger smiled, remembering. "My first time with Marcus blew my mind. He was the greatest kisser I'd ever met, and so fantastic looking I could hardly stand it. He was wearing the whole vampire getup – tux and cloak. I thought it was a costume – some friends of mine were throwing me a Halloween birthday bash – then I found out he was the real thing." Roger laughed and shook his head. "I almost peed in my pants, but he was so incredibly hot – still is, of course. He can curl my toes with just a look sometimes. Sorry... Too much information?"

"No, not at all." Jared smiled. "I remember when I first met Marcus, I thought exactly the same thing – that he was the most handsome and elegant man I'd ever seen. I thought the same of Andrew when he joined Michael and me that day. He had, *has*, the most beautiful eyes. It's as though there is an icy flame burning deep inside them. I regret that the last time they were fixed on me, they were cold with contempt."

"Maybe he'll get over it in time. Let's face it – he's got lots of that ahead of him." Roger chuckled at his own joke.

"So you and Andrew were an item at one time?"

"Yes." Jared sighed and stared for a moment at the city lights far below. "Michael, Andrew and myself were inseparable in the beginning, especially after Michael changed me, but I'm afraid Andrew's feelings for me ran deeper than mine for him," he added, turning to look at Roger again.

"That can be awkward."

"Awkward, and at times, painful. I've never been very good at relationships, Roger, even as a mortal man. Michael understood, but it seemed Andrew did not. I tried to explain to him that I just wasn't the companionable type. I enjoyed my freedom too much."

"Enjoyed—past tense?" Roger's eyes held a teasing light. "Has a certain Joey Ryan begun to change your mind?"

Jared's smile was rueful. "As I said, Joey and I are getting to know each other."

"There's more... I can sense it."

Jared nodded. "Yes, your intuition is correct." He gave Roger a quizzical look. "Or have you been reading my mind again?"

Roger assumed an innocent expression. "No, no, wouldn't do that. No, sir, not allowed."

"Well, I have to admit that Joey's presence in my life has made me rethink certain things I thought I had come to terms with, long since."

"Aha! So, you're seeing him this weekend?"

"Unfortunately, no. He has to go visit his parents. He asked me if I'd like to accompany him, but I thought it better that I didn't. Apart from the obvious problems, his father is quite ill."

"That's too bad."

"A form of dementia, Joey says. He also said something I found interesting."

"Oh, yeah?"

"He feels as if his father is trying to tell him something but can't find the words."

"Mmm..." Roger gave him a quick smile. "You could find out, you know."

"I know I could. I just don't know if I should interfere."

"I would," Roger said firmly.

"Yes, we know you would, Roger." Marcus, striding onto the veranda, fixed his lover with a cool look. "You have proven that capability over and over, if I recall correctly."

Roger rolled his eyes. "Here comes the voice of reason."

Marcus cuffed Roger lightly on the back of his head. "Just as well one of us has that gift, or heaven alone knows what devilment you'd get up to on a regular basis."

Jared laughed. "You certainly have a handful there, Marcus."

"In more ways than one," Roger quipped, leering at Marcus. "Don't complain about *that*, now, do you?"

"Roger." Marcus sighed heavily. "What shall I do with you?"

"We were actually having a serious conversation when you jumped in," Roger said huffily. "I was merely agreeing with Jared that he should help Joey's father."

Jared chuckled. "Well, what I said was I didn't know if I should interfere – "

"If it's for a good cause, it can't be interfering," Roger interrupted. "You'd be a hero forever in Joey's eyes."

"Or a monster, should he find out how his father was cured of his dementia."

"Horse pucky. There are ways to make sure he doesn't find out."

Marcus put a hand on the back of Roger's neck and squeezed gently. "For once I agree with you, Roger."

"You do?" Roger's eyes widened in surprise.

"Amazing isn't it?" Marcus smiled and leant against the veranda wall as he continued. "Roger's right this time, Jared. Interference for the sake of a good cause can be excused, especially in a case like this. From what I understand Joey's father is still a relatively young man. If his descent into dementia can be avoided, it should be. Vampire blood would certainly stimulate his brain and arteries. He might still end up a trifle absent-minded, but that is preferable to sinking into near madness."

"You're saying I should give him my blood." Jared looked away from them and sighed. "But how can I do that without Joey knowing? I would have to be alone with his father long enough to have him drink my blood, not to mention that first, I would have to convince *him* to do just that."

"Vampire persuasion..." Roger smiled slyly. "The very best kind. And didn't you say Joey had invited you there to meet his parents? You could say you'd changed your mind, and decided to drop in."

"Out of the blue?"

"Exactly."

Chapter Six

Joey looked up at the darkening sky, then at his father who sat dozing quietly in his wheelchair. Joey had taken him to the park 'for the breath of fresh air' his mother had suggested. Joey had hoped that his dad would remember what is was he'd wanted to tell him on his last visit, but to Joey's dismay his father seemed even more distant, more lost, than he'd been the previous weekend. He'd barely said ten words the whole time they'd been out even though Joey had pried him with several leading questions. His dad just didn't seem to be inside himself anymore.

He was distracted from his gloomy thoughts by the sound of a ball bouncing nearby and the excited yap of a small dog as it raced after it. *Better get home, I suppose*. He stood, then paused, transfixed for the moment by the sight of a tall man with long golden hair walking towards him.

"Jared! But how ...?"

"Hello, Joey." Jared pulled him into a tight embrace. "I decided to accept your offer after all."

"But how did you know where I was?"

"I stopped by your home and introduced myself to your mother. A very beautiful woman, by the way. She told me you had taken your father for a walk in the park, and gave me directions on how to find it."

"I'm so glad you could come. Oh..." Joey stepped back from Jared's arms. "This is my dad. His name is Bob. Dad...?"

Bob raised his head and looked first at Joey, then with widening eyes, at Jared.

"Dad, this is Jared Lantos, my new friend I told you about."

Joey wasn't sure if his father would remember him talking about Jared, but to his surprise, his father held out a trembling hand.

"I wondered when you'd come," he said. "You're a friend of hers, aren't you?"

Jared took Bob's hand then knelt before him and said very quietly, "I've come to help you, Bob. Do you understand?"

Bob nodded. "She said she would never forget me," he whispered.

"What the heck are you two talking about?" Joey asked, forcing out a weak laugh. "You sound like you know each other. Who's this 'she' you keep mentioning?"

A nasty little thought occurred to him. Had his dad cheated on his mom at some point?

"Nothing like that, Joey," Jared said, getting to his feet.

It took Joey a few seconds to realise that Jared had answered his unspoken thought. "How – what's going on here?"

"It's all right, Joey." Jared put an arm around Joey's shoulders and pulled him close. "I've come to help your father regain his memory."

"You have?" Joey gazed into Jared's dark eyes. "I didn't know you're a doctor."

"I'm not." He smiled. "In another life, I was a lawyer."

"In another life?" Joey was feeling distinctly weirded out. He shrugged Jared's arm off his shoulders and stepped back. "What are you talking about exactly?"

"I will explain everything to you in due course –"

"Never mind in due course," Joey snapped, moving towards his father. "Explain it now."

"Wait, son ..." His father took Joey's hand in his. "Jared was sent by the lady."

"Lady?" Joey felt completely lost. His dad was rambling again, and Jared was acting like someone he didn't know – someone he was no longer sure he wanted to know.

"Joey. Please don't be afraid of me."

The thought inside his head made him jump. What the hell was happening? He looked at his father who was smiling up at Jared as if he were someone he'd known all his life. This didn't make any sense – and now he was hearing voices in his head.

"Joey..."

There it was again! "It's you, isn't it?" He glared at Jared. "You're able to read my mind, *talk* to me in my mind. How – ?"

"Joey, I can explain everything. Can we go back to your house, and –"

"No!" Joey cut him off. "I don't think I want you near my mom and dad. Something weird is happening, and I don't like it!"

His father's grip tightened on Joey's hand. "It's all right, son. He's a good vampire."

"What?"

Oh, Jesus, he's really lost it. I have to get him home.

"Look..." He turned to Jared who was staring at Joey's father in amazement. "I really appreciate you coming up here, Jared, but I think you should go. I don't understand what's going on, but it's clearly upsetting my dad, so -"

"He's not upset, Joey," Jared said quietly. "He simply recognised me for what I am."

"Jared, for fuck's sake, stop fooling around." Joey stepped behind his father's wheelchair and began pushing him towards the gravel path that led to the street. "No one loves vampire movies more than me, but even I don't believe they actually *exist*."

He jumped back, startled. Jared was suddenly standing in front of his father's wheelchair. He hadn't seen him move, yet there he was.

"What the..."

His father chuckled, then Jared was gone. Joey stood very still while a slow shiver ran down his spine and the hair on the back of his neck stood to attention.

" Jared?"

"I'm here."

"Jesus!" Joey almost jumped a foot off the ground as he felt Jared's hand on his shoulder. "What the fuck is this?" he raged. "I won't let you hurt my father!"

He swung his fist at Jared's head, and found it caught in a grip that was both gentle, yet immovable.

"Jared, please..."

"Listen to me, Joey." Jared brought Joey's hand to his lips and the cool, soft pressure on Joey's skin made his knees grow weak. "Neither you nor your father are in any danger from me. I have come here not only to see you, but to help your father, just as I said earlier. My blood will cure him of his dementia."

Joey couldn't believe what he was hearing. "You...your blood?"

"Look at me, Joey," Jared murmured. "You and I have known each other in the sweetest of ways. Do you think that I would want to harm you after what we have shared together? You mean more to me than possibly any other man ever has, or ever will..."

"But what Dad s-said," Joey stammered, unable to take his eyes from Jared's. "I mean, about you being a vampire, and you saying..."

"It's true, I am a vampire."

"Oh, my God," Joey moaned, seeing the truth in Jared's eyes. Panic flared within him. He was alone in a deserted, dark park with a man he knew to be a monster. A vampire, who could tear his and his father's throats out in a heartbeat.

And then the near impossible happened.

Jared released his grip on Joey's wrist, and instead cupped Joey's face between his strong hands. For a long moment he simply gazed into Joey's eyes, then gently, he kissed Joey on the lips.

Joey melted into Jared's arms, his lips parted, giving Jared's tongue access. No kiss or embrace had ever been sweeter or more longed for, and with that, Joey's fear was gone – replaced by a numbing embarrassment when he realised his father was watching them.

"Sorry, Dad," he muttered, trying to step back from Jared's arms.

His father smiled, his eyes clear and lucid.

"Let's go home," he said.

* * * *

Joey's mother did not look at all surprised when the three of them returned together. Nor did she object when Joey asked if they could be alone in his father's study for a few minutes. He had no idea just how long Jared's 'cure' would take, or really what it exactly entailed, but he was sure this was not something his mother should witness.

She seemed very calm, however, and Joey wondered if Jared had used his strange power to soothe any unease his mother might have felt in having a stranger in her home, even one as handsome as Jared. He knew she was always a trifle nervous on meeting anyone for the first time, and worried unduly about her appearance and the state of the house. He noticed with a hidden smile that she had 'tidied up' since he and his father had left for the park.

"I'll make a little supper for when you're done in there," she said, after giving her husband a gentle kiss on his cheek.

Joey pushed his father's wheelchair into the study. He closed the door before asking, "Can I stay?"

"Of course," Jared said. "Now that you know what I am, there will be no more barriers between us." He pulled Joey into his arms. "The blood that runs in my veins has been

strengthened by an infusion of the most powerful vampire blood known to us. Marcus Verano, a dear friend of mine, whom you met a few nights ago, gave me his blood as a gift to your father."

"The...the men I met in the bar are also vampires?" No wonder he had been so enthralled by them. He felt a warm flush flood his cheeks. "And I just rambled on about that awful movie. Jeez, what must they have thought of me?"

"They liked you very much, Joey, and Marcus was so moved by your father's condition, enough to offer him this gift. Now, we should delay no longer."

He released Joey, then went to kneel in front of Bob. Joey watched with wide-eyed fascination as Jared bit deeply into his own wrist, before offering the bleeding flesh to his father.

"Drink from me, Bob," Jared murmured, "and be made whole again."

Jared moved closer to Joey's father and brought his wrist to the older man's lips. Bob took what looked like a tentative lick of the blood then, almost greedily, his lips closed over the wound and he sucked hard and long.

Jared stared across the room at Joey. They shared a smile of complicity, and Joey felt as though a covenant of some kind had been forged and sealed between them.

Jared smoothed back the hair that had fallen over Bob's forehead then gently pulled his wrist from Bob's still eager mouth. He licked his wrist and Joey gasped as the puncture wounds disappeared, leaving no trace of blood or even a scar.

Joey dropped to his knees by his father's side. "How do you feel, Dad?" he whispered.

"Good," his father answered, although his eyes seemed glazed and distant.

"While he drank from me, his thoughts were filled with memories of the 'lady' he told us about," Jared said.

"Who was she?"

"Your father believes her to have been a vampire. A beautiful woman he met in the woods when he was just a boy."

"She kissed me," Bob told them, smiling. "She told me stories of ancient worlds, of people she had known and loved and lost. Stories I told you, Joey—you and your friend Chris. Stories you loved, but didn't believe, not really." His smile saddened. "I always thought that one day she would come back. She never did, but I held her in my dreams, until I met your mother. And now, you've met Jared—and he's not going to leave you—are you, son?"

"Dad."

Joey let out an embarrassed laugh, but Jared took his hand.

"Your father is right," he said quietly. "Drinking my blood gave him access to my thoughts, but we will talk of this later. Right now, I think we should join your mother."

He gave Bob his free hand. "Stand up, Bob, and enjoy the new strength in your mind and body."

The first thing Joey noticed when his father got up from the wheelchair was that he appeared to be taller, his shoulders wider, his hair darker. The smile that had been strained and vacuous now reached his eyes, filled with humour...and gratitude.

He clasped Jared in a bear hug. "Thank you for this. This second chance. I won't waste a minute of it." He turned to Joey who fell into his arms. "Joey, Joey," Bob murmured, his lips pressed to his son's forehead. "So proud of you. Always have been, always will be."

Joey held his father, his mind a jumble of gratitude, elation and wonder. It was still hard for him to grasp the magnitude of what had happened in the last hour or so, but the end result was really all that mattered. His dad was cured, free of the dementia that had plagued him for the last several months, and for that miracle he would be forever grateful—to a vampire.

"Love you Dad," he whispered.

"Love you too, son..."

They walked out into the living room where Arlene waited. Her hands flew to her face and tears welled in her eyes as she gazed at her husband's transformation.

"Bob, oh, Bob." She rushed into his arms, and Joey was witness to something he hadn't seen in a long time. His mom and dad kissing – *really* kissing.

He turned to Jared. "Maybe we should give them some space?"

Jared nodded. He took Joey's hand and headed for the door. Neither Bob nor Arlene saw them go. Outside, they strolled down the driveway, and Joey noticed for the first time that apart from his car, there was no other vehicle parked there.

"How did you get here?"

Somehow Joey knew from Jared's smile what the answer would be.

"I flew."

"And you don't mean on a plane, do you?"

Joey shook his head as he gazed into Jared's dark eyes.

"I still can't quite believe this. Wait..." A thought had suddenly occurred to him. "When we met in the bar, Marcus or Joseph, I can't remember which one, said that Carlos was an old friend of theirs. Does that mean that Chris – ?"

No, Chris can't be a vampire too. I'd have noticed surely. But I didn't guess about Jared, or anyone for that matter.

"No, he has not been changed, yet." Jared brushed back the curls from Joey's forehead with a tender touch. "It is not compulsory for a vampire's mate to embrace immortality. Sometimes it is necessary. For instance, Marcus' mate, Roger, once mortal, is now one of us."

"It was necessary?"

"Yes, he was attacked by a rogue vampire and drained almost to the point of death. Marcus saved him, but in doing so, brought about the change." He drew Joey into his arms. "Is this all too much for you to comprehend?"

"No...yes...I mean, all those vampire movies I've sat through, and none of them prepared me for this. For someone as wonderful as you. Movie vampires are usually not guys you want to get close to—well apart from Robert Pattison, maybe. But you... I mean, you're... well, just the opposite. I don't think there's a closeness close enough for you and me."

He wound his arms around Jared's neck and brought their mouths together in a kiss that consumed them, that had them both gasping into one another's mouths, moaning their ecstasy as they held each other in an embrace Joey never wanted to end.

"I want you so badly," Joey murmured when at last they broke their kiss.

"Want you too, but..." He nodded towards Joey's home. "I think your parents need all the privacy they can get right now."

"You mean...?"

"I told you the blood I gave him, along with the blood of Marcus Verano, was more powerful than any other."

"Oh, wow." Joey paused for a moment, his smile full of mischief. "Mom and Dad, doing it even as we speak."

Jared chuckled. "Leave them a note saying you're driving me back to LA. They won't mind, believe me."

"Great idea, and I'll call them in the morning." He cast Jared an anxious glance. "This blood you gave him—it, uh, won't have any, uh, strange side effects, will it?"

"No, Joey, your father will not become vampire. He will live a long and healthy life."

Joey kissed Jared on the lips. "I don't think I've said thank you, properly."

"There's lots of time for that. Now go write that note so we can leave." He chuckled as Joey scurried indoors, and was back in record time.

"There's no sign of them." Joey grinned at Jared. "I guess you were right. Okay, let's go!"

Chapter Seven

Joey had a thousand questions as he drove south to Los Angeles.

How did you become a vampire?

What did it feel like when you were changed?

Is it true about garlic and crosses and sunlight?

How can you move so fast?

Jared answered with patience and some amusement. Some of the questions he knew came from Joey's obsession with vampire movies and books. It seemed that Roger, Micah, Chris and Joey were all aficionados of the genre, and all had the same misconceptions. Well, perhaps not Roger and Micah so much...

No, garlic doesn't weaken us, just doesn't smell good.

No, crosses don't stop us in our tracks – there are Jewish and Hindu vampires to whom a cross would mean nothing.

But yes, we cannot stay in the sunlight for very long, and yes, we have to be invited into a mortal's home – and yes, we have to drink blood in order to survive.

"So the blood you gave my father has to be replaced?"

"Yes."

"Soon?"

"Yes, as soon as it is possible."

Joey was quiet for a moment or two. "You can drink from me," he said finally. "Soon as we get back to my place."

"Joey... Do you know what you're offering?"

"Yeah, my blood, and after what you did for my father, I think that's the least I can do."

"You don't have to repay me in this way. Just being with you, knowing you are not afraid of me, is payment enough."

"That's why I want to." Joey put his hand on Jared's thigh. "I know you wouldn't demand it of me, but I truly want to."

Jared raised Joey's hand to his lips and kissed the palm, tracing the warm flesh with the tip of his tongue. "If you're sure..."

"I'm sure. Now let me have my hand back before I come in my pants!"

* * * *

Once back in his apartment Joey wasted no time, dragging Jared by the hand into the bedroom. "Do that thing you do," he murmured against Jared's mouth.

