



Vampire Christmas
by
K.L. Bjork

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Vampire Christmas

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Chapter 1

"Why did they have to pick Christmastime," Angel muttered under her breath. The freezing wind whipped under her heavy coat. She tried pulling it tighter to her body, but the cold always found a way inside to curl next to her skin. Her teeth chattered, her fingers tingled, and her toes...her toes felt like if someone touched them they would shatter like glass.

The snow had stopped an hour ago, but looking up at the clouds against the coming night, they still held a threatening element. She had to force her feet to move through the six inches that had already fallen on the sidewalk as she made her way to the shop, A Christmas Night. Once inside, she had to find a way to steal the formula for the glass ornaments the owner made.

"Damn it," she said as her foot slipped against the ice. Looking to the sky, she prayed, "Please, no more snow. Just let me get my sister back. Then it can snow all it wants."

The video had arrived by special carrier first thing that morning. When she popped it into her VCR her younger sister's face appeared huge before her eyes. Instantly, she knew something was wrong. Abby's dark blond hair looked oily and dirty, something her sister would never allow. Her mascara smudged under her blue eyes and one wet streak raced down her pale cheek. Angel's heart all but stopped.

"Angel," Abby's voice sounded hoarse as it shook with fear, "you have to steal a formula. A very special formula! Or they will," a heavy sob rocked her body, "or they will kill me."

Those awful words still echoed in her mind. Abby said she had forty-eight hours to steal the formula for a special glass that only the owner of A Christmas Night possessed.

Angel shook her head in confusion. What could be so special about this glass that someone would kidnap her sister for it, she wondered? Not that it mattered. The only thing that concerned her was getting her little sister back. Not who kidnapped her, or why he wanted this particular glass. None of it mattered, except getting the formula.

Abby was the last remaining member of her family. They often vegged out on the couch together during the Christmas season, letting the

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holiday cheer pass them quietly by. Together they would stock up on all the necessities that would last them through the month of December and cut themselves off from the world. It was a time for them to mourn the loss of their parents, who had died in a car explosion right before their big Christmas celebration three years ago.

The year after their death, Angel and Abby had tried to celebrate, but it only conjured up hurtful images of their once happy family, so they both decided to put away the Christmas tree and hibernate until the New Year, it soon became a tradition. It was something they both accepted not knowing how to get past their grief.

Now, Angel was fighting the mad rush of people to get the one thing that would save her sister. Whoever these people were who thought they could abuse them this way had another thing coming. She hoped getting the formula would be easy, so she could get her sister back and escape to another state where these bastards would not be able to find them again.

"God, I hate Christmas." She reached up, pulling her hat further down around her ears. The wind whipped wildly around her legs as if seeking a way to breach the heaviness of her clothes. The shop was not much further. Window after window full of Christmas displays passed on her left. She refused to look at them. The Christmas trees, the lights, the garland, everything made her cringe. This would all be over soon was a mantra created in her head.

A few steps from the door, she pushed her blond hair over her shoulder, pasted on a big sweet smile, and blinked her eyes a few times to give them an innocent effect. *Just another job*, she thought, trying to get into the roll. Once inside, she could say she needed to use the bathroom, then slip off into the office and quickly search the files. That is, if the owner wasn't occupying his domain.

Rethinking her plan, Angel decided it might be best to see how far she could get tonight and get a feel for the layout of the shop. Later, after the shop closed, she could slip inside and search the files.

Reaching out to grab the knob, she inhaled deeply and slowly exhaled as she passed over the threshold. Instantly, cinnamon and spice assaulted her senses making her fight to keep from sneezing as the scents accosted her.

"For Abby's sake," she whispered to herself as she let the symbols of Christmas fill her vision.

The door jingled as it slipped back into place behind her, Christmas tunes played over a speaker. For a moment, she allowed the warmth of

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the shop to soak through her clothing and gently caress her skin. Ahhh! She found herself wanting to say. "*Warmth*," her body replied, causing her to relax.

"May I help you?"

With a start, she grabbed her chest and turned to face the saleswoman.

The little woman was at least four inches shorter than her 5'3 frame; her hair, pulled back into a tight bun, was the whitest white, much like the fallen snow that blanketed the street. Wrinkles characterized her face and a wide smile and loving eyes looked expectantly at her.