Jared chuckled, the vibration sending a sensual tingling all the way to Joey's groin.

"What thing?"

"You know, where you make us immediately nekkid. I didn't realise what was going on at the time, but now..."

"Ah, that." Jared smiled. "I was thinking, however, that this time, I would like to slowly strip you, and lick every part of your bare skin as I go."

"Oh, yeah..."

Joey shivered and his knees buckled at the thought. "Okay, but I get to do the same to you." His fingers fumbled at Jared's shirt buttons. He laughed at himself. "If I can stop shaking long enough."

Jared sighed. "You are adorable, Joey Ryan."

He pushed Joey's T-shirt up to bare his abs and knelt to lick Joey's navel, his tongue dipping into the sensitive indentation causing yet more tingling sensations to zip through Joey's body. He opened Joey's fly and pressed his lips to the outline of the erection behind Joey's briefs, lingering over the head that leaked pre cum into the white cotton.

He inched down the waistband and Joey's cock, hard and proud, sprang out, its glistening head tapping Jared on the lips. He lapped at the translucent essence that bubbled up from the slit, his eager lips sliding down the length of the pulsing shaft. He cupped Joey's butt cheeks – one finger, then two, easing into the tight hole hidden in the cleft.

Jared rose to his feet, carrying Joey with him into his embrace. Joey wound his legs around Jared's waist while Jared pulled Joey's T-shirt higher. He licked at each small hard nipple, nipping at them gently, bringing soft moans from Joey. He slipped the T-shirt over Joey's head and tossed it to one side. While Joey's arms were still raised above his head Jared kissed his way into Joey's armpit.

"Mmm..." His murmur of appreciation was followed by a soft growl that made the fine hairs on Joey's body stand on end. Jared's mouth moved to Joey's throat and Joey shivered,

anticipating what was about to happen. He wrapped his arms around Jared's neck and pushed his crotch into the hardness behind Jared's fly. He felt himself falling backwards onto the bed, couched in Jared's arms.

Impatient now to feel Joey's nakedness pressed to his own, Jared gave a silent command and their clothes vanished from their bodies. He spat onto his fingers then slipped them between Joey's butt cheeks to lubricate the tight hole nestled there. His achingly hard cock followed, then sensing Joey's concern he whispered, "There is no need for protection now that you know what I am. We carry no disease. Trust me, Joey."

He slid a hand down over Joey's torso, and grasped the rigid erection that throbbed between the young man's warm thighs. Jared fang's extended and he bit down just enough to break the soft skin over the carotid artery. Joey shuddered in his arms and Jared paused to kiss the spot over the pulsing vein.

"There will be some initial pain," he murmured. "I will try to make it bearable."

He pulled Joey's lithe body into a crushing embrace, and bit deep into his neck. At the same time he thrust forward into Joey's moistened depths, penetrating him with one long, searing and swift stroke. He gasped as the hot, pungent blood gushed over his tongue. His eyes rolled back in his head from the sexual rush of Joey's blood, and the visceral sensation of being sheathed in Joey's silken heat. A powerful combination, enough to take his keen vampire senses over the edge, almost out of control, caught in the lure of mortal blood. Yet, even in his ecstasy he managed to quiet Joey's instinctual resistance by transferring sensual thoughts and words of longing into Joey's mind.

Joey tightened his arms around Jared, his moans of pain becoming cries of pleasure.

His thirst sated, Jared licked the wounds he'd inflicted on Joey then took his mouth with a kiss that threatened to consume them both in its intensity. The mortal blood he'd drunk sent fire into his body, giving his already heightened libido an even greater drive. He fucked Joey with long, hard strokes that had his lover moaning in ecstasy and writhing under him, his legs tightly wound around Jared's waist, his ass raised to receive every powerful thrust of Jared's hard-as-steel shaft, the beating of his heart pounding against Jared's chest.

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Joey clung to Jared, his arms and legs anchoring him to the vampire's body. Every nerve ending in his being hummed with rapturous desire. He opened himself to Jared, giving himself without constraint, mind, body and soul to this man, this *vampire* who now filled him to completion. Never could Joey have believed this to be possible, and yet here he was being held, made love to, being fucked – and enjoying every moment of it – by Jared, who even in Joey's wildest imaginings, shouldn't even exist. But exist he did, and Joey wanted every part of him, and right then especially the part that now glided and throbbed inside Joey bringing him nearer and nearer to what he knew would be the greatest, most explosive climax he'd ever experienced.

Every pass of Jared's naked cock over Joey's prostate was bliss. He'd never had unprotected sex before. He'd longed for it, wondered a million times what it would be like, but never had he dreamed it would be this incredible, this *exquisite*. The long drawn-out moan that escaped his lips reflected everything he was now feeling – the emotion that Jared kindled within him, the passion that engulfed him with every kiss, every caress from Jared's lips and hands, and the overwhelming desire to be a part of this man forever.

"Jared..." His lover's name trembled softly on his lips as his breathing became ragged and every pulse in his body raced. His heart hammered inside his chest, molten heat wrapped around his balls as his orgasm built inside him. Uncontrollable, it surged through him, and wide-eyed with ecstasy, clinging to Jared as though he would never let go, he came in violent, gut-wrenching spasms, his hot cum trapped between their tightly pressed torsos.

Jared's body stiffened in their mutual embrace. The thrusts from his powerful pelvis quickened as he rammed himself deeper into Joey. He choked out a cry of release and Joey gasped, startled, then thrilled as he felt the first white hot surge of Jared's semen inside him. Jared's climax seemed to go on and on, and Joey claimed the vampire's lips, forcing his tongue deep inside Jared's mouth, the kiss matching the feverish passion of Jared's orgasm.

When at last their bodies calmed, they lay still and quiet in each other's arms, Jared's face buried in the sweat-slicked hollow of Joey's neck.

Joey had never known such rapture.

Part Two

Chapter Eight

Andrew Berés reached out with his mind for Jared. Years ago, when they had formed the blood bond that Andrew had thought would last for eternity, they had communicated effortlessly, sometimes over hundreds of miles. Now, though, that bond had been weakened by Jared's indifference, by his long ago unwillingness to accept Andrew as his forever companion. It survived only because Andrew refused to let it go completely. For years he had hoped and prayed that Jared would change his mind, discover that what they had once shared was enough to keep their bond alive, to keep their *love* alive.

Now, of course, he realised he had alienated Jared forever. His boorish display of bad manners, his lack of self-control in front of the Vampire Council members had left him with a feeling of humiliation, and desolation. As he had admitted to his uncle, not only had he lost a brother, he had lost a friend, and the respect of the vampire echelon he had always admired – Marcus Verano, Jacob Quince, Joseph Meyer.

His brother, Michael, had repeatedly told him that, without these men, the vampire community would have destroyed itself eons ago.

Jared...

His mental call went unanswered. Even if Jared had heard it, he had probably decided to ignore any communication with him. Andrew had never felt so isolated in the two hundred years of his existence as he now did. The knowledge that he alone was responsible for this was of little consolation. Somehow, he had to make things right between Jared and himself. He had to apologise for falsely accusing Jared of Michael's murder, but this time it had to be more than mere lip service. Jared had to know it was sincere.

Andrew had come to Los Angeles for that single purpose, and would not leave until he and Jared were once more friends, at the very least. Lovers no more, but then had they really ever been? Yes, Andrew had been in love with Jared—he still was, in some small, less passionate way, but the future he had foreseen for the two of them was not to be, and when he was completely honest with himself, he knew the blame lay solely with himself. Jared had always been candid about his choices, and though Andrew had thought he could change the

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man's mind, convince him that what he needed was a forever companion, he'd been mistaken.

A bitter pill to take, but there it was. And now they were estranged, even in friendship, because of his foolish need to see Jared suffer. How utterly asinine he'd been. If only he could take back his accusations, the needless rage he'd directed at Jared when the man had come to him to give him comfort. If only he had not listened to his Uncle Lazlo – but still, he could not cast blame around. It must rest solely with himself.

Sadness clouded his eyes at the memory of Jared's shocked, then hurt, expression as Andrew had railed at him, accusing him of his brother's murder, tearing up the banker's receipt Jared showed him as proof of his attempt to help Michael out of debt.

What a fool I was. An unmitigated, churlish fool.

From his hotel room in West Hollywood, he looked down onto the darkened streets, at the few mortals, late-night revellers straggling home after perhaps a night out with friends at the local bars. Hunger clawed inside him, reminding him he had not fed in several days. The flight from the Vampire Council had drained much of his strength from him. He knew now he should not have stormed away from those who had reached out to give him solace.

He needed blood, and quickly.

The darkened alley behind the slowly emptying bar gave Andrew cover as he alighted from his short flight. The sounds of laughter and the thump of mindless music drew him to the brightly lit entrance. Two young men watched him as he approached them. One – as tall as Andrew, wide-shouldered, his pectoral muscles emphasised by the tight white T-shirt he was wearing – smiled and nodded at Andrew.

Andrew returned the smile, locking eyes with the young man. "Come with me," he murmured as he passed between the two men and entered the bar.

"Can I getcha a drink?" the man asked, hurrying behind Andrew. He put a warm hand on Andrew's cool arm. "I'm Tommy, by the way."

"Andrew... But I'm afraid that what I need, they do not sell here."

Tommy's hazel eyes grew wary. "Oh, I'm not into drugs, if that's what you're looking for."

Andrew chuckled. "No, that's not what I'm looking for." With one hand he smoothed an errant lock of blond hair from Tommy's brow. "And I'm glad you don't do drugs, either." His eyes focussed on Tommy's full and, once again, smiling lips. "Is there somewhere we can go to be alone?"

"Uh... Wow, you work fast." Tommy flashed him a goofy, endearing smile. "Uh, yeah, there's a back room. Should be pretty empty right now. It's kinda late..."

"But you're still here."

"Yeah, I pulled a twenty-four hour shift at the station, so I have the day off tomorrow." "Station?"

"Fire station. I'm a fireman."

That would explain the excellent physique, Andrew thought. He really is a beauty.

He hesitated. What he'd wanted to find was a young man or woman he could feed from, then erase the memory of their encounter from their mind. That he could still do, but Tommy's physical beauty, eager smile, and puppy dog expression might be hard to erase from his own mind.

Yet, he needed to feed.

"You wanna go back there?" Tommy asked. "I... uh, I don't usually do this kind of thing, you know, so fast like."

"Nor do I." Andrew smiled seductively. "It must be the full moon. It does strange things to a man's libido."

"It does? Well, if you say so, but I'd sure like to kiss you." Tommy's voice was no more than a whisper. "You have a real nice mouth, and the sexiest accent. Where are you from?"

"Originally from Hungary, near Budapest."

"Well, I like the hungry part."

Tommy's smile was so guileless Andrew found himself completely enchanted.

"Come then," he whispered, slipping an arm round Tommy's waist. "I'd like to kiss you, too."

They walked together to the back of the bar and Tommy pulled open a door then stepped to one side to let Andrew enter first. He'd been right about the room being empty. It was dark, but Andrew's night vision assured him they had the place all to themselves. Sultry music filled the interior, accompanied by a driving, hypnotic beat.

Andrew gripped Tommy's hard, toned biceps, pulling him into an embrace. Their crotches ground together in time to the music's sensuous rhythm. Tommy put a hand on

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each of Andrew's shoulders and leant in for a kiss. His mouth was soft and moist, his breath sweet on Andrew's tongue as he probed between Tommy's parted lips.

"Mmmph..." Tommy's little gasp of appreciation vibrated on Andrew's tongue, sending a jolt of desire to his groin.

He revelled in the feel of Tommy's arousal, hard against his own. He pulled the hem of Tommy's T-shirt free of his chinos and stroked his warm, sinewy, muscled torso. Andrew's lips moved from Tommy's mouth to his throat. The scent of the young man's blood was like an aphrodisiac, intensifying Andrew's need for both Tommy's blood, and his body.

His fangs extended and he bit down hard and fast, puncturing skin and flesh. Blood spurted over Andrew's tongue, dizzying him with the sensation of its hot rush and sweetly pungent taste. Tommy's body stiffened in Andrew's arms. He moaned low in his throat, a guttural sound of pain that quickly gave way to a groan of pleasure. He pressed himself harder against Andrew, arching his neck as Andrew sucked and drank down the rich essence of the young man's life blood.

Not too much. Just enough to bring me back my strength, and give him the ultimate ecstasy.

The words rolled through Andrew's mind even as he overcame his reluctance to give up drinking Tommy's rich blood. His thirst partially sated, Andrew pulled back and licked away the blood and wounds from Tommy's neck. He kissed the place he'd bitten, then pulled Tommy's shirt high enough to expose his sculpted chest. Andrew pressed his lips to Tommy's hot skin, nibbled and licked at each tiny nipple, rousing them to hard sensitive points.

"Oh, Jesus..."

Tommy whimpered when Andrew bit then licked each small nub. He slipped a hand behind Andrew's neck, holding him, encouraging him to nuzzle and nip, all the while uttering small gasps of pleasure. Andrew kissed his way down Tommy's hard torso, over the tightly defined abs, following the line of light-coloured hair that dipped south towards Tommy's crotch. Andrew dropped to his knees, pulling down Tommy's zipper as he did so. The young fire fighter's cock sprang out, hard and thick, glistening with pre cum. Andrew inhaled the heady scent of semen and male musk, then took all of the pulsing shaft into the depths of his throat.

A strangled cry escaped Tommy. His fingers tangled in Andrew's raven hair, his head fell back as he gave himself up to the ecstasy Andrew's lips and tongue were bringing him. Andrew's hands cupped the taut, beautifully rounded, twin globes of Tommy's butt and pulled him in even deeper. He moved one hand between Tommy's legs, taking the heavy weight of the young man's balls, squeezing them gently, rewarded by the sharp, shocked inhale of breath and the thrust of Tommy's pulsing flesh in his mouth.

"Oh, God. That's so good..." Tommy's body shuddered as he orgasmed, his hot cream spilling down Andrew's throat. Andrew held him in his mouth until the quivering shaft began to soften, then he released him, slowly, licking the last vestiges of cum from the slit. He stood up and placed a gentle kiss on Tommy's lips.

"That was...incredible," Tommy whispered. "Let me do the same for you."

"Unfortunately, I must go."

"But – "

Andrew silenced his protest with another kiss, fiercer this time, Tommy returning his passion with an ardour of his own.

"Don't go," he groaned, when they finally broke away from one another.

"I must." Andrew cupped Tommy's face in his hands and gazed deep into his eyes. "Remember this only as a moment of rapture, nothing more, never to be repeated. Goodbye, Tommy, and thank you."

Tommy pressed his back against the wall and ran his hand through his thick hair. His mind whirled with a thousand different emotions and questions.

What the hell had just happened?

Hadn't he been with some guy just now? But where was he? *Who* was he? He had only the faintest memory of someone, some*thing*, incredible happening. But what? His lips tingled, felt slightly swollen as if someone had been kissing him really hard, really *great*.

He put a hand to the side of his neck.

That tingled too. Was there a hickey there? He glanced down.

Holy shit. His dick was hanging free! Thank Christ he'd noticed before walking back into the bar. Come to think of it, what was he doing back here anyway? Why couldn't he remember? Shit, was he so desperate he'd come in here to jerk off? He stuffed his cock back in his pants and zipped up, then exited the room.

"Hey, you still here?" The bartender was gaping at him, the bar in darkness.

"Looks like it," Tommy muttered.

"Shit, I thought everyone was gone. I'm locking up, man. Anyone else back there?"

"No..."

"What were you doing back there on your own then?"

"I don't know." Tommy felt confused and slightly stupid. "I guess I was looking for the men's room. Must've taken a wrong turn."

"Well, you gotta go. It's past closing."

"Yeah, sorry man. See ya."

"Later."

Tommy walked out into the cool night air and shook his head to clear it. Man, but he felt weird, but not in a bad way, kinda nice, really. He'd had sex, he was sure of it. Some guy, some really great-looking guy had been kissing him, had sucked him off, had...what else? And who was he? Tommy shook his head again, then shrugged. Well, whatever, *who*ever—it was over. He just wished he could remember more.

* * * *

"Jared..." Andrew reached out again.

"Yes, Andrew."

"Oh, Jared."

A rush of relief poured over Andrew.

"I am so sorry for what I did. May I see you, so I can apologise to you, face to face? I feel I will not be completely exonerated from my guilt until I see you, hear you say that you forgive me."

"I forgive you, Andrew. But come to Marcus' home and be with us. He bids you welcome." "Thank you."

Andrew smiled, really smiled, for the first time in several weeks. From the shadows of the alleyway behind the bar he rose into the air, to be guided to Marcus' home by Jared's thoughts.

He glanced down as he hovered over the buildings and experienced a quick surge of regret as he spotted Tommy leaving the bar. The young man stood for a long moment on the sidewalk, obviously trying to recall what had passed between him and some stranger he couldn't for the life of him remember.

So sharp was the emotion that pierced Andrew's chest he almost broke the Verano rule he and many vampires adhered to. To reveal himself to Tommy now would cause too many problems, some of which might lead to disaster. No, best he let the young man forget him. They were, after all, too many worlds apart.

Chapter Nine

Andrew dropped from the night sky onto the driveway of Marcus Verano's Hollywood Hills mansion. Straightening his shoulders, he walked the few steps to the door and rang the bell. Marcus answered, and for a long moment after he had opened the door, stood quite still, staring at Andrew as though assuring himself he wanted this man in his home.

"Marcus, I—" Andrew faltered, unsure now if this had been a good idea.

"Come in, Andrew." Marcus' voice was low and gentle. "You are welcome here."

"Thank you." Andrew stepped inside, immediately aware of Marcus' powerful presence. He extended his hand and was relieved when the master vampire took it, then pulled him into an embrace.

"I am glad you have chosen to remain Jared's friend," Marcus said. "Discord among fellow vampires weakens our core strength. We have enough enemies—we can never have enough friends."

"I was foolish. My anger blurred my common sense. I regret it more than I can say."

Marcus nodded. "Then be grateful you have a second chance to make it right." The glint in Marcus' emerald green eyes softened as he gazed at Andrew's earnest expression. "Your grief is understandable, but Jared loved your brother too. He loves you, just not in the way you desired."

"I have accepted that, and now must move on, after I have apologised to Jared." His smile was rueful. "A proper apology, this time."

Marcus put a hand on Andrew's shoulder and steered him towards the living room. "He has already forgiven you, my friend. But it is good that you both see each other again under better conditions."

Andrew paused in the doorway of the luxurious room, his gaze taking in the rich furnishings along with the small group of men who rose from the various couches and chairs as he entered. He recognised only Jared and Joseph.

Jared was the first to greet him.

"Andrew!" Jared strode across the room and pulled Andrew into a fast embrace. "I'm so glad you're here. Our last meeting was one I have anguished over ever since."

Andrew pressed his forehead to Jared's with relief and affection. "I cannot even begin to tell you how sorry I am."

"Hush." Jared kissed Andrew's lips. "It is over. You and I are friends again. That is all that matters."

He stepped back and gestured to a young man who hung back, a small distance from them.

"Joey, I want you to meet an old friend, Andrew Berés. Andrew this is Joey Ryan."

A mortal...

Andrew stared at Joey, taking in the riot of chestnut curls that crowned his head and the steady blue gaze he directed at Andrew.

He is not afraid of us.

He took the warm hand offered him, and forced a smile to his lips.

Jared's lover...

He tried to ignore the prickle of envy that danced behind his eyes.

"Hi, Andrew. Jared told me about your brother, Michael." The young man's voice sounded sincere as he added, "I'm so sorry for your loss."

"Thank you."

"And I'm Roger." A smiling fair-haired vampire stuck out his hand. "Marcus' plaything."

"*Roger*..." Marcus shook his head. "Pay him no heed, Andrew. Roger likes to poke fun at everything and everyone."

"Whereas you like to poke me," Roger said with a mischievous smile.

Marcus sighed but any reprimand would have been drowned out by the laughter from the other men.

Joseph walked over and clasped Andrew's hand. "Now that you've met our resident clown, I'd like to introduce you to Micah, my forever companion. He's a little more restrained than Roger."

"Huh, that's what he thinks." Roger grinned at Andrew.

"A pleasure." Andrew relaxed a little as he gripped the auburn-haired vampire's hand. He longed to be a part of the good-natured camaraderie displayed by the other men, and a

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part of his mind regretted he did not now have the handsome fireman he'd met at the bar by his side.

He felt Roger's eyes on him, then the young vampire gave him a slow wink. Hmm... Roger is certainly one to keep an eye on — and your thoughts well hidden from!

After some good wine had been served, the conversation turned inevitably to the fate of Bernard Fieldman, the man who had instigated Michael's murder. After Joseph had handed him over to the police in New York, Fieldman had immediately hired a team of lawyers to defend himself. He'd been released on bail until a trial date could be set.

"The man is quite deranged," Joseph said, addressing Andrew. "For some reason he blamed you for his present predicament. To quote him verbatim—'That bastard vampire's brother will pay for this'."

Andrew grimaced. "I met the man but once, before you brought him to the council chamber. I hated the idea that Michael was involved with someone like him. I intercepted a phone call from Fieldman meant for Michael, and I...well, I suppose I was not very polite. We exchanged some heated words, during which he told me he was not one I should antagonise, or I would suffer for it. Something like that. I expect as he no longer has Michael to threaten, he now feels he can direct his hatred at me."

Roger looked from Joseph to Andrew, a question in his eyes. "But being mad at you is reason enough to kill you?"

"As Joseph said," Marcus murmured, "Fieldman is deranged. Reason enough."

"I wonder how he knew Michael was vampire," Micah remarked.

Jared nodded. "Yes, I've wondered about that. Michael was sure he had hidden his identity from the group he gambled with. He had no other association with them other than the gambling. Yet the men Fieldman sent to murder Michael went prepared to deal with one of our kind."

"Maybe, uh..." Joey faltered as six pairs of vampire eyes focussed on him. "Jeez, guys, tone down the intense stares. You just made me very nervous."

Roger and Micah were the first to chuckle and break the tension. "Sorry, Joey," Micah said. "I can relate. Before Joseph changed me it was sometimes unnerving to look into his eyes. They're beautiful, but just a little eerie."

"Eerie?" Joseph looked suitably hurt.

"And beautiful," Micah said, kissing his lover's cheek.

"So you were saying, Joey?" Andrew prompted.

Joey cleared his throat. "Those guys your brother was mixed up with—they sound like hoodlums. You know, the kind of guys who trust no one. It could be Fieldman had Michael followed, then became suspicious of his nocturnal habits. Maybe he was even seen, uh, *feeding*..."

"Don't you think they'd have raised a ruckus if they found out?" Roger asked. "I mean, how many mortals are comfortable sitting beside one of us? Well, apart from one or two."

All eyes went to Joey again. He moved closer to Jared who put an arm around his shoulders. "You are comfortable with us, aren't you?" he murmured.

Joey nodded. "Yes, but it's possible not all the members of the gambling ring knew."

"I think your opinion is sound," Andrew said quietly. "In a way, it's the only feasible explanation. And when he thought Michael couldn't repay his debt, to murder him was the way to exact vengeance, and also remove the possible threat of Michael turning on them."

"Not that he would have done such a thing," Jared interjected.

"But among mortals, we do have a certain reputation," Marcus remarked. "Fieldman most likely withheld Michael's identity from the other members in order to not cause panic among them, then later, could have become nervous himself."

"I'm now more concerned about Fieldman's threat towards Andrew." Jared shifted his gaze to Joseph. "You erased all memory of the meeting as Quince directed?"

"Yes, but he will still remember what occurred before. His telephone conversation with Andrew, for instance. It might have been wiser to have erased all memories concerning Michael and Andrew."

"But wouldn't that have given him problems with his gambling friends?" Joey asked. "I mean, for him to suddenly not remember Michael being a member of the group might have caused some raised eyebrows, and questions being asked."

"That's true," Andrew agreed. "It would have required erasing the memories of the entire group of Fieldman's cronies.

"So you must watch your back, my friend," Marcus said. "We will of course be there for your protection."

Andrew smiled his thanks. "But Fieldman is in New York, and presumably unable to leave town before his trial. He may want to harm me, but his hands are somewhat tied right now." He rose from his chair. "Thank you, all of you, for your concern and hospitality. I should go now and let you rest."

Jared walked with him to the door, where they embraced.

"Thank you, Jared, for your forgiveness. My existence has been a painful one without your friendship."

"You will have it always." Jared kissed Andrew's lips gently. "And please be careful. Let me know if you need my help, anytime, anywhere."

"I will." Andrew smiled into Jared's eyes. "Joey is a beautiful man, and an intelligent one. The bond between the two of you is already strong. I wish you all happiness, now that you have found the one you can love forever."

He glanced over Jared's shoulder at Joey who was watching them from a few feet away. "May I have a word with him, alone?"

At Jared's nod of consent Andrew stretched out his hand to Joey who took it in a warm grasp. "I am glad I met you, Joey, and I wish you and Jared all happiness together. You have chosen a wonderful man to love."

"Thank you. I'm just glad you guys are friends again. Did Jared tell you he saved my father's life? How could I not love him after all he's done for me and my family? Not to mention he's the most incredible guy I've ever met."

"And you don't mind the problems you will face loving a vampire?"

Joey shook his head and said with a certain defiance. "My best buddy, Chris, is Carlos Galeano's lover. If he has no problem with it, neither do I. Besides," he added, with a gentleness Andrew found disarming, "I love Jared too much for it ever to be a problem. I know there will be some rough times ahead of us, but what relationship doesn't have those?"

As Andrew stepped out into the darkness surrounding Marcus' mansion, he found himself thinking of Tommy again, and what Joey had said about all relationships having problems. The mortal had spoken true, yet Andrew could not foresee a future with a mortal for himself. Perhaps the flaw lay within him—perhaps he was simply unwilling to complicate his life any more than he already had. His reunion with Jared had been bittersweet. He felt the loss of Jared's physical love more deeply than he cared to admit, while at the same time, realising he must put it all behind him, and move on. But to where? Lost in his thoughts, he drifted upwards into the cool night sky, then flew like a silent shadow back to his hotel room.

Chapter Ten

"Guess who we're meeting tonight?" Jared gave Joey a teasing smile.

"Another ex of yours?" Joey asked tartly.

Jared pretended to ponder the question. "I don't *think* they are."

"They? Out with it, mister."

Jared laughed. He loved this mortal man and his quirky sense of humour. How had he managed to exist without him for these two hundred years? No one had ever touched him in so many different ways, or had ever sparked desire in him as quickly as Joey did. His feelings for Joey went far beyond his physical attraction, far beyond even the lure of his blood, potent though it was.

"Come on, tell me," Joey insisted.

"Very well. I was going to keep it as a surprise, but it's perhaps better you know in advance. Chris and Carlos are back in Los Angeles and -"

Joey gave out a whoop and jumped into Jared's arms. "And we're going to see them? Oh boy, I can't wait to see the look on Chris's face when he sees you and me together. He's going to freak, totally freak. You didn't tell him, did you?"

"No, I didn't," Jared mumbled, kissing Joey's neck. "Mmm, you smell so good."

"Mmm, yourself." Joey wound his legs around Jared's waist, writhing against Jared's hard body. "You *feel* so good. What time are we meeting them?"

"In about two hours, at Carlos' apartment on Melrose."

"Two whole hours. What can we possibly do 'til then?"

Jared chuckled. "Um, you choose."

"Fuck me."

Jared rolled his eyes. "How did I know you'd choose that?"

"Easy, and you didn't even have to read my mind."

They were naked and on Joey's bed in an instant. Joey smiled into Jared's eyes as the vampire lay over him, his lips less than an inch from Joey's.

"I don't think I'll ever get tired of you doing that," he whispered.

"What?"

"You know what. That instantaneous naked-and-in-bed thing you do. You'll have to show me how you do it one day."

"One day," Jared murmured, rubbing his lips over Joey's.

"Of course, I don't mind it when you take your time too," Joey teased.

He parted his lips to let Jared's tongue slip into the wet heat of his mouth. He sucked on the strong, demanding tongue that licked and probed to reach every corner of his mouth. God, but this man was the greatest. Joey loved everything about him. So what if he was a vampire? He had more life and energy than any other man he'd ever met. Besides, it had always been Joey's secret fantasy to be made love to by a vampire – not so secret, really. He'd shared it with Chris who had totally agreed with him, and the fantasies had come true, amazingly, for both of them.

He couldn't dwell on those thoughts too long, for Jared was kissing an erotic trail over Joey's neck and chest, nuzzling his armpits, teasing his nipples until Joey thought he couldn't bear the thrill of Jared's touch a moment longer. He almost came apart when Jared took him into his mouth, the wet heat enveloping his pulsing flesh a rapture so exquisite, there were no words in his mind he could find to describe it. His hands raked through the silken strands of Jared's hair while his hips bucked, driving himself deeper into Jared's eager mouth. He felt the head of his cock gripped by Jared's throat muscles and he cried out as he fought the sudden lack of control that threatened to make him erupt into that hot silken depth.

"Jared, Jared... Wait..."

It wasn't that he didn't want to come – he just didn't want this time of ecstasy to be over too soon. He wanted Jared inside him, filling him with his glorious rigid flesh, taking him to that part of his existence only this man could. Everything he'd thought and wondered about Jared previous to his finding out he was vampire had simply revolved around the fact he considered Jared to be an incredibly caring and powerful lover.

But now, because he knew the truth of him, and had accepted that, the boundaries of their lovemaking seemed limitless. At least, Jared had no boundaries. Joey, being mortal, knew that as much as he was willing to match Jared's endurance, to make love all night long, again and again, he had to acknowledge he was, after all, only human. For that reason each moment like this was precious to him, and to have it be over in a heated rush was not what he desired. His lover innately knew Joey's concerns and pulled back, releasing him from his mouth, moving over him, leaving a trail of fiery kisses over his torso as he reached for Joey's mouth. Once there, the kiss he laid on Joey's lips was all things at once—incredibly sweet, yet filled with an underlying passion that had Joey's senses reeling as he clung to Jared, his arms wound tightly around the vampire's neck, holding their mouths pressed together with a feverish raw need.

Joey lifted his legs and wound them round Jared's slim waist, raising his hips to meet Jared's probing fingers made slick with his saliva. One, then two, stretching Joey, readying him for the moment they both craved.

"Yes..." Joey breathed out his acceptance as Jared pushed forward, his cock sliding past Joey's resistance with one long rapturous thrust. His eyes, wide open, locked on Jared's dark gaze. Their mouths met again in another long and searing kiss as Jared fucked Joey with deep, powerful strokes. Their bodies moved together to a rhythm born of mutual passion and desire, their moans of pleasure mingling in each other's mouths.

Never let this end, was Joey's yearning wish, even as he felt the undeniable pressure of his orgasm build inside him.

"Come for me, Joey. Let me feel your hot seed on my skin..."

"Jared!"

Joey's strangled cry was followed by his body shuddering in Jared's arms as his climax rolled through him, blinding him with its intensity, sending a fountain of cum over both their chests. His body spasmed again as Jared came in one long sustained orgasm that filled Joey with a white hot blast. Their bodies heaving, breath rasping in their throats, they clung to one another in a straining embrace, their kisses roaming over each other's faces and throats. His heart pounding madly, Joey cupped Jared's face between his hands and gazed into the darkest blue eyes he had ever seen.

"I love you, Jared Lantos," he whispered. "I love you."

* * * *

Andrew, watching from his hotel room window, spotted the two men standing on the other side of the street opposite the hotel entrance. There was no doubt in his mind that they were there to do him harm.

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So Bernard Fieldman's power can reach as far as Los Angeles, despite his arrest and pending trial.

He'd even managed to find the hotel where Andrew was registered.

No mean feat, Andrew mused. It is obvious I must take the threat these men pose seriously.

He considered calling Jared for help, but felt confident he could handle two mortals by himself, if they should confront him. He reached out, probing their minds, found them dull and stupid, awaiting instructions. One of them was carrying a canvas bag, and from the bulges inside their jackets Andrew could determine they were armed.

Unless they are loaded with silver bullets, their guns are useless.

The sun had almost set, the street lined with lengthening shadows, enough shade for Andrew to get nearer to the men, perhaps frighten them enough with a sudden appearance that would make them abandon their watch. He smiled as he mulled over that possibility, then his extra sensory hearing picked up a muttered conversation.

"You knuckleheads, why'd you wait until sunset? The freak'll be awake!"

"Don't worry, boss, we can take him with what we got here."

"I hope so. For your fuckin' sakes, I hope so."

Andrew heard the words, "Okay, go get him."

The men moved, walking briskly across the street towards the hotel. They were obviously in touch with Fieldman, or someone in league with him, by cell phone.

Well, they are in for a little surprise.

A few minutes later he sensed them in the hallway outside his room. Andrew doused all the lights but one, then slipped into the shadowed recesses of the room. The door was suddenly kicked in and the two men rushed in.

One of them looked wildly around the dimly lit room. "Where the fuck is he?"

"He's here," the other grunted, holding his gun straight out in front of him. "The fucker's hidin' somewhere in here. Get that *thing* ready!"

Andrew moved from the shadows and clamped a hand on the gunman's shoulder.

"Here I am."

The gunman squeaked with shock then with terror as Andrew's hand fastened around his throat and lifted him off the ground. Andrew whirled round, fangs bared, to face the other man, still holding the first man aloft. The man's face was turning purple, his breath coming in spluttering gasps. "Get him!" he croaked. "For fuck's sake –"

Andrew threw the man aside and advanced on his partner, who although he looked like he might faint at any moment, managed to pull something from the bag he carried.

A net.

It glinted in the man's gloved, shaking hands as he threw it over Andrew's head. With an angry growl, Andrew grabbed the net and tried to peel it back.

Silver...

Tiny jagged pins of pain seared through Andrew's skin as he struggled to remove the net, but cunning barbs impaled him, weakening him. The two men were holding it down, forcing Andrew to his knees, the silver barbs imbedding themselves deeper into his flesh, poisoning his blood, draining him of his strength.

"That's it, we got the fucker," the gunman hissed through clenched teeth. "Just hold it there 'til he can't move no more."

Andrew's struggling grew weaker. Even as he called out Jared's name, his mind became blurred, then began to close down.

The final death was upon him.

As Andrew's body stilled, the men stepped back, gloating. They'd done it. Now only one more thing remained to make sure there was no trace of the vampire left. They ran from the room spraying the walls and floor of the hallway with a combustible liquid from aerosol containers they'd secreted in their pockets. When they reached the emergency stairs the gunman turned and struck a match.

"Goodbye, freak," he muttered, throwing the match onto the carpet. "Let's get the fuck outta here," he snarled at his partner. "This place will be toast in no time."

* * * *

Joey could hardly contain his excitement as he and Jared waited outside Carlos Galeano's apartment door. Chris was going to be so totally freaked when he saw who was coming to dinner!

He gripped Jared's hand tightly as the door opened and yet another magnificent looking man smiled at him. As he stared at the tall, athletic man with a mane of black hair

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and the darkly mysterious eyes he remembered, Joey wasn't sure if he could handle this surfeit of male beauty he seemed to have been surrounded by since he'd met Jared.

If Carlos was surprised to see Joey standing alongside his old friend, he hid it well. "Jared, welcome." He waved them inside, then the two friends embraced.

"You remember Joey?" Jared asked.

"Indeed." Carlos gave him a bemused smile. "How are you, Joey?"

Joey grinned at him. "I'm good, but don't tell Chris I'm here yet. I want to surprise him."

Carlos raised an aristocratic eyebrow. "I think you will do just that. Well, come on through to the living room, and spring your surprise."

Chris was standing at the bar in the elegantly furnished room, opening a bottle of wine in preparation for Carlos' guests. The bottle almost slipped from his hands as he looked up and saw his best friend in the doorway, smiling at him.

"Joey! But – "

"Surprise!" Joey rushed forward and gathered Chris in his arms. "Don't be nervous, I know...everything."

"You do?" Chris's eyes were wide with wonder. "That's good. Wait, you do? But how, and who's that with you?" he added in a whisper.

"Jared, my boyfriend."

"But he's...he's-"

"A vampire. I told you, I know everything. I've met Marcus and Joseph and – you look stunned."

"I am stunned, but you just solved the problem of how I was ever going to tell you about Carlos." Chris kissed Joey's cheek. "I still can't believe it. How did it happen? Wait, we're being rude. You should introduce me to, uh..."

"Jared. Yeah, come and meet him. He is so incredible—" Joey realised he was gushing, and shut up long enough to let Chris and Jared exchange 'hellos' after he'd introduced them.

Carlos led them all back to the bar and poured the wine Chris had opened.

"I think we should have a toast, don't you?" The vampire's golden brown eyes gleamed in the candlelight. "To newfound friends," he said, smiling at Joey. "To old friends" – with a nod to Jared – "and to friends who have many new things to talk about tonight. Salud."

"Salud."

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* * * *

Tommy Cordain, lying on a bench inside the fire station, had just completed his fiftieth press-up when the alarm went off. The computerised voice telling the location of the fire was followed by Fire Chief Brad Lambert yelling, "Come on, ladies, haul ass, now!"

Tommy leapt off the bench and headed for the row of lockers with the rest of the crew where they grabbed their boots and heavy gear. Tommy experienced the usual rush of adrenaline that preparing for action always brought him.

"Barclay Hotel on Robinson," his buddy Alex Benson muttered beside him as they pulled on their boots. "Hope they managed to evacuate the guests."

Tommy had an instant vision of parents trying to guide their frightened children through smoke-filled hallways. He hoped like hell, along with Alex, that they'd had enough warning to get out. He pulled up his fire retardant pants, grabbed his helmet.

"Let's go!"

He and Alex jumped aboard the quint, squeezing into the back of the cab while Chief Lambert climbed in front with the driver, Lenny Holmes. A fire truck followed them out of the station as they sped onto the darkened street, klaxon braying at full volume.