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean to sneak up on you."

Angel looked at the little grandmotherly figure, resisting the urge to roll her eyes. Shaking her head, the tips of her lips curled up into a soft smile.

"No. It's quite alright." Angel lowered her voice, her smile growing. "I was just so caught up in the shopping list that I have running through my mind that I didn't hear you. Totally my fault." She threw in a little giggle at the end knowing it made her appear less threatening.

"Who are you looking to buy for in here? We have all sorts of lovely gifts. My son said just the other day, Mama, he's always called me mama, never mom or mother, always mama. Well, anyway, he told me the other day that he hopes I bring home one of Dante's newest ornaments. They have prisms on the inside, you see."

Angel just nodded her head as the old woman took her around the shop pointing to this ornament or that ornament. Each one had a special story, a unique tale that she told in agonizing detail.

Angel fought the urge to flee the building and never look back, but she kept reminding herself that she had a job to do.

"Um. Ma'am? May I use your ladies' room?" She managed to work up a blush and cheered herself, *Bravo!*

"Sure deary, it's in the back, second door on your right. I'll just wait right here for you." Angel noted an odd glint in the saleswoman's eye, before the door jingled and another customer walked in. She excused herself and raced to the new customer, eager for a sale.

"Perfect." Angel said under her breath. Pushing through the back door, she located the bathroom but did not enter. Instead, she walked a few more feet further down the hall, looking back to make sure no one had appeared, and stood in front of the door marked OFFICE.

Reaching out she grabbed the knob, silently twisting, praying that it was unlocked. Her heart pounded against her chest, the hallway was

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deathly quiet. The threat of the old woman discovering her was at the front of her mind. Hopefully, the new customer will keep her busy for a while.

One swift turn and the door slipped open.

Pushing through the door, the room appeared very dark. Gray shadows outlined the bookcases along the wall. Before entering the room, she looked down the hall once more then slipped inside closing the door softly behind her.

When the door clicked into the place, she felt along the wall for the light switch and flipped it up; the room erupted in light and immediately she knew she was not alone. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end as her heart pounded, one solid beat against her chest. She refused to turn around.

A large hand reached around her, easily covering her hand that still rested on the light switch. His touch heated her skin. Angel's body froze in place. Inhaling deeply, she allowed the oxygen to infuse her muscles, to relax them, so that her mind would stay focused.

Her hand throbbed inside the warm cocoon of his palm. He squeezed lightly indicating to her that there was no way she would win if she decided to fight. She tried to relax, focusing on the fact that other situations she had found herself in had been far worse than this.

Angel took stock of their positions. He was not touching her, but the warmth of his chest at her back seeped through her clothes, right through the multiple layers. How odd.

She jumped as his scorching breath brushed across the skin of her ear. The heat radiated down her neck traveling to parts of her body she tried to stay unaware of. She could smell fragrance of exotic flowers, drifting up from his clothes, accompanied by a pure male odor that screamed at her to let down her barriers. Something about this man made her body burned to be touched.

Angel found herself easing back into a hard chest, shocked at how unmovable it felt. His muscles danced against her body, sending more heat racing across her flesh. Moisture seeped into her lacy underwear, making her desire undeniable. Angel squeezed her thighs together to dispel the ache that started between them.

"It is not often you mortals come of your own free will."

She was too caught up in the feel of his hands for his words to register. The room grew hot, or maybe it was just her who was hot. A drop of sweat raced down the path between her breasts, her nipples pushed against the silk of her blouse. His hand still held hers in his hot

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grip. Slowly, he moved their joined hands away from the wall bringing hers to rest at her side.

She wanted to turn around and sink into his chest, to let his arms settle around her shoulders. She needed to get away from this man that was awakening her body from its long slumber. Angel broke free and turned around, quickly realizing that it was not the smartest thing to do. His eyes caught hers, holding them to his dark gaze.

"Oh. I'm sorry. I was just on my way..." She cringed at the seductive whisper of her voice. It sounded husky and passion filled even to her own ears. Angel tried to remember why she was here, but his lips filled her vision, pushing all other thoughts out of her mind.

"Shh," he said, placing one warm finger to her lips. "You are beautiful. I would have chosen you, had I seen you first."