"Fire started on the fourth floor."

Lambert relayed the information as he received it.

"Pretty much everyone's out, but there's a couple of guests unaccounted for. Could be they're just out on the town, of course, but we need to check."

He glanced back at Tommy. "Cordain, make sure your air equipment's A-okay. I'm sending you and Benson in."

"Okay, Chief."

The building came into view as they roared round the corner onto Robinson.

"Shit..."

Dense black smoke poured from almost every window from the fourth floor up, while flames leapt from the roof. The quint skidded to a halt outside the entrance and Tommy, along with Alex, jumped out, air equipment in hand. The foyer was empty, the elevator doors wide open. The men took the stairs. "I'll check out the third floor," Alex yelled. "Make sure there's no stragglers, then I'll head up to the fourth."

"Right." Tommy didn't argue, just took the stairs two and three at a time.

He pushed his way through the fire door on the fourth floor. Smoke and heat and the smell of some kind of fuel caused him to gag. He slipped his oxygen mask over his face then turned his fire extinguisher onto the burning carpet in the hallway ahead of him. Kicking in each closed door, he did a hasty check of the rooms on both sides, drenching any remaining flames with foam. All of the rooms were empty. *Thank God*...

He came to the last room, his eyes widening as he saw the door had been taken off its hinges, and what looked like a man's body lay crumpled on the floor.

Oh, shit, the poor son-of-a-bitch...

Tommy crouched low and reached for the body.

What the hell -?

He gaped at the net studded with metal points that covered the man from head to foot. He knelt down and began pulling at the net, then eased up when he realised there were hidden barbs tearing at the man's flesh. Taking more care, he forced himself to slow down in removing the net. He grimaced at the sight of the man's arms and hands covered in blood.

Shit, who the hell would do this to you?

He threw the net to one side. A long groan escaped the man's lips.

Still alive, thank God.

Tommy turned him onto his back and stared at his bloodied face, at the raven black hair that fanned out under his head.

Wait. Don't I know you?

He heard the clump of heavy booted footsteps heading his way.

"Alex, in here! I've got a guy here needs the medics in a hurry."

Alex rushed into the room and squinted down at the man. "What the hell happened to him? He's covered in blood."

Tommy pointed at the net. "That *thing* was all over him. Looks like somebody was trying to make sure he couldn't get out."

"Jesus. Okay, let's go."

Together they lifted the man to his feet then Tommy took the inert body over his shoulder. They hurried down the hallway.

"He's the only victim," Alex said, listening to his headset as they ran down the stairs. "The other missing guest has shown up, and it looks like they have the fire almost contained."

They ran out onto the street, Tommy carrying the man he'd saved through the gathering crowd to the waiting ambulance. "He needs oxygen and he's pretty badly cut up," he told the paramedics in a rush. "It's amazing he's still alive."

He hovered nearby, watching as the medics removed the man's shirt and started swabbing at the cuts that Tommy could now see covered most of his body.

Shit, who would do something like that – and why?

A faint murmur came from the man's lips, then one of the medics threw Tommy a puzzled look.

"Are you Tommy?"

"Yeah, that's me."

"He's asking for you."

"What? But I don't—"

"He's asking for someone named Tommy, and that's you."

"Huh." Tommy moved closer and stared down at the man's face, handsome despite the blood and smoke that streaked his skin. "I'm Tommy," he said, leaning closer. "Do you know me?"

"Don't..." The man's voice was so weak, Tommy had to put his ear to the man's lips in order to hear. "Don't let them take me to a hospital, Tommy."

"What? 'Course you gotta go to the hospital. You're pretty cut up and you need a doctor, pronto."

"No. In my pocket is a friend's phone number. Take it and please call him. His name is Jared Lantos. Tell him that Andrew needs his help."

"Is he a doctor?"

The man hesitated for a moment, then said, "Yes, and he will help me."

"Okay, I'll call him to let him know which hospital you're in."

The man's piercing blue eyes caught and held Tommy's, and the young fire fighter felt his breath hitch in his chest as recognition flooded over him.

"You're the guy I met the other night, in the bar... Andrew, right?"

Andrew nodded. "Please call my friend. His name is Jared."

Tommy put his hand inside Andrew's pocket and pulled out a folded slip of paper with a phone number written on it.

"Okay, guys, we gotta move," one of the medics said. "You can carry on your tête-à-tête some other time. This guy needs medical attention, not a heart to heart."

"Right." Tommy stood aside as the medics loaded the gurney carrying Andrew into the ambulance.

"Call Jared now."

The voice in his head was so clear it could have been Andrew talking to him, but that was impossible. The ambulance doors were closed and they were pulling away. He reached for his cell and punched in the number just as Chief Lambert yelled, "Cordain, get your ass back over here, now!"

"Hello?"

"Oh, hi... Jared Lantos?"

"Yes."

"You don't know me," Tommy said, jogging over to the quint. "My name's Tommy Cordain. I'm a fireman, and, uh, a friend of yours, Andrew, was just taken out of a fire in a hotel room on Robinson. He's on his way to the hospital but he asked me to call you, and -"

"Which hospital?"

The guy, Jared, sounded agitated.

"Uh, St. Agnes on Van Nuys, I think."

"Thank you for letting me know."

The line went dead.

"Well, you're welcome – jeez."

"Cordain, get over here," Lambert barked at him. "Get off the phone and start helping the guys over there."

"Right there, Chief..."

Who would've thought I'd see that guy again, and wasn't it crazy how I suddenly remembered him when he looked at me like that?

How could I have ever forgotten those beautiful eyes...?

Chapter Eleven

"What's wrong?" Joey asked, seeing the grim expression on Jared's face as he closed his cell phone.

"Andrew's in trouble. They're taking him to a hospital. Carlos, we must go, we must stop them from examining him."

He looked at Joey, an apology forming on his lips.

"It's okay," Joey said quickly. "Chris and I understand."

Jared kissed him hard on the mouth. "Thank you. We'll be in touch as soon as we can."

Carlos and Chris embraced, then the two vampires headed for the balcony. Chris and Joey watched as their lovers launched themselves over the balcony railing, and up into the night sky.

"That'll take a bit of getting used to," Joey remarked, his eyes following the fleeting shadows until they disappeared from view.

Chris took Joey's arm and led him back inside. "Have you flown with him yet?"

"No."

"That's what takes getting used to." Chris chuckled at the memory. "You know I have no head for heights. I nearly peed myself the first time he took me up there, higher than the clouds. If it had been possible to break a vampire's ribs I would've at that moment. I was holding on so tight, he pretended to wince."

"So what do we do now?"

"Wait. There's nothing we can do to help. I imagine they'll either bring Andrew back here, or over to Marcus and Roger's place. Depends on how badly the guy's hurt."

"Do you know Andrew?"

Chris shook his head. "No, haven't met him."

"He's Jared's ex."

"Oh."

"It's okay. He seems like a nice guy. There was some tension there for a while, but they're friends again, and Andrew went out of his way to make sure things were good between us, the night we met. I think it took him a long time to get over the fact he and Jared were no longer lovers, but he seems to be okay with it now."

"So, how are you dealing with all this?" Chris asked. "How did you find out?"

"Would you believe my father was the one to know before I ever did?"

"What? But how?"

"Remember all those stories he used to tell us when we were kids, about vampires and demons? Well, it seems my dad actually met a vampire, long ago when he was a kid. The Lady, he calls her."

"Wow..." Chris looked at him with big eyes. "So he knew Jared was vampire, and told you? You must have freaked."

"I did. I thought Dad had finally lost it, then Jared convinced me and told me he could cure Dad's dementia – and he did."

"Fantastic, Joey. So you two are forever companions now?"

"Well, we haven't gone the whole way. Of course I'm going to say yes, if he asks me. He drank from me. I offered to give him my blood after he gave so much to my father, but I haven't drunk his blood yet. He seems reticent about that bit."

Chris nodded. "It's a big step – a major bonding."

"But you took it?"

"Yes, and I haven't regretted it for a moment. You'll get to meet some other guys who have taken the blood bond, but who remain mortal like you and me. Ron Hendricks—he manages an Italian restaurant in West Hollywood—he's been with his vampire lover Jean-Claude for over two years, and is still mortal.

"Carlos told me he'll wait until I'm ready for the change. He said he'd never pressure me into it, but the more I'm with him, the more likely that prospect becomes – despite what it entails."

Now the barriers were down, and the two friends had no more secrets between them, Chris was free to recount how he had discovered Carlos was vampire and how badly he'd reacted to the knowledge that the man he was in love with was an immortal.

"He had to take away all my memories of him, which was why I acted like a dummy every time you mentioned his name."

Joey chuckled. "Yeah, I remember that. I just thought you were in denial and I didn't want to upset you by pressing the point."

"And what I've never told you for fear of freaking you out is that Carlos was being stalked by vampire hunters who kidnapped me and used me as bait to get to him."

Joey's jaw dropped. "What? Jesus, Chris, why didn't you tell me?"

"How could I? You'd have thought I had gone off the deep end. Poor Chris, finally certifiable, totally nutzoid."

"Yeah, I guess I would have." Joey gave his friend a rueful smile. "Obviously, the hunters didn't get you or Carlos."

"No. Thanks to his vampire buddies. You said you met Marcus and Joseph..."

Joey nodded.

"They joined forces with Carlos and rescued me." Chris's eyes gleamed as he remembered. "It was fucking amazing, Joey. There I was tied up in this rat hole, and Carlos and the others—they tore the place apart—with their *minds*, Joey." He shook his head. "We thought we knew everything there was to know about vampires from watching those dumb movies, but, I'm telling you, that was beyond anything I ever dreamed they could do."

Joey stared at his friend in silence for a long moment.

"Joey?"

"Yeah... I was just trying to imagine what you must have gone through then." He reached out and hugged Chris to him. "Jesus, I wish I'd been there for you, too."

Chris held him tight and chuckled. "Well, the use of the *mind* part might have been a little difficult."

"Creep." They laughed together, then Joey sat back. "What did they do with the hunters?"

"They let them go in the end. I thought Carlos was going to take some kind of revenge on them, but Marcus persuaded him to let them go. Wiped their minds and sent them on their way."

"Wow."

"I hope I haven't scared you off the idea of sharing with Jared."

"God, no. He's so... fantastic. But can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"The blood..." Joey gave his friend an anxious look. "What does it, uh, taste like?"

"Sweet, spicy... Like nothing you've ever tasted before." Chris grinned and added, "If I could get my folks to distil a wine that good, they'd be millionaires in no time."

* * * *

Jared and Carlos alighted by the emergency entrance to the hospital just as an ambulance pulled up outside. Jared probed the interior with his mind.

"Andrew's in there," he told Carlos, who nodded his agreement.

"Plan?"

"We take him before they can get him inside. Then it might be too late."

"There are two paramedics in there with him," Carlos said. "They may have already discerned that something is not quite as it should be."

"We must make them forget. The driver too, and get any report they may have started." "Right."

They moved forward. The doors to the ambulance swung open, and two young men jumped out. They looked worried.

"George, I can't understand those readings at all," one was saying. "And what happened with the radio when I tried to call in his vitals? Man, the way his blood -"

The paramedic gasped in surprise as Jared spun him round to face him.

"George, what the -"

Jared's hypnotic gaze cut the man short. Jared sat him alongside George on the ambulance floor, then strode round to the cab where the driver was just about to fill in his report log, before getting out of the ambulance.

"Thank you, I'll take that." Jared removed the pen from the man's hand.

"Hey! What the fuck—?" That was as far as the driver got before simply forgetting whatever it was he thought he was reacting to.

"Ready?" Carlos was holding Andrew in his arms.

"Ready." And the two vampires lifted off again into the darkness.

"Looks like silver poisoning," Carlos informed Jared as they flew towards the Hollywood Hills and Marcus' mansion. "He's covered in tiny puncture marks, like they were made by some kind of needles..."

"Bastards. Hopefully, Marcus will know what to do. I'll apprise him of what's happened. We can call Chris and Joey once we get there."

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Marcus and Joseph were waiting at the door when they arrived.

"Lay him on the couch in the living room." Marcus hustled them all inside. "Silver poisoning you say? Yes, and cunningly administered," he added, baring Andrew's chest. "Barbs of some kind. See, some of them are still imbedded in his flesh. Those must be removed. It is a miracle he has not met his final death."

"What can we do?" Jared asked.

"Blood, and lots of it. We must all give him as much as we can. Have you fed? Roger, Micah..." He beckoned to the young vampires. "Bring me a bowl and a soft cloth. His skin must be washed with blood so that each wound can heal, then he must drink — if he can."

While Marcus hurried to find a pair of tweezers, Jared and Joseph stripped Andrew's shirt and pants from his unresisting body, revealing myriad tiny wounds covering his torso and limbs.

Jared growled low in his throat at the sight. "If this is Fieldman's work, he will pay for this," he rasped. "The knowledge he has of us must be wiped clean from his wretched mind."

Marcus returned with the tweezers and set about pulling out each barb that remained in Andrew's flesh.

"Roll him over so we can examine his back. Yes, there are a few," he muttered, pinching Andrew's skin between his fingers then seizing the barbs with the head of the tweezers and drawing them out.

Roger returned with the bowl and cloth. He stared at Andrew's naked body. "Jesus, who'd do a thing like this to him?"

"Those who fear us," Marcus said quietly. He bit into his wrist then let his blood drip into the bowl. "Joseph?"

Joseph nodded and followed Marcus' example, as did Roger and Micah.

"We will save Jared's and Carlos' blood for Andrew to drink. We can only hope we are not too late."

* * * *

Tommy left the fire station later that night. He hadn't been able to forget Andrew his entire shift. He pulled his cell phone from his pocket and punched in the number for the hospital he'd copied from the fire station report sheet.

"Oh, hi, I'm checking on the condition of a patient. Andrew...uh, sorry, don't know his last name. He was admitted earlier after a fire in the Barclay Hotel on Robinson."

"One moment, please, while I check."

Tommy listened to the 'hold' music grinding in his ear, then the receptionist said, "Sorry, sir, no fire victim from a Barclay Hotel was admitted this evening."

"What? But I was with him when the medics put him in the ambulance. I'm a fireman, I pulled him outta the building myself."

"Well, I'm sorry, but he wasn't admitted to this hospital. They may have taken him somewhere else?"

"Uh, yeah, that's a possibility, I guess. Okay, thanks. I'll check another hospital."

"Good luck, sir. Hope you find him."

Tommy frowned as he closed his cell phone. This didn't make any sense. Why would the medics take Andrew to anywhere but the closest hospital? The guy had been in critical condition. He grabbed the slip of paper with Andrew's doctor's number on it and punched it in.

"Hello?"

"Hey, yeah," Tommy blurted. "Is this Jared?"

"It is, yes."

"I called you earlier to let you know about Andrew and told you he was goin' to St. Agnes's hospital. I just called over there and they told they had no record of him being admitted there. D'you know which hospital they took him to?"

"Ah, well. You see, he's not actually in a hospital."

"What? Well, where the hell is he? The guy was in serious condition and –"

"I can assure you he is out of danger."

"Wait a minute," Tommy snapped, "just who are you exactly?"

"My name is Jared Lantos, as you know. I am a friend of Andrew's. He is with me and his other friends, and like I said, he is no longer in any danger."

Friends? Something fishy's goin' on here...

"You know, I get the feeling there's something fishy goin' on here." Tommy's voice began to rise in decibel level. "Andrew was in critical condition when I last saw him. The paramedics said he needed urgent medical attention, and now you're tellin' me he's out of danger. Are you all doctors then? The fact that it looked like somebody attacked him in his hotel room doesn't exactly fill me with confidence that you are tellin' me the truth. What if I just call the cops and give them your phone number so you can explain all of this to them?"

"There is no need for the police to be involved, Tommy," Jared said smoothly. "You may speak to Andrew yourself, if you like. Would that convince you that he is indeed out of danger?"

That reply was not one Tommy expected. "Huh? Oh, okay, I guess so. You mean he's well enough to talk?"

"Hear him for yourself. He's right here..."

There was a faint rustling sound, then a voice, weak but audible said, "Hello, Tommy."

"Andrew, are you okay?"

"Yes, thank you for your concern, and thank you for rescuing me from that fire. I owe you my life."

"Well, that's nothing," Tommy said gruffly. "It's my job. Just as long as you're okay."

"I am in good hands, as they say."

Wish you were in my good hands, was Tommy's thought.

"Well..." A sigh of relief escaped his lips. "I'm real glad to hear it wasn't as serious as it looked. Hey," he added quickly, "when you're feeling up to it, how about you and me getting together for a drink, dinner – something? I'd really like to see you again."

"That would be very nice. I, too, will look forward to seeing you again, Tommy."

"Uh, okay. Good. You want my cell number?"

"Please."

He reeled off the number and heard Andrew repeat it to someone.

"Okay, then. You take care, Andrew."

"You too, Tommy, and thank you again, for everything you did for me tonight."

Andrew handed the phone back to Jared and lay back on the couch with a sigh.

"So, a fireman, eh?" Roger's teasing voice made Andrew smile despite the pain that lingered in every fibre of his body. "That sounds hot." "What else could a fireman be?" Micah asked dryly.

Jared smiled down at Andrew. "He sounds very concerned for you. Perhaps you should take him up on his offer, when you are feeling 'up to it' as he put it."

Andrew looked up at the faces surrounding him. In addition to Tommy, he owed every man here his life.

"How can I ever repay all of you for what you've done for me? Even you, who did not know me well, perhaps did not even like me very much, after what I put Jared through."

Jared sat by his side. "Hush now, that is all in the past. Everyone here is your friend, Andrew, and we will find out who did this to you, and why. Do you remember anything prior to the fire?"

Andrew nodded. "Two men broke into my room. Ordinarily, I could have handled them easily, but they threw a net of silver over me. I knew it had to be silver for it weakened me immediately."

"A net of silver barbs," Marcus muttered. "Fiendishly clever." He put a hand on Jared's shoulder. "Are you sure this is Fieldman's work? How could he know so much about us?"

"Of that I'm not sure," Jared replied. "But Joseph said he threatened Andrew's life. We have to presume this was his doing."

"I should have wiped his mind clean when I had him in my grasp," Joseph said vehemently.

Marcus was quick to reassure him. "You did what Jacob Quince ordered you to, Joseph. None of us suspected the man would attempt something like this. Anyway, I suggest you stay here, Andrew, until you regain your strength."

"Thank you, Marcus." Andrew sat up and smiled. "The blood everyone here has given me is already proving to be a miracle cure. I feel much stronger."

"Nevertheless, you can't go back to that hotel. So, consider this your home until you can make more permanent plans."

"Again, I thank you. I expect I'll return to New York as soon as possible." He paused and laid a hand over Jared's. "Now that Jared and I are friends again."

"What about your hunky fireman?" Roger winked at Andrew. "Don't you want to see him again before you go?"

"A one-track mind," Marcus said with a heavy sigh. "Roger, Andrew has other more pressing things to think about."

"What could be more pressing than a hunky fireman? Huh, Micah?" Roger nudged his friend.

Micah chuckled and side stepped away from Roger. "I think I'll stay out of this one. You always get me into trouble over stuff like this."

Andrew laughed and stood, stretching his arms over his head. "Don't worry, Roger. I shall see Tommy before I leave. I owe him my thanks in person, at the very least."

Roger nudged Micah again. "And we know what that can lead to."

Jared embraced Andrew. "Carlos and I should go. We left Chris and Joey back at Carlos' apartment. I've called them to let them know what happened, but they are impatient to hear all about it."

"Among other things," Roger said in a stage whisper.

Chapter Twelve

Bernard Fieldman listened with satisfaction to his henchmen tell of their success in finding and killing Andrew Berés.

"Well done, boys. Come to the game tonight, and I'll take care of you."

He sat back in his chair and snorted in contentment. So, another job accomplished and with a minimum of fuss. He'd had both of the Berés brothers taken care of just like he'd been paid very well to do. The man who'd hired him would be very pleased.

When the stranger had approached him with the information that Michael Berés was in fact a vampire and had shown him the proof of it, Fieldman had at first been terrified, but the man had explained how Berés could be killed, and the profit was simply too much for Fieldman to ignore.

And, of course, the same had applied to Andrew Berés. The man had supplied the net of silver barbs that he said would undoubtedly weaken, then kill, any vampire. Vampire blood, strong and impervious to all disease as it was, could not counteract the poison contained in silver.

Fieldman snorted again. Vampires, for Chrissakes, who'd of thought it possible?

And for all he knew there could be even more of them out there. He still got that nasty little knot at the back of his skull when he remembered the dream he'd had about being taken in front of a whole crowd of the bloodsuckers. Like that was possible! But it had unsettled him for days after. Still did at times. And how had the police connected him to that wino Lombardi's murder? Had Michael squealed? Vampires could read minds after all...

Shit. Just as well he had them taken care of. As for Lombardi, Charlie Haynes would get him off the hook.

It'll cost a bundle, but Charlie's the best defence lawyer in town — he'll probably set up some kind of a deal with the DA. And from now on, when someone new wants to get in on the action, they get the third, fourth and fifth degree, before they're allowed anywheres near me and the boys!

* * * *

Tommy was glad he had the next twenty four hours off. It had been the week from hell, and even he, in his near perfect physical condition, was feeling the toll of too many long shifts – dealing with the hotel fire on Robinson, then an apartment fire that had taken hours to contain. Then there had been that weird situation with the guy he'd rescued from the hotel fire – *Andrew*.

He'd checked with the paramedics who were supposed to have taken Andrew to the hospital and they'd looked at him like he had three heads. Even his buddy Alex didn't seem to remember much about the incident, and when he'd gone to check the log there was no mention of them handing a hotel guest over to the paramedics.

Yet, he knew he wasn't mistaken. Andrew had locked eyes with him, they'd recognised each other, he'd called Andrew's friend just like he'd been asked to – then ... then, he wasn't sure about the rest, but somehow Andrew had ended up being looked after, successfully it seemed, by these friends.

They had to be awful good doctors because Andrew had been really sick. Close to death, really.

Yet, when he'd spoken to him on the phone he'd sounded good. Maybe it just hadn't been as serious as he'd first thought. But there had been all that blood.

And he hadn't heard from the guy. That hurt. He'd been so sure Andrew had been sincere about them getting together. He'd tried calling the number Andrew had given him—that Jared whatever his last name was—but there had been no reply, no voice mail to leave a message. Why the hell hadn't he thought to ask for Andrew's cell number?

Oh well, chalk it up to just a bout of anonymous sex. Except it hadn't been anonymous, and the memory of Andrew's beautiful eyes, luscious lips and sexy accent just wouldn't fade from his memory.

Damn, but he needed to get laid!

He'd celebrated his time off by taking a long leisurely bath then cracking a Bud light. Now he lolled on the couch, beer in hand, wearing only his boxer briefs and fiddling with the remote trying to find something worthwhile on the television. Maybe he'd go out later...

A knock at the door startled him.

Can't be Alex, he thought, padding over to the door, *he's on duty 'til tomorrow morning.* He pressed his eye to the peephole just in case it was someone he should put more clothes on for. His breath quickened.

Andrew.

He flung open the door, a big welcoming smile on his face.

Andrew's eyes gleamed as they skimmed over Tommy's naked torso, but his answering smile was shy.

"I hope you don't mind me just dropping by like this?"

"No, not at all. Come in, come in."

Tommy beamed some more as Andrew stepped inside, and was glad he'd taken a few minutes to tidy up some after his bath.

"How do you feel? You look good—amazingly good, considering. Hey, how'd you know where I lived?"

Andrew chuckled. "You're listed in the phone book."

"Oh, right... Duh. Well, I'm real glad you came by."

"I wanted to see you, Tommy, and thank you again for all you did for me the other night." Andrew reached out and touched Tommy's face gently with his fingertips. "I would have undoubtedly died, but for you."

Tommy tangled Andrew's fingers with his. "Not on my watch," he said huskily. He raised Andrew's hand to his lips and kissed the cool palm. Their eyes met and Tommy whispered, "God, but you are beautiful. That night in the club, I remember only some of it. God knows why. I should remember it all. It was – *you* were wonderful."

Andrew could hear the countless questions forming in Tommy's mind. Questions he could not yet answer. Answers that Tommy would never understand. If the time ever came when Tommy should know the truth, he would have to be told in the most careful and gentle way possible. But for now, Andrew only wished to bring the handsome fire-fighter pleasure. He owed this man his life; it was the very least he could do. While their eyes were still locked on one another, a quick mental pulse calmed the confusion in Tommy's mind.

Andrew moved into Tommy's embrace, and their parted lips met in a scorching kiss, tongues tussling, probing, breath mingling, setting each man's senses on fire. Andrew felt the power in his new blood course through him, heightening his awareness of Tommy's scent, his taste, the warmth of his skin, all of it *fantaszticus*. A low growl rumbled up from his throat and Tommy tightened his arms around him.

"Oh, yeah..." The young fire fighter breathed his desire into Andrew's mouth. "My thoughts exactly."

They didn't make it to the bedroom. As if of one mind, they both sank to their knees, their mouths still locked together, Andrew's arms around Tommy so tight he had to remember to ease up just a little in case he cracked the sweet man's ribs. Andrew fell backwards, bringing Tommy down on top of him. His mouth settled on Tommy's neck and the scent and the lure of the young man's blood almost drove him mad with desire.

Not yet, not yet, not this time...

His hands slid down the length of Tommy's sleek, muscled body, ripping away the fabric of Tommy's boxers, to cup the round swell of his ass and pull him in against his own stone-hard erection. Tommy was tugging at the buttons on Andrew's shirt. In his impatience to feel Tommy's naked body pressed to his own, Andrew threw caution to the wind and willed his own clothes gone.

Tommy didn't even seem to notice, just started feasting on Andrew's nipples, all the while giving out little moans and sighs of appreciation. Tommy's mouth moved sensuously over Andrew's chest, teasing the dusting of black hair between his teeth, licking and nibbling at Andrew's nipples until the vampire thought even he could not bear it a moment longer.

Was it simply because he had gone so long without this exquisite intimacy, or did this young man possess some kind of sexual enchantment that made Andrew crave his touch like he had no other, since Jared? Whatever the reason, it was all he wanted right then. He pushed his fingers through the thick blond hair on Tommy's head, murmured something in his ecstasy that was incomprehensible even to himself, and Tommy's mouth slid into Andrew's armpit, his tongue burrowing hard into the cool scented flesh, taking long and languid strokes that had Andrew gasping his pleasure out loud.

"Oh, yeah..." Tommy's mumbled approval vibrated on Andrew's skin, sending tingling jolts through his body. He clasped Tommy tighter and rolled him onto his back. Tommy gazed up at him, his lips slightly lifted in a wanton smile.

"You are so fuckin' hot, Andrew."

"And you are the most wonderful mort—*man* I have ever met." Andrew almost laughed at his near mistake. He would wager anything and everything that Tommy had never before been called a *mortal*.

"Mortman?" Tommy's hands caressed Andrew's butt. "Is that Hungarian for something?" he asked, his voice low and husky, a teasing light in his eyes.

"No..." Andrew's eyes met Tommy's, and there was sincerity in that look. "The Hungarian word – or rather, words – for you are, *Csodálatos minden tekintetben.*"

"Whoa, that's kind of a mouthful. What's it mean?"

"It means..." Andrew laid his lips on Tommy's, then whispered, "Wonderful in every way."

"Mmm... Same goes for you." Tommy curved his strong, limber body into Andrew's. The fit was perfection. His lips parted under the pressure of Andrew's demanding kiss. Once again their tongues filled each other's mouths, intensifying their desire, their bodies writhing together, their swollen cocks sparring like dancing sabres. Tommy whimpered and struggled under Andrew.

"Want to taste you. Want to have what you wouldn't let me have last time."

Andrew rolled onto his side and Tommy fell upon him, his hand gripping the base of Andrew's pulsing shaft, his tongue lapping at the juicy slit. Andrew grasped Tommy's hips and positioned him so he could reach the young man's rigid cock, taking all of him into his mouth, relishing the salty tang of pre cum as it passed over his taste buds and slid down his throat.

Tommy sucked on Andrew's throbbing flesh, his lips gliding up and down, up and down over the silken skin of Andrew's erection. At that moment he didn't know which sensation thrilled him more. Was it having this incredible man's hard as steel cock in his mouth, or the spicy musk he inhaled each time his nose was buried in the dark curly hair at the base, or the amazing feel of Andrew's lips and tongue laving his now sensitive as all hell cockhead? All of it was so blissfully overwhelming, Tommy could hardly believe it was really happening.

Never in all his life had he had sex with a man quite so...so *magnificent*...was the word that jumped into his mind. A word he rarely, if ever, used, but it fit Andrew perfectly. Nor could he remember being quite so turned on by any other man. This guy seemed to know exactly the absolutely best way to set him on fire. Andrew was giving him head, so had other guys, but never like this. Never so exquisitely intense that he felt he might just leap out of his skin at any moment. He only hoped he could last. Andrew's mouth was working some kind of magic on him, bringing him to the edge too quickly.

Oh, jeez...

"Wait, wait." He pulled away and swung his body round to lie over Andrew. His breath came in great gasping gulps as he fought to control the urge to let go, to just let his orgasm take over. He locked eyes with Andrew, and was lost for what seemed an eternity in that steady light blue gaze. His breathing calmed, but the fire in his loins remained.

"God, but I want to fuck you," he murmured, his lips on Andrew's.

"Yes, I want that." Andrew wrapped his legs around Tommy's slim, hard torso and lifted his ass to meet the head of Tommy's cock.

Tommy didn't want anything to get in the way of this moment, but he knew he had to go get a condom. "Wait, I need to get a - "

He was stopped mid-sentence when Andrew pulled him down for a kiss so rapturous it drove all reason from Tommy's mind. In his head he heard the words, "*There is no need*," then Andrew's fingers, slick with his own saliva, were lubricating Tommy's aching shaft and he was sliding inside Andrew, and *oh*, *God*, but it was fucking fantastic, the most incredible feeling he had ever experienced.

"Jesus," he gasped, sinking all the way to the hilt inside Andrew. His mouth was taken again and again by Andrew's devouring kisses. His senses spun out of control. Andrew clung to him, locking Tommy in an embrace from which he never wanted to break free. Tommy drove himself balls-deep into Andrew, again and again, with long measured strokes that grew faster, deeper, as an almost primal need swept over him.

Andrew was so tight, so hot, his ass muscles clenching round Tommy's rock hard cock as he drove himself deep, deeper into Andrew's silken core. Sweat dripped from his forehead onto Andrew's face as he plunged in and out of the man who writhed and bucked under him, his hands gripping Tommy's shoulders with an almost unnatural strength. Tommy knew he'd be bruised for days, but didn't give a damn, for at that moment, he could feel his orgasm grip his balls, churning inside his blood, uncontrollable now, unstoppable.

He ground out a long groan from between clenched teeth, and he buried his face in the cool skin of Andrew's neck as his climax swept over him. Even as he came, he felt Andrew stiffen under him and the hot surge of Andrew's semen between their tightly pressed bodies. Starbursts blossomed behind his closed eyelids and waves of sheer ecstasy rolled over Tommy, racking his body with spasm after spasm as he emptied himself into Andrew's depths.

J.P. Bowie

* * * *

Tommy's eyes fluttered open, and for a moment, he had to gather his thoughts before realising that what had happened earlier hadn't been a dream. Andrew was lying beside him, one hand resting lightly on Tommy's chest, his lips touching Tommy's neck.

"Are you asleep?" he whispered.

"No, I've been waiting for you to wake up." Andrew sat up, leaning on one elbow to look down at Tommy. He traced the outline of Tommy's mouth with his forefinger. "You talk in your sleep."

"I do? Nothing embarrassing, I hope." He bit down lightly on Andrew's finger, trapping it in his mouth.

"Something about 'the greatest'," Andrew said with a small smile.

"Ah, must have been talkin' 'bout you."

Andrew lowered his head to kiss Tommy's lips. "Imádni való..."

"Did you just swear at me?"

Andrew chuckled. "No, I called you adorable."

Tommy grinned and wound his arms around Andrew's neck. "I like you calling me that. I don't think anyone else ever has." He stretched his long, sleekly muscled body, pressing the whole length of himself against Andrew, grinding their crotches together. "You goin' to stay over?"

"I can't, I'm afraid. I have some urgent business in New York I must take care of."

Tommy's attempt at hiding his disappointment failed.

"When will you be back?"

"I am not sure."

"You're not sure? What does that mean?" Tommy bit his lip and looked away. "Sorry, I shouldn't talk that way. You don't owe me any explanations."

Andrew tilted Tommy's face to his and kissed him gently. "I owe you much more than explanations, but I really do not know how long I will be gone. Rest assured, though, I will contact you when I return. You have my word on it."

"You talk so nice." Tommy sighed. "I miss you already."

"And I will miss you, Tommy," Andrew said, then added with a glint in his eye, "Perhaps we can do something to make us both feel better." "I was hoping you'd say that." Tommy rolled on top of Andrew, gliding his already hard cock over Andrew's erection. "Do me, this time."

Andrew lips curved in a sensual smile. "I was hoping you would say that."

Chapter Thirteen

It was raining heavily in New York City when Andrew and Jared arrived there the following night. Andrew had shared an apartment in Upper Manhattan with his brother, and it pained Jared to have to return to the scene of Michael's murder. He could tell Andrew was also troubled, but in addition to his sadness over his brother's death, Andrew's thoughts were also of the violent argument he and Jared had engaged in after that ill-fated discovery. For a time they stood silently outside the building, both lost in their thoughts of that time.

"Before we go inside..." Andrew touched Jared's hand gently. "Let me say again how much I regret my actions the last time we were here."

"It is forgotten, Andrew." Jared squeezed his friend's hand. "Both of us suffered a terrible loss. A friend, a brother, who can never be replaced. But I am thankful that at least you and I are once more friends."

"And nothing will ever change that," Andrew murmured with conviction. He looked up at the apartment's balcony. "Perhaps it might be better if we didn't alert the doorman to our presence."

Jared glanced up and down the rain-swept deserted street and nodded. He and Andrew rose swiftly from the sidewalk and landed silently on the balcony outside the apartment. Some lights were on inside and the vampires stiffened with surprise as they stared into the interior.

It was obvious someone was living there. Empty take-out food boxes and bottles were strewn over the coffee table, and a news announcer's voice emanated from the television. A low, involuntary growl freed itself from Andrew's throat when a man, wearing striped boxer shorts, walked through the living room, his head tilted back, guzzling at a beer. He paused to scratch at his hairy pot belly then dropped heavily onto the couch, and stuck his bare feet up on the coffee table.

With an angry wave of his hand Andrew unlocked the glass sliding door and threw it open. The man jumped to his feet, shock and fear etched on his slack features.

"What the fuck?" he screamed as Andrew and Jared stepped into the room. "Who are you guys?"

"More to the point," Jared said, his voice low and lethal, "who are you, and why are you here?"

"I-I live here. This is my apartment."

With a move so fast that the man had no time to run, Andrew had him by the throat.

"I know who you are," he hissed. "You are one of the men who attacked me in my hotel room in Los Angeles. What is this? As a reward from Fieldman for doing his dirty work, he gave you my brother's apartment?"

The man squealed with fear as Andrew, fangs exposed, lifted him off the ground.

"Wait, Andrew," Jared said softly. "He might be of some use to us."

"True, he just might."

Andrew released the man who fell to the floor, then started crawling away, towards the door. He grabbed the doorknob, pulling at it frantically, but found he was locked in. He began pounding on the door, shrieking at the top of his voice for someone, *anyone* to let him out.

"No one can hear you," Andrew told the terrified man. "Neither your screaming nor your beating on the door is of any consequence. No one will come to help you."

The man cowered in abject terror as Andrew and Jared approached him. "Please, please, none of this was my idea," he whimpered. "It was all Bernie's."

Andrew snarled, showing his fangs again, eliciting another squeal of terror from the man.

"You killed my brother and tried to kill me. What did he give you for murdering Michael?"

"I—I owed him money. He said he'd forget it if me and Sam took care of your brother. He had me over a barrel—I had no choice."

"We all have choices," Jared said.

"It was him or me!"

"Tell me, *Jimmy*..." Andrew sank to his haunches and stared into the man's startled eyes. "How did Fieldman know of our existence? What made him suspect we were vampires?"

"He—he got a tip from somebody. I don't know who it was. H-how do you know mmy name?"

Andrew ignored the question, looked up at Jared, then back at the terrified man.

"Well, I suppose we'll just have to ask Mr. Fieldman himself." He glanced at his watch. "Ten o'clock. Is there no game tonight?"

"N-no, he has a date with some broad he's been sniffing around for weeks now. Her old man finally caved and let Bernie near her." Jimmy's lips twisted in a grimace. "Guess Bernie had somethin' on him."

"And do you know where he's taking this date?"

Jimmy shook his head. "No, no, he'd never tell me about stuff like this."

Andrew smiled, his fangs glinting in the light from a nearby lamp.

"You just lied to me, Jimmy. You see, I can read your mind, that's how I knew your name. You can hide nothing from us. He is taking the young lady to the Moonlight Room for dinner, is he not?" He grabbed the end of Jimmy's nose between his thumb and forefinger and twisted, hard.

"Correct?"

"Oo-ow! Yeah, yeah. They got a private room there."

Andrew stood up. "So, Jared, what do we do with my brother's murderer?"

Jared gave him a wicked smile. "Well, I did say he might be of some use to us..."

The vampires fell silent as they regarded the petrified man.

A visceral wail of sheer terror burst from Jimmy's throat, and he began hammering at the door again, screeching for someone to come help him.