He ran his finger lightly over her lips, slowly over her chin, and down the line of her neck. Chill bumps erupted down her spine, making her shiver. Long pent up passion flooded her veins. She had built a wall after her ex-fiancé betrayed her, now this man's touch battered her emotional walls.

His finger continued gliding down until he parted her shirt, leaving her breathless for his next move. After a moment he continued slowly over her flesh before resting directly in the valley between her breasts. Angel's skin was on fire where he touched her.

"What are you doing?" Angel asked, hesitantly.

"I'm admiring your...neck."

At his words, she self consciously rubbed at the exposed flesh. His eyes locked with hers; they were so dark she thought she could see her own reflection. The pupil and the iris faded together, outlined with a ring of gold.

His eyes questioned why she covered her flesh to him and her hand dropped away obediently. The man exuded power that you could not deny.

Angel fought to remain calm. She had been in more precarious situations, this was nothing. Once, shortly after her father past away, and she had taken up being a professional thief, she was caught stealing a piece of art. The owner had taken one look at her curvaceous body and thought he would have his way with her. He had almost succeeded, until she kicked him so hard in the balls she thought they would come out of his mouth. She had gotten away, the painting clasped tightly in her grasp.

Even during that situation, she had been completely aware of her feelings, knowing she wanted to escape, never wanting the man to touch

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her, not like this. Her mind was growing fuzzy as she looked into his eyes, and her thoughts were growing slower, lazier. Her eyelids drooped; she was totally consumed by this man.

Angel forced her eyes to remain open, to watch the seductive way he lowered his head to hers. She thought for a minute that he was going to kiss her and she was anticipating the feel of his lips, but at the last moment, he angled his head brushing his lips across her neck.

A jolt of electricity raced from the spot where his cool lips touched her neck; all thoughts fled except for the fact that it has been so long since she had been touched like this. She wanted more. Much more. She wanted to feel his palms rub across her nipples, down over her flat stomach and caress her even lower.

Erotic images of the two of them naked, splayed out across a bed of crimson sheets played against the back of her lids. She wanted to feel his hands cup her breasts while the heat of his mouth seared her nipples. Even now, she felt the cream begin to soak her panties as her body called out to his to fill her.

Angel's body tensed. She inhaled deeply. Placing her hands on his chest as if she was going to push away, her fingers began to stroke over his muscles. Feelings warred inside her body, fighting to let him continue, and fighting to remain in control. Her passion won out as a sensual longing infused her. She was in the arms of a complete stranger and she was allowing him free reign, and it felt so right.

This was insane.

The thought made her jerk back, but he cupped the back of her neck with a large hand, holding her steady.

"Shh..." His warm breath touched her neck. Goosebumps broke out over her arms.

He kissed her neck over her collarbone, teasing her skin. A moan escaped from deep in her throat as she angled her neck to give him better access.

Why was she allowing this man such freedom? Was it because it felt so good? Or was it because her body had taken over her brain? A deep haze wrapped around her thoughts as her body slowly succumbed, wanting him to take what he wanted; as long as he did not stop. The world around her became unimportant as she arched into his chest. She needed to feel more of him. Her hands continued rubbing over his muscled chest, his shoulders, stroking up and down his arms.

Out of nowhere, something pierced her skin. Angel's eyes flew open as fire raced through her veins. She did not have time to scream

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before her body became languid; the room darkened as he held her tightly to his chest keeping her from pulling away. A chill overcame her body making it hard to move, finally she closed her eyes allowing the darkness to claim her.

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Chapter 2

Sitting in his office, Dante Von Wolfe contemplated Angelina Francesca Truheart, the woman from whom he had fed earlier in the evening. How odd that he had found her in his office? However, what a lucky break, because he did not have to search out his evening meal.

She had tasted sweet, her blood had a hint of spice. The scent of her arousal had hardened his cock until he thought he would throw her on the ground and take her there in his office. It had taken much control to only feed.

He rubbed his fingers over his lips. He could still taste her sweet essence as it had slid so deliciously down his throat bringing his cells to life. The way her energy wrapped around each of his cells made his power pulse to a new level. It was intoxicating, unlike anything he had ever tasted before.

It was most peculiar, but one he would not mind encountering again. His lips curved in knowing smile.