With an impatient gesture Andrew silenced him. "Like I said before, Jimmy, no one outside this room will hear your cries for help."

And he was right.

* * * *

The Moonlight Room was an elegant affair, and if the owners were aware that some of their clients were thieves and even murderers, they chose to ignore those 'eccentricities', as they preferred to think of those particular vices. Business was business, and everyone's money was welcome. The maitre d' who had shown Bernard Fieldman and his 'date' to their private room had perhaps quietly sneered at the Fieldman's execrable taste in shirts and ties, but the hundred dollar bill pressed into his hand was enough to bring an almost warm smile to his thin lips. He looked up from his reservation screen as two exceedingly handsome men approached. Both were tall and wide shouldered, but while one had hair dark as night, the other man's shoulder-length hair shone like a golden mane.

Now here are clients who deserve the very best service, was his thought while fixing his most welcoming smile on his face. *And anything else they might wish for...*

"Gentlemen, how may I help you?"

"We are guests of Mr Bernard Fieldman," the dark-haired man told him.

"Really?" The maitre d' could not disguise the surprise in his voice, but he quickly controlled it as he added, "Mr Fieldman has reserved a room only for two—"

"That is correct," the golden-haired man interrupted smoothly. "My name is Jared Lantos, and my friend is Andrew Berés. We are not staying for dinner, just long enough for perhaps a glass of wine and a brief conversation."

Andrew locked eyes with the maitre d'. "Would you please show us to his room?"

"Why yes, of course."

Under the spell of Andrew's eyes, the man would have happily shown him, given him, anything he wanted.

"This way, gentlemen."

He led them down a short hallway, stopping before a heavy oaken door on which he tapped quietly before opening it and ushering in Andrew and Jared. Once the maitre d' had closed the door and left to return to his reservation desk, Andrew sealed the door against any unwanted interruption.

The room was dimly lit with soft overhead lamps and candles on the table, set for two. Fieldman didn't bother to look at them, no doubt considering them to be part of the restaurant staff.

"Hey, just in time to refill our glasses. You guys sure don't bust your asses around here to take care of somebody payin' a lot of money to -"

"Be quiet, Mr Fieldman," Andrew snapped.

He glanced at the young girl sitting opposite Fieldman. She looked to be underage and Andrew could read in her mind that she wanted to be anywhere but in Fieldman's company.

What kind of father would do this, regardless of the hold this fat man has on him?

"Jared," he said softly.

Jared nodded and held out his hand to the girl. Their eyes met, and the girl took Jared's hand without any trace of fear or hesitation, allowing him to lead her to a corner of the room where she sat by him on a couch, not saying a word.

Fieldman's face was purple with rage. "What the fuck is going on here?" He reached for his cell phone lying on the table in front of him. "Who are you guys? What's this all about? You got some goddam nerve comin' in here. I'm calling the management, and -"

"I am Andrew Berés, Mr Fieldman." Andrew took the cell phone from Fieldman's unresisting, sweaty fingers. "Michael's brother."

"What?" Fieldman's small eyes widened in his podgy face and his skin turned ashen as he stared with disbelief at Andrew. "No. That's...that's not possible. You're supposed to be dead."

"That is true." Andrew's cold blue stare riveted Fieldman to his seat. "Or rather, I am undead. But then you know that, and that is why I am here. To find out who informed you that Michael was vampire. I would advise you to answer truthfully, Mr Fieldman. Your very life depends on it."

Fieldman's fleshy neck wobbled as he tried to swallow his fear.

"But he was the one who wanted you and your brother out of the way. He'll kill me if I tell you his name."

"And I will kill you if you do not," Andrew said quietly. "The choice is yours."

Fieldman's flabby body shook as he mumbled, "His name is Lazlo Marek."

Andrew stiffened at the mention of his uncle's name. He felt his arm taken in a comforting grasp by Jared who was suddenly at his side.

"My uncle did this?"

"Andrew," Jared murmured. "I am so sorry..."

Fieldman's piggy eyes darted from Andrew to Jared then back to Andrew.

"You'll go now?" he whined. "You won't hurt me now you have what you want?"

For a long moment Andrew remained perfectly still, the sense of betrayal numbing his mind, his thoughts becoming unclear.

"Andrew..." Jared's grip on Andrew's arm tightened. "What do you wish to do?"

Andrew gave himself a small shake and stared at Fieldman, a question in his eyes.

"You saw my uncle at the Vampire Council chamber. Why did you not identify him at that time? Why didn't you accuse him of his complicity in my brother's murder?"

Fieldman's eyes bugged out of his head with shock. "You—you mean that was real? I thought I'd dreamed it all. I was really there? With all them vampires?"

"Yes, you were really there." Andrew couldn't quite hide the distinct pleasure Fieldman's realisation brought him. "And you should consider yourself very lucky that you were allowed to leave alive."

"Then-then your uncle must've did something so's I wouldn't remember what he looked like," Fieldman quavered. "I didn't even know he was there. Didn't know I was there..." His voice trailed off into dumbstruck silence.

Andrew nodded, aware that his uncle could do exactly that. "Jared, please arrange for a cab to take the young lady home. Mr Fieldman and I have some more business to discuss."

Jared beckoned to the girl who rose from the couch and came willingly to him. With a little smile she took Jared's hand.

"I will join you outside in a few minutes," Andrew told him.

"Wait," Fieldman cried as Jared led the girl from the room. "You said you wouldn't hurt me if I told you who screwed you! Please..."

The fat man's face was covered in a sickly sweat as he begged.

"You are a disgusting specimen, Fieldman." Andrew leant over the man who shrank back in his seat and stared up at Andrew, rank terror in his eyes.

"What I see in your mind, what you intended to do to that girl, fills me with revulsion. Now..." Andrew pulled a chair close to Fieldman and sat beside him. "Here is what you will do. Before I leave you here, you will call the young lady's father and relinquish any claim, any threat you hold over him, and you will tell him that never again will you bother his daughter with thoughts of violating her. Is that clear?"

Fieldman, caught in Andrew's hypnotic gaze, could only nod his agreement.

"Then, you will call your attorney and you will tell him that you are ready to confess to every murder, every single crime you have committed over the years. You will brook no argument from him, no matter what counsel he tries to give you, no matter if he tries to talk you out of your decision. You must confess. Do you understand?"

Again Fieldman nodded, his many chins wobbling, sweat now freely pouring from every pore on his face.

"Good." Andrew stepped back and pushed Fieldman's cell phone towards him. "You may make that first call now."

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He smiled grimly as Fieldman picked up his cell with a shaking hand and punched in a number.

"Joe?" Fieldman's voice was barely a croak. He cleared his throat then said again, "Joe—listen, it's Bernard Fieldman. Uh, I just sent Laura home. It's okay, no problem, just had a change of heart, so to speak. Yeah... and don't worry, I won't be troublin' you again."

"Very good, Mr Fieldman," Andrew said. "Now please make that other call."

Fieldman nodded and punched in another number. "Charlie... Bernard Fieldman. You got a minute?"

Andrew stood and walked to the door, pausing just long enough to hear Fieldman's quaking voice instruct his lawyer to call the District Attorney and arrange a meeting for the morning.

Smiling, he slipped through the door and closed it quietly behind him.

In the foyer, Jared chatted with the maitre d', all the while making sure the man only remembered that the young lady left early due to a sudden migraine attack, and that Fieldman had ordered her a cab to take her home. He smiled at Andrew as he joined them at the reservation desk.

After thanking the maitre d' for his help they left the restaurant and stood outside on the damp sidewalk looking up at the dark but clearing sky, the moon's brilliance stark against the blackness that surrounded it.

"So what will you do about your uncle Lazlo's betrayal?" Jared finally asked as they walked the short distance back to Michael's apartment.

Andrew sighed. "It is so hard for me to understand why he would have done this. To have Michael murdered, to put the suspicion in my mind that it was you who killed him, then to have me silenced. But for what reason? I can think of nothing that could possibly have persuaded him. It sounds almost as if he thought there was some monetary gain to be had, but there is no family fortune, at least not that I am aware of, and surely I would know if it existed. My brother's mind was open to me at all times."

"And your uncle's?"

"I never thought to question his honesty, or his loyalty to us." Andrew's full lips thinned as he was forced to reconsider. "Obviously, my faith in him was misguided."

"Where is he now?"

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"He still has a home in Budapest, but he could be anywhere. I have reached out to him, but his mind is closed to me. I think he must know what has transpired."

Jared frowned. "And is now even more of a danger to you."

"Only if he can enlist more paid killers. I don't think he would dare face me on his own." Andrew's expression reflected his sorrow. "Why, Jared? Why would he do such a heinous thing?"

"I'm afraid that is something only he can answer." Jared put an arm around Andrew's shoulders and drew him close. "I suggest we let Marcus and Joseph know what we've found out. Once the Vampire Council is informed of your uncle's duplicity it won't be long before he's either run to ground, or is forced to give himself up."

Andrew nodded his agreement. "Thank you, my friend, for being by my side through all this. You will return to LA tonight?"

"Yes, unless you want me to stay. Joey was a little apprehensive of what we were doing."

"I understand. Go to him and put his fears to rest." Andrew's smile was warm, yet rueful. "I think I'll stay for a day or so just to make sure Fieldman does what I instructed him to do. If my uncle should discover what I've set in motion, and try to intervene, I want to be here so that I can counteract any plan he might have."

They passed by the small crowd gathered outside the apartment building. Flashing lights of police cars and an ambulance revealed that Jimmy's body had been found on the sidewalk.

They heard a paramedic comment, "No sign of any injuries. Must've been a heart attack."

"He's awful pale," another remarked.

The friends stepped under the building's awning and embraced.

"Stay in touch," Jared murmured and touched his forefinger to Andrew's temple. "Even if things get dangerous, *especially* if they do, contact me immediately." He turned to go, then paused.

"What about your fireman?"

"I will call him."

Jared grinned. "Make sure you do."

Andrew smiled then disappeared inside the foyer.

Chapter Fourteen

There was no way Joey could hide his delight at seeing Jared again. As soon as he opened the door and saw Jared standing there looking so beautiful it almost hurt. He leapt into his arms and smothered his face with kisses. Jared carried his young lover into the living room, his hands caressing Joey's butt, his lips raking over Joey's in a long, languorous mating of eager flesh on flesh.

"Oh, God, I've missed you," Joey gasped when they finally broke the kiss. He wound his arms around Jared's neck and pressed their faces together.

"It's only been two days," Jared protested with a chuckle.

"Two days too many. Don't ever leave me again."

"I may have to." Jared lowered Joey, letting him sensuously slide down his body until his feet touched the floor.

"Why, what happened? Is Andrew all right?"

"Yes, he's fine, physically." Jared kissed Joey's forehead. "But I'm afraid he received very bad news from the man who arranged Michael's murder."

"What was it?"

"His uncle, Lazlo Marek, paid Fieldman to carry out Michael's murder and the attempt on Andrew's life."

"Oh, my God."

Jared related the rest of what happened in New York, leaving out the part of Jimmy's demise.

No need for him to know all the details.

"So Andrew is staying in New York until he's sure Fieldman has turned himself in," he continued. "I think he will take a certain pleasure in reading the newspaper headlines when that happens."

"I don't blame him. Poor Andrew, to find out that his uncle was behind this." Joey stood on tiptoe to kiss Jared's lips. "I'm just glad you're back safe and sound." He pressed his face to Jared's chest.

"How glad?"

Joey looked up into Jared's dark blue eyes and gave him a mischievous wink. He unbuckled Jared's belt and pulled down his zipper while he sank to his knees in front of Jared. Jared's cock, already hard, the head glistening with pre cum, sprang out as if seeking the sensation Joey's lips and tongue would bring it.

"Mmm..." Joey ran his hands up Jared's thighs, then cupped his muscular buttocks and pulled him in, his lips gliding down the length of Jared's shaft, while his tongue laved every splendid inch on the way. He took it all in until his nose was buried in the golden, springy curls at the base where he could inhale Jared's unique scent. He pulled back and smiled up at his lover.

"Missed this too," he whispered, peeling Jared's jeans down over his thighs. He lapped at Jared's balls, his tongue curling around each one, before taking them into his mouth.

A long shudder ran through Jared's body. "Enough," he almost gasped. "I want you naked and in my arms..."

"Whoa!" Joey laughed out loud as they were suddenly lying on top of his bed, totally naked. Jared was lying over him raining kisses down the centre of his torso. "Oh, my God, that's new... And, oh boy, I love it."

Jared mumbled his agreement as he took Joey's cock into his mouth, sucking and licking at the throbbing flesh. He fondled Joey's balls then added his tongue, taking long swipes over the soft skin. He lifted Joey's legs, exposing the little pucker hiding in the cleft between Joey's butt cheeks. Jared plunged in, tongue first, and Joey's body arched, a long sighing moan of ecstasy escaping his lips.

There had to be something magical about Jared's tongue, the way it set Joey's blood on fire with every tingling pass it made over his opening, with every probe as the tip slid inside. Joey thought he might just lose it from these sensations Jared created in him. Then came the exquisite sensation of Jared's cock pushing its way into Joey's tight heat, the long glide into his core, fusing their bodies together. Jared lowered his head to Joey's chest, his teeth worrying gently at each nipple, his tongue sensuously stroking the tiny hard nubs. Joey writhed under him as Jared's mouth inched higher weaving a scorching passionate trail over Joey's throat before taking his lips with a kiss that stole Joey's breath and again, blurred all rational thought. He moved under Jared to the rhythm he had begun, slow and sensuous at first, quickening in pace as their need drove them towards their mutual orgasms. Jared's pulsing cock gliding back and forth inside Joey's silken heat was an ecstasy Joey wanted to last forever, to never let go of. His eyes screwed up tight in an effort to stave off the climax that threatened to erupt from him at any second. He whimpered then gasped as Jared's hand enclosed his erection.

"Ah, Jared, I love you."

"I love you too, Joey."

Jared crushed Joey's body to his own as his young lover's orgasm overwhelmed him, his cum jetting out of him in scalding spasms spraying both of their chests and landing on Joey's lips. Jared licked the cum from Joey's mouth, the taste and scent taking him over the edge and into his own mind-searing orgasm. His entire being was caught up in the climax that swept through him, the already thrilling sensations magnified to almost unbearable rapture by his vampire senses.

Spent, sated, he collapsed over Joey, his mouth claiming Joey's with a kiss that left words unsaid and unnecessary. Yet, his mind seethed with emotions he couldn't remember ever having in his long existence. He had said the words Joey wanted to hear, in a rush of intense passion, but he had meant it, still meant it even when the sexual heat abated and left him content only to feel the warmth of Joey's body pressed to his, Joeys' lips soft against his skin.

Yes, I love him, as I have loved no other. This mortal man has made me long for his, and only his, companionship – forever.

"You've gone awfully quiet," Joey murmured.

Jared lifted his head from the warmth of Joey's chest and smiled into his eyes. "You have left me speechless."

Joey returned his smile with a tentative one of his own. "I meant what I said earlier, Jared. I really do love you."

"And I love you, Joey."

"Does that mean we're what Chris called, forever companions?"

"If you wish it, then yes."

Joey wrapped his arms around Jared's neck and drew him down for a long sensuous kiss. "I do wish it, Jared. With all my heart, I wish it."

"Then we will make it so."

"Chris said he and Carlos have exchanged blood..."

"That is part of it, yes." Jared's forehead crinkled in a slight frown. "I would not immediately force that upon you, if you have any doubts—"

"God, no. I have no doubts. This is what I want, Jared. You and me together, forever – if you can stand it!"

Jared chuckled. "My sweet Joey..." He sat up and slipped an arm around Joey, holding him close.

"There's something you should know – you already have more than a trace of vampire blood in you."

Joey's head jerked up off Jared's shoulder and he stared at him wide-eyed. "I do? But how? I don't remember you—"

"Not me, Joey – Micah."

"What? Micah. Wait, what am I missing here?"

"Some time ago when Carlos revealed himself to Chris," Jared explained, "I'm afraid Chris reacted badly and Carlos erased himself from Chris' memory."

"Yes, Chris told me all about it the other night at his apartment. At the time, I thought Chris was just in total denial of ever knowing Carlos."

"Right, so *Roger* concocted a foolhardy, but well-intentioned, plan to implant a memory of Carlos in Chris' mind. To do so he had to blood bond with Chris."

"But what had that to do with me?"

"You were with Chris that night, and rather than have you panic when Chris suddenly disappeared, abducted as it were by Roger, Micah took you—"

"Oh, my God..." Joey's head fell back on Jared's shoulder. "I remember now. For a moment that night, I thought I'd had sex with Chris – but it was Micah?"

"Well, you didn't have sex with him, you exchanged blood. He left you with a feeling of rapture."

"And how! Then Chris was babbling about Carlos, but still acting weird about him. So that's what happened. Jeez... *Micah.*"

"Are you upset?'

"No, no... Just a little weirded out, I guess. How did you find this out?"

"I sensed there was something different about you, and Marcus confirmed it after meeting you. He forced a confession from Roger."

"Those guys..." Joey shook his head.

"They meant well," Jared said quietly.

"Oh yeah, I can see that. If Roger hadn't intervened, Chris and Carlos might never have got together again – and I just happened to be in the way. Well, I'm glad it all worked for the best."

He kissed Jared's neck, then rolled on top of him, pressing his naked warmth to Jared's cool skin.

"And maybe if all that hadn't happened I'd never have met you. But I want your blood in me, Jared. I want us to be a part of one another."

Jared cupped Joey's face between his hands and placed a tender kiss on his lips. "You are certain that in your heart and mind, this is what you want?"

"Yes," Joey whispered, brushing Jared's lips with his. "Absolutely certain."

The tip of Jared's tongue traced the outline of Joey's lower lip then slipped sensuously into his mouth. His arms tightened about Joey's body and held him fast. His mouth moved to Joey's throat and he nipped gently at the skin, drawing blood. He could feel the hammering of Joey's heart as his lover's body tensed in his embrace. He bit down, his fangs piercing Joey's flesh. A whimper escaped Joey's lips but he pressed himself deeper into Jared's arms.

A rush of hot, rich blood coated Jared's tongue, filling his senses, dizzying him, and for a few moments he had to fight to control what every vampire was susceptible to—the blood lust—that insidiously subtle but dangerous impulse to drink more than the human heart could endure.

Swallowing Joey's heady essence, Jared licked the wounds closed then raised his wrist to his mouth and bit deep into the vein. "Now drink from me Joey, my love," he whispered, holding his wrist to Joey's lips.

"Drink, and be mine forever."

* * * *

Joey stood on the small balcony off his living room and gazed out at the starlit night. He didn't know quite what he'd expected after drinking Jared's blood. An immediate feeling of immortality, of invincibility perhaps? That hadn't happened, and as Jared had explained later, it would take time—and more of his blood. But what Joey had experienced had nevertheless exceeded all of his expectations. The intense sexual rush, the sense of being physically and mentally bonded to Jared had been overwhelming, the closeness exhilarating, the love he felt for Jared, boundless.