It was odd that she had not been afraid, he pondered. The bitterness of fear that laced most blood was absent in hers. Could that have been why he experienced so much more from her? A heavy dose of lust laced her life force. He could have done so much more to her with her sweet cunt wrapped around his dick. He could feel her pent up passion and was tempted to feel her body explode around him.

There was something about this one, though. Something that intrigued him enough to let her live. Maybe it was her strong will that he sensed as he fed from her. He had almost drained her of life when the tiny spark had touched a part of him. She had fallen under his spell, completely collapsing into his embrace. Once he had lifted his head from feeding, he had looked down at her, seeing all color drained from her face and realized that she would be completely his.

Dante knew he would be seeing her again soon.

It had not been difficult finding out where she lived. Her wallet had all the pertinent information. Handbags were a marvelous thing; they contained almost everything about a woman anyone ever needed to know.

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When he had placed her on the bed in her apartment, he couldn't help standing at the side for a moment looking down at her. Her blond hair fanned over the cerulean pillow making her glow, her lashes highlighted her rose colored cheeks. She looked heavenly lying there.

She moaned softly in her sleep. Surprisingly, his cock jerked in response and he found that he wanted to curl up behind her. He wanted to ease his body onto the bed behind her and pull her close to his chest.

Now as he sat in his office trying to get his mind back on his work, he tried to push that memory away.

"Mr. Wolfe?" A soft voice drifted into the room.

Dante pulled at his pants, where his dick had grown hard, before slowly turning around in his chair to face his assistant.

"Yes, Mrs. Delight."

"Oh, oh. I'm sorry to interrupt. This just came for you. Some man in a dark suit dropped it off." Holding out her hand, a white envelop between her fingers.

Reaching out, Dante grabbed it and placed it on his desk. "Thank you. How are sales this evening?"

"Good. We've done quite well tonight. One woman came in and bought all her family members an ornament from the special Starlight line. It was about a dozen, total. That really is a special line, Mr. Wolf. Very popular."

"Starlight, hmm?"

"Yes, sir. She said they warm her heart and hope they'd do the same for her family." Mrs. Delight moved out of the office to the doorway before turning back to look at him, her soft gray eyes studied him as they always did. She was a special woman who had been with him for many years. He had saved her life after a vicious attack by two punk kids wanting her bag. After he healed her, she was so thankful, he had decided to use her as his human servant. She had been more than happy to help him out.

"Thank You. I hope you have a good evening. Turn out the shop lights when you leave, please." Dante's thoughts went to the Starlight ornaments as Mrs. Delight closed the door, leaving him alone once again.

A mixture of irises, sand, and crystal made up the formula for the Starlight ornaments. The flower instilled faith and wisdom in its owner, with a bit of a compulsion spell for happiness. This line of ornaments was the most popular this season. It also was unique because he had decided to hide one-half of a special formula the Vampire Council had given him before each of them left their post to travel the world.

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It was a formula that he was to guard with his life until a Vampire Queen was born to take possession it. Once the full formula was mixed, it would form a mixture called The Elixir of Life. He did not know who held the other half so as to warn them of the danger he was now facing.

Someone had been sending him letters to give up the formula and each year he opened up the shop there had been break-ins. He assumed that it was just a nuisance, kids misbehaving so he'd ignored it, but this year he felt like something bigger was about to happen.

What was Ms. Truheart after? Was she looking for the formula or was she after something else? He mused.

Dante turned back to his desk and his eyes fell on the envelope. He felt uneasiness laced with dread as he slowly stroked his finger over the smooth surface. In deep dark letters, his name flowed in curves and loops, large ancient strokes on the surface with real India ink. He could smell the plant extracts drifting up from it.

Flipping the envelope over Dante reached in, pulling out a small folded piece of a paper.

Mr. Wolfe –

You can not hide. We will find the formula.

M.

He balled the paper tightly in his hand as his fury ignited. Dante jumped from the chair, throwing the crumbled note across the room where it landed on a pile of books. A guttural growl escaped from the back of his throat. They would never locate it.

"You will not get Starlight," he vowed. Dante walked to one of the walls and pushed on a hidden lever. A small door opened allowing him to enter before it closed softly behind him.