He turned at the sound of movement behind him. Jared was standing in the open door that led out onto the balcony, a glass of red wine in each hand.

"I thought we might celebrate the consummation of our blood bond with a little wine," he said, smiling and handed Joey his glass.

"I like that idea," Joey said, though his smile was rueful. "I just wish we had something a little better than this stuff. I know you're used to so much better."

Jared leant forward and kissed Joey. "The finest wine in the world could never compare with what we have just shared."

Joey nibbled gently on Jared's lower lip. "You know all the right things to say."

"Salud." Jared touched his glass to Joey's. "Here's to our long life together."

After they had sipped the wine, Jared put his arm around Joey and guided him back into the living room.

"How are your parents?" he asked, closing the screen on the glass sliding door.

"Wonderful, thanks to you. Dad sends his regards, and Mom wants to know when you'll come back to visit with me."

"We'll do that soon, I promise."

Joey sat on the couch and pulled Jared down beside him. "Dad's started writing a book. It's called 'Lady of the Night', and Mom says it's really good. He gives her each page to read as he finishes it."

"Lady of the Night," Jared repeated. "It has a nice ring to it."

"Yes it does." Joey smiled, remembering. "When I think about the fact that all those fantastic stories he told Chris and me were actually his memories of her, it just blows my mind."

"And now, everyone will be able to read them." Jared kissed Joey's cheek. "The stories will live forever."

Jared smiled and kissed the tip of Joey's nose. "Very cool, indeed."

Chapter Fifteen

Lazlo Marek stood outside Tommy's apartment waiting for the young fire fighter to come home. What a fool Andrew was, he thought, to keep his romantic ideas about this mortal so much in the front of his mind. He knew Andrew had been trying to reach him, trying to locate his whereabouts, but Marek was older, and in his opinion, wiser than Andrew or his brother, Michael, could have ever been. It wouldn't be long now until he finished what he'd set out to do-destroy both his nephews and take what they never even realised they had.

The fools.

If Michael had only known he and Andrew were heirs to a vast fortune, he would never have been in debt to Fieldman, but then Marek would not have been able to manipulate the brothers as he had. It had been his hope that Andrew would have killed Jared, thus sealing his own fate, but Jared had proved the stronger, or perhaps Andrew had not the will to kill his ex-lover. Infatuation, a fool's game, had weakened him no doubt. Not that it mattered now.

The lure of the young fireman's sweet blood and body would prove too much for Andrew to resist, and he would fall into the trap Marek had set for him. Nor did it matter to Marek that Jared had informed Marcus Verano of his treachery. He had taken precautions that would prevent the other vampires from bringing him to justice. As long as he had Andrew's lover in his grasp, the others would not endanger the young man for Andrew's sake. His plan would work, and by the time they discovered what he'd done, it would be too late.

His eyes narrowed as Tommy turned the corner astride his motor bike, the low growl of the engine the only sound on the darkened, empty street. He watched Tommy dismount then remove his helmet, running his hand through his blond hair as he hurried towards the apartment steps.

Marek probed the young man's mind and found it a jumble of anticipation and exhilaration. Marek smirked.

So, expecting Andrew, are you? What a pity I have to spoil your plans.

He moved like lightning and was on Tommy before the startled man could utter a sound, lifting him off the ground and speeding upwards into the night sky. Tommy cried out and his helmet fell from his nerveless hand as Marek bit deep into his neck, severing the carotid artery and sucking the young man's lifeblood. Swiftly, silently they flew above the clouds, Tommy, now unconscious, carried in the vampire's arms to a place where no one would ever dream of finding them—until Lazlo Marek determined the day and the time.

* * * *

Andrew frowned as he walked through the parking area outside Tommy's apartment. Something was wrong. He couldn't sense Tommy's presence even though he could see his bike parked in its allotted space. An object rolling about on the ground near the bike caught his eye. *Gods*—Tommy's helmet! Andrew stooped to pick it up, feeling the warmth still contained in the padded interior.

In a flash he was at Tommy's door, ringing the bell, rapping hard on the wood.

"Tommy!"

But even as he called out the name, Andrew knew something terrible had happened. Someone had taken Tommy, and whoever it was had to have been strong enough to overpower him. Andrew was sure his young lover's physical prowess would have helped him put up a formidable defence, unless – unless he had never even seen his attacker.

A vampire... Uncle Lazlo.

Andrew's senses blurred as a cold rage swept through him. With an angry growl he launched himself into the air. Aided by his keen night vision he scanned the star-studded skies, but even his powerful eyes could not discern any movement other than the occasional nightbird.

Cursing, he flew onwards until the lights of Los Angeles were left behind. He tried to detect any sign of Tommy's lifeform, but again nothing was revealed to him. He needed help from a more powerful vampire than himself, and this was no time for foolish pride. Marcus and his friends would not deny him the aid he now needed, of that he was certain.

"Marcus..."

His mind reached out to the master vampire's.

"It's Andrew."

The response was immediate.

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"Yes, Andrew. You are troubled."

"I fear my uncle has taken Tommy, the young fireman who saved my life, but his mind has been closed to me since I last saw him at the Vampire Council's chambers."

"Jared told me of your uncle's duplicity. I will contact all my friends and associates to see if anyone can detect your uncle's whereabouts. In the meantime, why don't you come here to be with us? Searching alone when the man could be anywhere will only serve to frustrate you."

"Thank you, Marcus. I can only pray that he hasn't harmed Tommy – that he's simply holding him as a way to coerce me into doing whatever it is he now wants."

Marcus met his friend Joseph's grim expression with one of his own.

"Marek must be insane to think he can get away with this kind of devious ploy."

"There has to be a reason he's willing to go to such lengths," Joseph said. "To have one nephew killed and attempt the murder of the other is the work of a man desperate for something—but what? Andrew says there is no wealth to speak of, and after two hundred years, if there had been, would it not have surfaced long ago? Is it possible Marek simply wants the young man for himself?"

"I don't believe he loves men as we do," Marcus replied. "No, I have to think greed is the explanation. It's possible neither Michael nor Andrew knew of any fortune. If only Marek is privy to it, he could have sealed the information away from his nephews."

"So why then kill them?"

Marcus shrugged. "To stop any challenge if it should come to light that he has taken what is rightly Michael and Andrew's. Ah…" He paused and smiled at Joseph. "André in Argentina bids us good health." He chuckled. "But he wants to know why we're interrupting when he has a beautiful mortal woman in his arms."

Joseph rolled his eyes. "André never changes."

"He has discerned nothing out of the ordinary but will keep his mind open."

They looked to the doorway as Roger entered accompanied by Andrew.

"Found this guy on the doorstep." Roger grinned at them. "Says he knows you."

Marcus frowned. "Roger, your humour is ill-timed. Andrew has some disturbing news. His friend Tommy has been abducted, we think, by Andrew's uncle."

"Sorry." Roger grimaced. "See that's what I get for not reading other people's minds, like you keep telling me not to."

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"That's all right, Roger." Andrew gave him a weak smile then turned to Marcus. "I'm only sorry that I have once again to involve you in my troubles."

"Andrew, let me ask you this," Marcus said carefully. "Have you wondered why your uncle wanted you and Michael out of the way? Is it possible that money or property or some other form of wealth is at the root of the problem? Marek's interest in Tommy cannot be a sexual one, therefore it seems to me that he is holding the young man hostage in order to have you give him something of value."

Andrew looked perplexed.

"Jared suggested that also, but I swear to you Marcus, if there is some kind of family fortune, neither Michael nor I had knowledge of it. Our parents were not poor, but certainly not wealthy. Uncle Lazlo always said the best thing that happened to Michael and I was that even though he changed us against our will, he took us from a life destined to be one of monotony. In addition, if we'd had money to spare, then Michael would not have been in debt, nor would he have had to borrow from Fieldman."

"And Fieldman wouldn't have known Michael was vampire if your uncle had not told him." Marcus paused in thought. "So, it would seem that Marek used your brother's weakness to set him up for destruction, then convinced you that Jared had done the deed. Perhaps he thought that you would kill Jared, or Jared kill you, either way ridding himself of you standing in his way for whatever prize he thinks is in his grasp."

Andrew shuddered. "When I think that in my rage, I almost gave him what he wanted. I am once more filled with remorse for what I put Jared through."

"But that's over with now," Roger said, punching Andrew lightly on the arm. "You and Jared are buddies again, and now we have to find Tommy so you and the hunky fireman can get it on for real."

Marcus sighed. "Roger..."

"I know, I know, my humour is *ill-timed*, but I'm only trying to make Andrew feel better."

Andrew gave Roger's shoulder an affectionate squeeze. "And your attempts are appreciated. If only I knew where my uncle has taken Tommy. If I could but reason with him." "What he has done shows he has lost all reason," Joseph remarked. "But I am curious. If there is in fact a fortune that only he knows about, why has he waited so long to claim it as his own?"

"Perhaps he has only recently discovered it," Marcus suggested.

"If such a fortune exists." Andrew shook his head. "I still can't quite believe it does."

"But if it does," Roger said, his eyes shining, "think of all the fun you and Tommy could have once you get it back from your evil uncle. You could have a ball – or two!"

"Roger."

Chapter Sixteen

Tommy awoke, a deep throbbing pain on the side of his neck. He groaned and tried to sit up, but could not.

Jeez, I'm so weak. What the hell happened?

The last thing he remembered was walking to his apartment. He'd wanted to get there before Andrew arrived, tidy up a bit, take a shower. He had been excited by Andrew's phone call saying he was back in town and could they meet?

Could they ever!

But now? He looked around him at the strange surroundings.

Where am I? Why can't I move?

"Ah, I see you have finally awakened."

Tommy managed to turn his head and peer into the dimly lit room. The voice, heavily accented, came from a man reclining in an armchair near where Tommy lay.

"Who're you?" Tommy could barely manage a whisper. His throat ached and his mouth felt like it was stuffed with cotton.

"I am Lazlo Marek, Andrew's uncle. Has he mentioned me?"

"I don't think so."

Andrew's uncle?

Tommy mulled over that information. "But why am I here? Where's Andrew?"

Marek sniggered. "Still flying about in circles, I expect, looking for you. Of course he's not going to find you, until I am ready for him."

A prickle of anger mingled with fear stabbed at the base of Tommy's skull.

"What d'you mean?"

Marek rose from his armchair and moved into Tommy's line of vision. "You don't know what Andrew is, do you, mortal?"

"You mean what he does for a living?" Tommy stared up at Marek, at the stern hawklike features. "No, I don't think we got into that. And what's this *mortal* shit?"

Marek's chuckle was sinister, and Tommy shivered involuntarily as he sensed a kind of madness in the sound.

"You are human," Marek rasped. "Andrew is not. You are a living being, Andrew is one of the undead – he is vampire."

"What?" Tommy glared at Marek. "You are one stupid asshole if you expect me to believe that bullshit. There's no such things as—Whoa!" Tommy's eyes widened as Marek slid onto the couch beside him and bared his fangs.

"Hey, man, aren't you a bit old to be playing with those phoney Halloween teeth?"

Marek gave a dry chuckle. "I can assure you these are not phoney." He leant over Tommy and nipped at his neck.

"Ow!" Tommy glared up at him. "Cut that out!" He tried to raise his arms to push the man away from him, but found he could not move a muscle.

Marek's cold eyes gleamed with satisfaction. "I have already drunk from you," he hissed.

Tommy could not avoid flinching when Marek's fingers pressed painfully against the place on Tommy's neck where he'd bitten him.

"Andrew has too, I could sense it. But he didn't tell you what he is. He wanted to spare you that. He has *feelings* for you," he added with a smirk. "You, the brave fire fighter who saved his life."

Tommy's memory snapped back to a moment when he and Andrew had been in bed together and he'd teased Andrew about calling him a 'mortman' after they'd made love...

Jesus, he'd been about to call me a mortal. It's true what this moron just said, Andrew's a fuckin' vampire! Oh, God...

He tried to curl his right hand into a fist in preparation to slug Marek on the jaw, but again he could barely lift it off the couch.

Still so weak!

Marek's grin was fiendish. "Your strength will not return until I will it so. You can forget any ideas you might have of acting the stalwart hero. But don't worry, I have no designs on your body. As handsome as Andrew may find you, you are merely a mortal man to me, and have no sexual allure."

"Thank fuck for that," Tommy rasped. "You are definitely not my type either."

"Nor will Andrew be, I suspect." Marek's voice was cold with satisfaction. "Now that you know his true nature."

Tommy was silent, thinking how crazy he'd been about Andrew, how he couldn't wait to see him again, kiss him, hold him, feel that hard body pressed to his—but now? The guy was a vampire. The undead. A monster he'd read about and seen in movies, tearing people's throats out, always ending up being staked, or burned, or—but try as he might he just couldn't equate any of that with Andrew. The man who had made love to him with such incredible passion, whose kisses were the greatest he had ever known. No, it just couldn't be true.

It *wasn't* true, dammit!

"You're lying," he said, through clenched teeth. "This is all some kind of trick. What's the real story here?"

Marek laughed without mirth. He stood and walked away from Tommy, returning a moment later with a framed photograph in his hand.

"Take a good look at this," he said, sinking onto the couch again. "Tell me what you see."

Tommy squinted at the photo. It was old, not even black and white, more creamy looking.

Sepia, I think that's what it's called.

Standing alongside another young man, Andrew smiled happily at him from the picture, and Tommy felt a pang of warmth blossom in his chest.

He looks so young and beautiful...

"It's Andrew and some other dude."

"His brother Michael, now deceased." Marek said. "Taken in Budapest two years before they were changed. Before *I* changed them. When that picture was taken, Andrew was twenty-three, and the year was eighteen-hundred-and-five."

"You are one sick son-of-a-bitch," Tommy muttered. "You changed them, made them vampires? What? They asked you for this favour?"

Marek's eyes flared with amusement.

"No. They struggled quite a bit in the beginning, I'm afraid. I had to wean them into their new existence, nurture them if you will, although I fear that now the trust Andrew had in me will have diminished somewhat." He laughed again as if this was something that delighted him. "Now he knows I had his brother killed and arranged the attempt on his life – the fire you rescued him from." "God, but you're a fuckin' bastard!" Tommy silently willed his strength to return to his body so he could take this moron apart. "What did they ever do to you that you'd want to kill them?"

"They have something I want. Something I cannot have while Andrew still lives."

"You mean like money?"

"More money than you could dream of, young Tommy." Marek rose and threw the framed photograph on top of a nearby bureau. "A fortune languishing in a Swiss bank for over two hundred years, untouched, and gaining in value every year."

"And it's Andrew's?"

Marek scowled. "The fool doesn't even know of its existence. His parents *died*, quite young. Andrew and Michael were just boys—it was unfortunate."

"You killed them, didn't you?" Tommy snapped, in a moment of intuition. "How come you didn't take the money and run then?"

"I was unaware that their grandfather had opened a trust for the boys after their parents died. The old fool died of a heart attack before he could tell anyone what he'd done. It wasn't even mentioned in his will. It wasn't until quite recently that some enterprising clerk in the bank came across the account, quite by accident. The bank manager wrote to Michael and Andrew to inform them of their good fortune."

"I thought you said —"

"I intercepted the letter while I was staying at Michael's apartment in New York," Marek said, anticipating Tommy's remark.

"Some guest you are." Tommy curled his upper lip. "Remind me never to have you stay over."

Marek chuckled. "Quite the comedian. Tell me, young Tommy, are you as unafraid as you seem to be, or simply arrogant?"

Tommy shrugged. "I'd be a fool not to be afraid of someone like you—not only a vampire, but a homicidal maniac. I could lie here and piss my pants, but I won't give you that satisfaction."

"Good, that's a rather expensive couch you're lying on."

"Har, har..." Tommy bared his teeth at Marek.

"So, what happens now? You waitin' for Andrew to fly to my rescue? 'Cause I don't think that's gonna happen, seeing as how he doesn't even know where I am. And even if he did, what makes you think he'd want to?"

"Because I can read his mind, Tommy, and you are uppermost in his thoughts. I told you he has feelings for you." Marek grimaced. "You have replaced Jared in his affections."

"Jared? That's the guy I talked to when Andrew got hurt."

"They were lovers once." Marek paused as if listening to something, or someone. "Interesting..."

"What?" Tommy tried to sit up, but still his body wouldn't respond.

"It seems I may have to hurry along my plans a little." He knelt at Tommy's side. "This will hurt, I'm afraid."

He grabbed a handful of Tommy's hair and turned the young man's head, exposing the long column of his neck.

"No," Tommy whispered. "Don't..."

Marek bit down, hard and fast into the corded flesh of Tommy's neck. Tommy groaned, too weak to resist. More of his strength drained from him, along with his blood. He struggled to keep his eyes open, but his vision dimmed. He tried to cry out, but no sound except a strange gurgling came from his throat.

Oh Jesus, he's killing me. I'm dying...

The pain again, this time sharper, deeper, draining him.

Oh, dear God, don't let me die…please, don't let me die…

He sank into oblivion. His last thought was that Andrew had not come to save him.

Marek sprang to his feet as the door behind him was blown off its hinges and crashed into the middle of the floor.

"Uncle!"

Andrew stood framed in the doorway, his raven hair wild and disarrayed, his face livid with rage. For a second his ice blue gaze fell on Tommy's body lying still and silent on the couch, then immediately back to his uncle's defiant expression.

"You... murderer. Your final death is upon you!"

"You cannot destroy me," Marek snarled. "I created you. You are bound to me for all time."

Andrew stepped into the room.

"I disavow my loyalty to you, Uncle Lazlo. For the crimes you have committed I have the Council's permission to end your existence."

A flicker of fear crossed Marek's face, then he laughed. "You might *try*, nephew, but don't forget who is the more powerful here."

"Have you changed him?"

Once again Andrew's gaze settled on Tommy's inert form.

"You interrupted me. He will die if – "

"You know it is now forbidden to change a mortal without his or her permission, even in the most dire of circumstances."

"Oh, la-di-da," Marek sneered. "Don't spout that pretentious Marcus Verano philosophical claptrap at me. But tell me, nephew – how did you know where to find me?"

Andrew's smile was enigmatic. "You didn't really think you could escape the combined mind bonding of Marcus and Joseph Meyer, did you? You thought to trick us by staying in Los Angeles, but it soon became apparent to them that you had not left the city. Your secret penthouse hideaway is no longer a secret, Uncle."

Marek's move would have been a blur to a human eye, but Andrew was even faster. In a flash, he was standing in front of the couch where Tommy lay, preventing Marek from reaching the dying man.

"Impressive," Marek grunted. "Your skills have improved. You came alone. Why?"

"I am not alone, but this is between you and me." Andrew moved towards his uncle. "You had Michael murdered for some nefarious reason I can only guess to be greed. Now you must pay the price for your treachery."

Andrew launched himself at Marek, lifting him off the ground by his throat. Marek screamed and brought both fists down on Andrew's skull, stunning him momentarily, causing him to stagger backwards. Marek followed up his blows with a kick to Andrew's chest that sent him reeling against a wall with enough impetus to crack the plaster.