The hallway was dim, lit with tiny lights in the ceiling. The path was just wide enough for him to walk comfortably. A few steps down the hall, he came to the end of the tunnel, well, it would appear to be the end to anyone that stumbled upon the first door. His fingers slid along the top until he felt the tiny indentation in the panel and pushed. It opened another door that led into a large room.

Three large caldrons dotted the floor. Smoke bellowed out of one as Dante made his way over to it. The smell of lilies drifted in the air as he gently stirred the brew. His body stirred as his thoughts went back to Angelina.

Angelina Truheart, her driver license stated. She lived in the Bay Towers on the seventh floor. She had blond hair that drifted, ever so lightly, down to the middle of her back. Dante's mind wandered as he

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remembered the way her skin felt under his fingers, the way her innocent blue eyes flashed with desire. Closing his eyes, he relived the moment he traced the path between her breasts. If he had gone lower would he had found her wet? Her breathing had remained steady as he explored, and her feminine scent saturated the room.

Dante shook his head to clear it. Then a new question entered his mind. Why had she been in his office? Mrs. Delight had said that she was looking for the restroom, but the restroom was clearly marked. And the note, the note came afterwards. Could they be connected? Those questions needed answering and the only way to get them answered was by visiting Ms. Truheart.

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Chapter 3

Angel slowly awoke to a great pounding in her head. The covers over her body felt like a ton, weighing her body down. She tried turning, but her body rebelled, pain shooting down her limbs. A moan escaped, her neck throbbed, her head pounded.

Grabbing her head, the pain behind her eyes viciously beat with the rhythm of her heart. "Oh God, just make it stop. I'll be good, I promise." Her voice filled the empty room.

Placing her arm over her eyes, the weight of it helped ease the pain. Why was she in so much pain? What had she done the night before?

Her bedroom door swung open, crashing loudly against the wall. She cringed and let out a small groan; she squeezed her eyes shut.

"Angel, baby, are you going to sleep all day?" Raul's sing song voice drifted in on a cold breeze. Angel pulled the covers up to her chin trying to hold in all the warmth her body possessed. She hated being cold.

"Go away, Raul."

"Oh girl, let me see you." The air in the room stirred as he approached the edge of her bed. More coldness seeped deeper into her bones. Only then did she realize she was shaking. Her body felt so cold, like she had slept outside in the snow. The chill went all the way to her bones.

"Oh!" He exclaimed rubbing a cool hand across her cheek. "Rough night, honey? You look like hell. I hope he was worth it. If anyone deserves a wild night, it's you?" His grin exposed perfectly white teeth.

Raul was a wonderful friend she had to pick up from her first job at a Fashion Boutique after her parents were murdered. He was the only male associate at the store and the only one the customers sought for advice on their wardrobes. Just looking at him, a person would never know he was gay.

In the last two years he had taken up body building. He was tight and curved in all the right places. He reflected the outward image of the perfect man. Many women had been disappointed after finding out he

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liked his own kind. Even Angel was disappointed at first, despite swearing off men years ago.

She had come to love him in her own special way. Raul was a wonderful man to have around and she did not have to worry that he'd try to fuck her. Angel had given up on most men, because it seemed like all she ever found were losers, plus if they were to get too close to her secret she would have to dump them. Raul never made demands on her time; therefore, she kept him around.

"I'm so glad you like how I look," her sarcasm was apparent as she narrowed her eyes at him playfully.

"Angel," his voice took on a concerned tone, "you are as pale as a ghost." His fingers grabbed her chin turning it right then left. She watched as he studied her closely. "And just look at these dark circles... Have you been in bed all day?"

"All day?" Angel stole a glimpse of the digital clock beside the bed. "Tell me it's 7am not pm." The movement of her head sent a new wave of pain to her brain. Grabbing her temples, she moaned.

"Sorry, darlin'. It's pm."

"Just go away. Please. Let me die in peace." She pulled a pillow over her head.

How could she have been so careless as to sleep the day away? Actually, night and day away. What happened last night?

The dip in the bed indicated Raul had taken up residence beside her instead of making his way out the door.

"Where's your sweetheart of a sister? Why isn't she taking care of you?"

Angel shot up out of bed causing pain to shoot behind her eyes. Dropping her body to the bed, she covered her head once again.

Oh God. Her sister. Her kidnapped-pain-apparent-on-her face sister.

Moving the pillow, she forced Raul to look in her eyes while she held his chin. He did not move, but looked at her questionably.

"Raul. Listen to me." He nodded indicating he was listening. "You have to leave and not return until I or Abby contact you. Understand?"

"No. I don't." He lowered his brows.

"Just do it, okay. I don't want to see you hurt."

Raul snorted. "Ha! Me get hurt? Woman, I may be gay, but I am one of the leading body builders in our area. I can handle myself." He flexed his muscles.

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Cupping his jaw, she smiled. "I know. But please just listen to me, okay?"

Raul pulled away, "Where is Abby?"

"Raul, no questions."

Their conversation was cut short by a banging on the door; it sounded like someone was trying to break down her door. She covered her ears.

Raul patted her knee and said, "I'll go see who it is."

"No, I'll go. Just hand me my robe." As she reached for her terry cloth robe, she realized she was still wearing what she wore the night before. How odd.

Confused, she shrugged her shoulders and made her way to the door. The pounding continued on the door and in her head.

"Just a minute," she screamed. She felt Raul following her.

Standing on her tiptoes, she looked into the peep-hole. A large man with long dark hair stood in the hallway. His features seemed familiar, her memory touched briefly on a thread of recognition before it dissipated. A large black cloak covered much of his body, an opening in the front revealed a dark suit. A flutter in her stomach caused her to question the wisdom of opening the door. She did not feel anything threatening from him, but she could not help her uneasiness.

A spot on her neck began to tingle with a warm sensation; reaching up she rubbed at it. Taking a deep breath, she opened the door.

"Yes, how can I..." When the man looked up, she felt the world begin to fade. Time no longer moved forward, instead it was perfectly content to hold onto this moment. A smile curved his lips as he took a shallow bow.

"Angelina Truheart?"

Angel felt Raul's touch at the middle of her back, forcing time to move forward once again. He wanted to make sure she knew he was there to support her if needed. She imagined him sizing up the dark stranger in her doorway. Her lips turned up at the corners in amusement at the thought of Raul trying to protect her.

"Yes. I'm Angelina. How may I help you?" The stranger's dark eyes roamed over her, starting at her feet, up to her hips then up further until they rested for a moment longer than they should on her breasts. They continued their slow progress to her neck, her lips, and finally reaching her eyes. She raised one eyebrow. A shiver raced down her spine. Somehow she knew that her life was about to change.

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Chapter 4

Raul's voice startled her. Angel's mouth dropped open at the sound of his voice, which suddenly sounded deep, very manly, and very, very protective. She fought back a giggle.

"The lady asked you a question." He pushed up further behind her, his chest brushed against her back. What had gotten into Raul? Her eyes locked onto his mouth wondering how he could change the sound of his voice so easily. He winked at her before she turned back to face the stranger.

Turning, her eyes locked with the man in her doorway. His eyes on her, never acknowledging that Raul had spoken. His lips curved ever so slightly at the edges, as if he knew a great secret.

"Ms. Truheart," he said, "I need to speak with you alone." As he spoke, images of them flashed through her mind. And they were doing everything but talking. Angel fought back the blush that stole across her cheeks. No man could do this to her. Frustration followed the lustful thoughts, making her burn with a different kind of fire. Anger. Anger at allowing this man who she didn't even know to have such an effect on her body.

"What is this about?" She hoped her voice was as cool as intended.

"I would rather speak with you alone, if your...friend does not mind." His attention turned to Raul for the first time.

Turning to face Raul, she said, "Raul, I'll call you later. Please remember what I said."

In a low voice, Raul responded, "I do not think this is a good idea, Angel."

Angel covered his chest with her hands and lifted up on her toes placing a kiss on his cheek. "I'll be fine," she whispered in his ear.

Reluctantly, Raul walked past the stranger, but not before he glared hard into his eyes. "I'll call you, Angel," he said over his shoulder.

Angel's attention went instantly to the man, the absolutely gorgeous man, standing at her door.

"I am Dante Von Wolfe. I own A Christmas Night." He extended his hand. Uneasiness crept down her spine, but she did not want to seem rude, so she grasped his outstretched hand.

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A jolt of electricity raced up her arm. She pulled away quickly and looked up into his blank eyes. Had he felt that too? A smoldering flame danced in her stomach.