"Fool," Marek muttered, advancing on Andrew to finish him off.

He grabbed a handful of Andrew's hair and smacked his head against the wall with brutal force. The punch Marek landed on Andrew's face would have shattered bones in a human jaw. Andrew brought his hand up hard under Marek's chin, at the same time pushing him back with all his strength, sending his uncle spinning across the room. Marek's legs

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caught the edge of the couch and he sprawled awkwardly on his back. Andrew was on him in an instant, straddling his chest, his hands anchored around his uncle's throat.

Desperately, Marek twisted his head back and forth. His hands wrenched at Andrew's fingers, trying to break the death grip on his throat

"Andrew, don't," he gasped. The whites of his eyes turned red as blood vessels burst under the pressure Andrew was inflicting on him. "Andrew! I will share it all with you..."

"Share what?"

"A fortune your grandfather left to you and Michael." Marek could barely speak, his voice no more than a croak. "More than two hundred years ago. Think of it, Andrew. It's worth millions, more than enough for you to share with me."

Andrew's lethal grip tightened around Marek's throat.

"Yet it was not enough for you to share with Michael and me. You are despicable, Uncle, and for what you have done to Michael, and now to Tommy, you will die."

Marek's eyes bulged and his lips peeled back in a terrible grimace. Summoning all his strength, he levitated from the floor then flipped over, driving Andrew onto his back with sickening force.

Andrew's grip on Marek's throat did not lessen. Straining against his uncle's formidable power he rose from the floor, propelled the man across the room, and with one superhuman thrust, sent him hurtling through the large plate glass window behind the couch.

Without waiting to see if Marek would use his powers to survive the fall, Andrew rushed to Tommy's side. Kneeling beside him, he felt for a pulse at his throat.

Still there, thank the gods. Weak, but there.

"Tommy, can you hear me? It's Andrew, Tommy."

The young fire fighter's eyes fluttered open. "Andrew..." His voice was barely audible. "You came to save me, after all."

Andrew took Tommy's hands in his. "Tommy, listen to me. You have been drained of almost all your blood. You will die, if you do not drink from me. Do you understand?"

"You – you're really a vampire?"

"Yes, Tommy, I'm sorry, but explanations can come later."

He bit into his wrist and held the bleeding wound to Tommy's lips.

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"Drink from me and be healed. Don't worry..." Andrew allowed a wry smile to curve his lips. "You will not become vampire."

The tip of Tommy's tongue poked at the dark red blood that pooled on Andrew's wrist, then seemingly encouraged by the sweet taste, he began to gulp it down. His eyes never left Andrew's as he drank, and Andrew felt his own slowly beating heart quicken with the power of that gaze.

Tommy still couldn't believe what had happened, what *was* happening. Everything Andrew's uncle had told him was true. Andrew was a vampire, and he was lying here drinking Andrew's blood as if it was the most normal thing in the world. This was crazy, but what was even crazier, was what he felt in his heart, in his entire being for... for this *vampire*.

He knew he was in love with Andrew – despite everything, he was in love with a vampire! Oh fuck, what was he going to do about this?

He gazed into the ice blue depths of Andrew's beautiful eyes and saw himself reflected there, greedily sucking at Andrew's wrist. He should be filled with revulsion, he should be pushing Andrew out of the way, running from this room and never looking back. But he could not, and it wasn't just because he was still weak as a kitten—though he could feel some of his strength returning. No, it was because he didn't want to.

A man in love is never a wise man, his mother had once told him, and at that moment, he couldn't help but agree.

And man, what Andrew's blood was doing to him. He might not be able to take on a charging rhino yet, but the way his cock was throbbing and his heart was pounding, he most definitely was up for a first-class fuck!

He watched as Andrew withdrew his wrist then licked at the wound, his eyes widening as any trace of teeth bites disappeared along with the blood. Andrew lowered his head and kissed Tommy's mouth gently. Without hesitation, Tommy opened to Andrew, tracing the length of Andrew's tongue with his own. A long sensual shudder coursed through his body, and finding he could now move his arms, he wrapped them around Andrew and held him tight, grinding their crotches together.

A disturbance at the open door had them pulling away from one another, and Andrew leaping to his feet to defend Tommy from any further danger. A struggling Marek, flanked by Jared and Marcus holding him securely by his arms, entered the room. "He was attempting to fly away but we intercepted him," Marcus explained.

"Who're these guys?" Tommy asked.

"Good friends," Andrew told him.

"More vampires?"

"I'm afraid so, but there is only one who wished you harm, and he is no danger to you any longer."

Tommy groaned and fell back on the couch.

This could not be happening!

Andrew stared at his uncle for a long moment.

"I cannot kill you now as I intended," he said quietly. "I will leave it up to the Vampire Council to carry out the sentence."

Marcus and Jared released their grips on Marek, and the vampire hissed and threw them all a look of hatred. They knew he understood what that meant. He was free to go, but the Council would send an assassin to hunt him down and execute him—and there was no escaping the one sent to carry out the ruling.

No one ever had.

"Andrew..." Marek's bone-white face seemed to grow older as he stared at his nephew. "I beg of you, have the Council call off the assassin. I am the only family you have left."

Andrew shook his head.

"You are wrong, Uncle. Here, in this room, is my family. The men you tried to destroy with your evil plans mean more to me than my existence. You have proven your unworthiness to be called a part of my family. Now go, before I forget my vow not to harm you. The sight of you sickens me."

"So be it." Marek sneered at him. "You had better hope that the assassin finds me quickly, for until then you would do well to take note of every night shadow that comes near."

With a final look of hatred at Andrew, Marek fled from the apartment.

For a long moment after Marek's words, silence filled the room.

"How is your friend?" Jared asked finally, in his native Hungarian.

"Fortunately, my uncle didn't have time to change him. An infusion of my blood brought him back from death."

Tommy sat up and swung his legs off the couch, trying to stand.

"What are you guys saying? I can't understand that lingo."

"My apologies." Jared walked over to the couch. "I am Jared. We have spoken on the phone."

"Oh, yeah." After a moment's hesitation, Tommy took the proffered hand. "Are you really a doctor?"

"Not really, but I think that now you understand how we were able to help Andrew."

"Yeah... *that.*" Tommy shook his head as he looked at the three vampires. "You sure know how to liven up a guy's day."

Marcus coughed politely. "Well, now that you are both safe, Jared and I will take our leave. I am sure you have many things to discuss." He touched Jared's arm. "Come, Jared."

Jared nodded, but paused long enough to embrace Andrew before leaving with Marcus.

Andrew turned to smile encouragingly at Tommy, and couldn't resist probing gently at the young fire fighter's mind. He was relieved to encounter only confusion. Thankfully there was no fear, only uncertainty.

"What?" Tommy asked.

"How do you feel now?"

"You mean physically? I'm great. I guess that *transfusion* you gave me really worked. Mentally, that's something else. Looks like there's a lot to get used to here. I mean, it's not every day a guy falls in love with a vampire – fuckin' hot looking though he may be."

Tommy stood up, swaying just a little.

Andrew stepped forward and took him in his arms.

"You are in love with me?"

"Yeah, am I crazy?"

"Totally. But I'm very glad you are – crazy, and in love with me."

Their kiss was long and sweet, then Tommy said, "We should get out of here. I want to make love to you, but not here. Trouble is," he added as Andrew nodded, "I don't have my bike."

"We don't need one." Andrew's smile was teasing. "Are you ready for a little adventure?"

"Another one? Hey!" Tommy laughed as Andrew swept him up in his arms and walked towards the broken window.

"Wait a minute, what are you doing?"

"Taking you home."

"But – oh, shit, you can't mean it! Whoa!"

Tommy was strangely silent on the short flight to his apartment. He kept his eyes shut and his face buried in the crook of Andrew's neck, not looking up until Andrew murmured, "We're here."

"Don't you dare tell anyone I was scared shitless," Tommy pleaded as Andrew released him, setting him down on the balcony outside his living room.

"I wouldn't dream of it," Andrew said, chuckling. "And who would believe it anyway? My big, brave fireman, scared of heights?"

"Just wait 'til I get you inside," Tommy growled.

"I can't wait."

Chapter Seventeen

No sooner had they entered the apartment than Tommy grabbed Andrew and laid one serious kiss after another on the vampire's lips.

"You are fucking incredible. Have I told you that before? Wait..." He sniffed at his armpit. "Okay, as much as I want you naked and all over me, I seriously need a shower. Don't I smell rank to you?"

"Yes, but I don't mind."

"Well, I do." Tommy pouted. "And you could've said, 'No, you smell great', just to spare my feelings."

"I'm sorry." Andrew grinned. "You smell great ... "

Tommy raised an eyebrow. "Vampires as comedians? No, that's too weird."

Andrew assumed a suitably chastened expression.

"May I shower with you, perhaps massage yours shoulders? Undo the stress you have suffered?"

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "Are you laughin' at me?"

Andrew pulled Tommy into his arms. "Not at you, Tommy. I intend to laugh *with* you, cry with you, love you, hold you, make love to you for the next aeon or two, if you will let me."

Tommy kissed Andrew's neck. "Oh, I'll let you do all that, and I'll let you talk that way to me forever too. But right now, I gotta shower. You're right, I smell rank."

"Even rank, you smell better than most humans," Andrew said, not letting him free of his embrace.

"Really? Some of us smell bad to you?"

Andrew nodded. "It is eradicated when a vampire is attracted to a human. Something in the pheromones I expect."

"Wow... Who knew?" Tommy grinned. "Something more for us to explore—after our shower."

He grabbed Andrew's hand and hustled him into the bathroom.

"Hey, where did my clothes go?" He looked at Andrew who was also naked, gloriously so. "Is there nothing you guys can't do?"

"Some, but we'll talk about that another time." He made a small gesture and the shower spray hit the glass. "After you..."

Laughing, Tommy dragged Andrew into the shower with him. He ducked his head under the hot spray, shaking out his blond hair like a dog would. Andrew's arms surrounded him and held their naked bodies pressed tightly together. Tommy's heart soared as Andrew's mouth took his with one of his magical kisses that went on and on, leaving Tommy breathless, panting and willing for it to never end.

Andrew soaped his hands then slid them over Tommy's wet skin, caressing the taut muscles, his soothing touch evaporating the tension from Tommy's body, bringing him a sensuous euphoria he'd never known.

Andrew turned him around in his arms, his lips tracing the curve of Tommy's neck, his hard shaft wedged in the cleft between the round globes of Tommy's butt. Tommy pushed against Andrew's arousal with a long sigh of happy anticipation.

"Yeah, baby... Fuck me. Fuck me good and hard."

He shuddered as one long finger penetrated him, then another, passing over his prostate, making his cock jump and leak pre cum. He leant back against the solid wall of Andrew's body, turning his head to find Andrew's mouth, licking the full lips that parted to let him in.

He felt the broad head of Andrew's cock nudge at his opening then push and slide inside him. Tommy gasped, his body arching into Andrew's as the initial burning pain, morphed into red hot pleasure. Each pass Andrew made over Tommy's sweet spot brought lightning jolts of exquisite bliss coursing through Tommy's body. Andrew caressed Tommy's chest, fingers teasing his already hard nipples, then sliding down the expanse of smooth muscular flesh to grip Tommy's rock hard erection.

Andrew's fangs nipped at Tommy's throat, drawing blood. He let it pool on his tongue then drew Tommy's mouth to his, plunging with a demanding relentlessness inside Tommy's wet heat, letting him taste his own blood mixed with Andrew's saliva.

The effect was instantaneous as Andrew knew it would be.

Tommy's body lurched and spasmed in his arms and he let out a long muffled moan of rapture. He sucked on Andrew's tongue, devouring it, relishing the pungent taste, letting their kiss sweep him away, a wild primal kiss that sent his senses reeling, had him falling mindlessly into a world where only they existed and from which he never wanted to leave.

Andrew's powerful hips thrust his cock harder, deeper inside Tommy, one hand pumping Tommy's cock to their quickening rhythm. Tommy's eyes rolled back in his head as he gave himself up to the most intense pleasure he had ever known. A great cry of triumph was torn from him as he felt the hot surge of Andrew's semen inside him.

"Oh, God, yes. I feel you comin' inside me, Andrew. Feels so fuckin' good."

At those words, Andrew rammed in harder and a second and third wave of hot cum jetted inside Tommy, bringing him his own climax. It swept over him and he came in a sudden wild rush, his cum gushing over Andrew's hand and splattering against the shower wall. For a moment he thought his legs would give out. He felt completely and utterly drained—but this time, in the best possible way.

Andrew's gentle lips moving over Tommy's neck and ear, his hard cock still pulsing deep inside him, brought Tommy the greatest sense of well-being he'd ever known.

"Oh, man, Andrew," Tommy panted. "You are incredible."

He wriggled his ass around Andrew's cock.

"I could stay here forever like this, if it wasn't for the fact this hot water is starting to shrivel me up like a damn prune. Not a look I'm goin' for." He turned off the faucet then leant back for another of Andrew's kisses. "Mmm... Do all vampires kiss like you do?"

Andrew gave Tommy's bottom a playful slap as he eased himself out Tommy's heat. "You think I'd allow you to go around sampling kisses from other vampires?"

Tommy chuckled and turned in Andrew's arms. "I don't think many would measure up quite like you." He put his lips on Andrew's. "And don't worry, my vampire, I have no intention of sampling any kisses, 'cept more of yours."

* * * *

Later, lying in each other's arms, Tommy asked, "So, what happens now? How do I introduce you to my buddies as my boyfriend, *the vampire*?"

"You don't, for obvious reasons."

"I was just kidding," Tommy said, kissing Andrew's cheek. "I know there'll be some problems with us dating –"

"Tommy." Andrew took his hand and held it tight. "I have never had a relationship with a mortal man before. I know the difficulties ahead of us are many, but not insurmountable. There are vampires who have had longstanding love affairs with mortals, some lasting over one hundred years."

"Huh?" Tommy gave him a wide-eyed stare. "But how's that possible? We don't live that long."

"Vampire blood extends a human lifespan. My blood has already given you several more years of life, barring accidents of course. Mortals who become a vampire's forever companion remain young in body and mind due to a regular infusion of vampire blood. Not only would you live much longer, but we would be bound to one another forever, if we both wish it."

"Forever companions," Tommy murmured. "I like the sound of that."

"Do you?" Andrew stroked Tommy's cheek, his eyes locked on his lover's. "Forever is-"

"Forever," Tommy said. "Look, I know we haven't known each other for very long, and the first time we met, well, I hope I didn't give you the wrong impression. I'm not the kind of guy that drops his pants for any man who asks just 'cause he's handsome and sexy and... Oh, hell you know what I mean, Andrew. If being with you means forever, I want that-of course, you have to want that too. Do you?"

"Szeretlek, Tommy..."

"There you go, swearing at me again," Tommy teased. "What did you just say?"

"I said, I love you, Tommy."

"Then, szer... swere... Oh, hell!" Tommy rolled on top of Andrew. "You'll just have to put up with, I love you. I'll never get my tongue round that lingo of yours."

Andrew grinned up at him. "Then it's just as well we can find other things for your tongue to do."

"Amen to that," Tommy said with a sigh as he started licking Andrew's neck.

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One month later

"It would seem our circle of friends is growing exponentially," Marcus remarked as he and Roger poured drinks for their guests.

"Come again?" Roger paused mid-pour. "What was that word you just used?"

"Exponentially. It means rapidly increasing, Roger."

Roger sighed. "You read too much. You need to come to the movies more often with Micah and me. Now we have Chris and Joey joining us, and Tommy just told me he likes the occasional horror flick—so I guess our movie club is also growing expo—whatever you said."

Marcus chuckled. "I will do most anything in the world for you, Roger, except go to see a horror movie with you."

"You don't know what you're missing," Roger sing-songed. "And there's a new one opening next month—"

"No, thank you, Roger. Joseph and I will exclude ourselves from your movie-going party if you don't mind."

Roger sighed dramatically. "Well..." He decided to change the subject and looked around the spacious living room artfully lit by numerous art-deco lamps. "I'm glad we managed to get Ron and Jean-Claude to come over tonight. Ron's always so darned busy managing that restaurant of his. All that's missing are Andorra and Tony," he remarked, referring to their two friends who lived in Spain.

"And don't forget Bernard and Pietro," Marcus reminded him.

"Right, but they'll be here next month on vacation from the Vatican, so we can have another party for them." He laughed lightly. "If only old Benny knew what some of his staff gets up to."

He picked up a tray filled with glasses of wine and headed for their group of friends all engaged in animated conversation.

"Here we go, gents and vampires. Wine from our very own Christopher's very own vineyard. If you don't like it, you know who to blame."

"*Roger*..." Marcus' pained tone from behind him only made Roger laugh.

"Thanks, Roger," Chris said, grinning. "I'll have to tell my folks to use that as an advertising slogan."

"Well, Salud, everyone..." Marcus raised his glass. "To our friends, old and new..."

"Some very old," Roger muttered into his glass, and received a nudge from Micah.

"Welcome, Tommy," Marcus continued, ignoring Roger. "We have to thank you for saving Andrew's life, and we wish you and Andrew, Jared and Joey eternal happiness in your new-found love."

"Beautifully said." Roger winked at Marcus. "But then, you always had a golden tongue."

After the toast, Joey said shyly, "I think I'd like to propose another toast."

He looked around the group and marvelled for a moment at the strangeness of it mortals and vampires side by side—and yet it all seemed so right. "I—I just wanted say that my life has been changed in the last few weeks—"

"No kidding," Roger said dryly.

Marcus frowned. "Roger..."

Joey laughed then continued, "And I've had to do some growing up really fast to keep up with it. I want to thank Jared for bringing my dad back to my mom and me. I really can't begin to tell you what that means to me—it's a miracle, really. And I want to wish Andrew and Tommy well. They've been to hell and back, and I'm sure Tommy has had the same queasy moments as me, when I think what could go wrong, how all this could suddenly be taken from us, but then I think, hey, that's true of any friendship—*relationship*, isn't it?

"All I know is I love you, Jared, my vampire, and from the look on Tommy and Andrew's faces, I know they love each other too—so I'd like to drink to that, and to echo Marcus' wish for us. Here's to eternal happiness."

He lifted his face to Jared's to accept his kiss.

"I'll drink to that," Tommy said, his arm around Andrew's waist. He drew his lover in close and planted a loud kiss on his lips.

"Hey, you guys..." He grinned at his fellow mortals, Joey, Chris and Ron then raised his glass. "Feel the love, guys, feel the love!"

"Oh, I'll bet you'll be feeling more than the love after you leave here tonight."

No one had to look round to know who'd just spoken.

"Roger..."

About the Author

J.P. Bowie was born in Scotland and toured British theatres in numerous musical shows including Stephen Sondheim's Company.

Emigrated to the States and worked in Las Vegas, Nevada for the magicians Siegfried and Roy as their Head of Wardrobe at the Mirage Hotel. Currently living in Henderson, Nevada.

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