Dante started to step across her threshold then stopped. "May I enter your home, Angelina?"

Rubbing her hands together, Angel could still feel the tingling from the earlier jolt. "Oh, sure. Come in." Stepping out of the way she allowed him to enter her home.

The light in the room dimmed almost unnoticeably, but she noticed. Her experience as a profession thief taught her to notice the slightest changes in everything. Maybe a light had burned out in the room somewhere.

As he walked past her, a scent of exotic flowers stirred some memory that remained just out of her reach.

"Was that your male?" He said not turning to look at her, instead he continued his scrutiny of her apartment.

The question confused her. "My male?" She said with a slight giggle. "Uh, no. He is just a friend."

"Not your companion?" Turning around to face her, his dark eyes studied her.

"No." Heat stole into her cheeks. Damn the hormones. What was it with this man that instantly brought to life feelings she had locked deep inside? He was dangerous. Dangerous to those carefully hidden emotions.

She tried telling herself that over and over since he entered her house. Nothing, however kept the dampness from growing between her thighs. He oozed sex, filling the room with pheromones that tickled her senses.

"Angelina," his words broke into her thoughts, "why do you not have a Christmas tree in your home?" His furrowed brows and questioning look startled her.

He moved across the room in the blink of an eye. Her breath escaped in a hurried whoosh. He held her shoulders and she felt that she had been in this position before. How could that be possible? This was the first time meeting him---right?

Ignoring his question about the tree she said, "Why are you here?"

"You were in my store last night. You left before Mrs. Delight could inquire about what you wished to purchase." His deep voice made her heart flutter. Oh God, his eyes danced in inquisition, burning right

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through her. He continued, "I take my customers seriously. I would like to find out what specific ornament you would like to purchase."

If the room got any warmer, she felt like she would have to run naked from the building into the snow outside to cool down. She could listen to the way his words drifted off his full lips for hours. His foreign accent was so exotic she wanted to beg him to say her name over and over. Angel felt herself falling into his dark eyes, while the vision of the room narrowed, leaving just him.

"Angelina? Why were in my shop last night?" He was touching her again. His touch was fire and ice combined, each battling to be dominant.

Angel knew she could not tell him the truth, but something...something in her mind was telling her that she had to tell him. Tell him the truth about needing the formula. She felt her lips moving, but she fought the impulse; the words were on the tip of her tongue ready to spill out. There was too much at stake. Her sister. Her sister needed her to remain strong and focused.

"I... I was looking for...an ornament for my sister." The lie burned through her brain. Something pounded inside her to tell him the truth. Tell him. She shook her head, breaking eye contact.

Suddenly, she sucked in a breath. She felt light-headed and reached out to grab the wall, but stumbled.

"Are you okay, Angelina?" He grabbed her elbow to guide her over to the couch, placing her down gently. "You look very pale all of a sudden. Even more so than when you answered the door. Are you sick?"

Grabbing her head, she buried her face in her hands. She was far from being okay. Her head felt funny and the room would not stop swaying. Was she sick from stomping through the snow last night?

"I just need to lie down. Maybe we could conduct this meeting another time?"

The cushions dipped at her side making her painfully aware of the large body beside her. More of his exotic scent drifted over to her. She couldn't help taking in a deep breath and actually surprised when the ache in her head receded some.

"I have brought something for you. I was hoping you would display it for me on your... uh, Christmas tree."

"I don't plan on putting up a tree, or decorations for that matter. It's a long story," she said to him as her mind instantly went back to that unfortunate Christmas.

Vampire Christmas

Her father was a spy for the government and Jonah, her boyfriend, almost fiancé, had gotten close to her just to get to know her dad. *Just to kill him.* Unfortunately, when the deed was carried out her mother was with her father when the car exploded.

After the explosion, when she needed Jonah the most he had packed up and left her. Left her alone with only her little sister remaining of what was once a tightly knit family. Angel had been so angry she searched for answers. Finally, after taking up her father's job as a professional thief, she found information in a government official's home.

Jonah Mathews was a hired killer. Hired to kill her father for not carrying out a job he was hired to do. Her heart broke, no, shattered as she looked at his picture beside his credentials. After that day, or actually it was the day he left her, she packed up her heart, her feelings, locking them away. Getting close to another man just was not in the cards for her.

Taking after her father, she put her skills to use. However, unlike her father, she worked solely for herself. Taking money from rich men and women to steal things that mattered most to them. She could enter a room, a house, a mansion, an office, anywhere, without so much as moving the wind.

"Angelina?" Dante's voice broke through her train of memories bringing her back to reality. "Rest, we will continue our talk tomorrow evening."

Dante rose, allowing her to stretch out on the couch. She suddenly felt very tired. "Sure...we'll talk...tomorrow." She forced the words from her lips. They felt so heavy on her tongue. All she could think about was sleep. Who cared if there was some strange man she didn't know standing in her living room. She needed the rest.

Unable to move her body she felt something heavy drape across her body, then the pleasantness of warmth surrounded her. Barely managing to open her eyes, she saw Dante reach down and push back her hair. The gesture was so nice, so... caring. She wanted to sigh, which she probably did. God, what was wrong with her.

"I'll see you then," he whispered.

Somewhere in the distance, she heard the door open and close. The room was silent, she was warm, and sleep could not be refused a moment longer.

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Chapter 5

Wild images plagued Angel's dreams all night. Pictures of blood flowing across her body, while shadows danced around her. Just as the images grew worse, a warm embrace made it all disappear. The dream moved her into a darkened room, where she stood all alone, but feeling as if someone was watching her.

Slowly her body came awake leaving the images of the nightmare behind. She was on the couch with bright rays of sunlight filling the room. Angel lay there a moment, trying to dispel the uneasiness of her dream. Had yesterday really happened? Did Dante Von Wolf actually show up at her door, enter her living room, and tuck her in on the couch?

She ran her hand through her long hair, pulling it away from her face. Thankfully, her headache was gone and her body felt, at least, a little better. Pushing the blanket aside, she set her foot on the soft cushiony texture of the carpet.

"I'm meeting him tonight?" She rubbed her temples trying to recall the conversation. "But where?"

As she got up and walked to the kitchen, she noticed a white envelope lying on the floor in front of the door. Bending down she picked it up and noticed it did not have any distinguishing marks other than her name in bold black letter written across the middle.

Quickly she opened it and her heart jumped in her throat.

Ms. Truheart:

I hope that you have made some progress in your little endeavor and you did not just sleep your day away. Your sister is counting on you.

M.

Crumpling up the paper, she threw it across the room, watching it bounce off the wall to land in the fireplace. "Just where it needs to be." She kicked the air. "I've lost a whole day. A whole damn day."

She drank a quick cup of coffee and dressed. Oh, how she dreaded getting out in the cold once again. Before she left, she dropped her lock pick tool in the pocket of her jacket.

Reaching the parking deck, Angel quickly jumped into her car, hurriedly turning the heater to high. A rush of cold air blew in her face.

Vampire Christmas

"Damn, damn, damn." Pulling out of the lot, she angled the vents away from her.

The shop sat in between two other stores. One was a dress shop that tried to capture the essence of summer through its window display. Angel wished she could fly somewhere warm like that. The other store window had winter coats wrapped securely around mannequins. A Christmas Night sat snugly between the two, displaying two large Christmas trees lined with different color ornaments on the branches.

For anyone else, the display would represent love, happiness, hope. Angel just cringed and tried to focus on her task.

She twisted the knob, knowing it was locked. She peered over her shoulder in both directions before she casually pulled out her tools. Without even looking down she flipped open the lock pick.

"Angel?" A voice startled her, making her almost lose her grip on the tool.

She looked over her shoulder as she carefully slid it back into her pocket. "Raul? What are you doing out here?"

"I could ask you the same question," he said with a wide grin. He came up beside her and rubbed her shoulder. "You're looking better."

"Oh yea. I do feel better." Angel tried for a cheerful voice, but she knew she did a bad job of it. "So, you're out shopping for your friend, Raul?"

Angel tried moving them away from the store so they could talk without him becoming suspicious of her actions. She had managed to keep him from figuring out she was a thief. Only her sister and the few clients she worked for knew about her special talent.

"Oh girl, I got this fabulous scarf for him. Let's go somewhere for some coffee and I'll show it to you."

"I really can't right now, Raul."

"Oh, of course you can. Unless, you're planning on shopping for me," he winked. Throwing his head back, he laughed.

Angel could not help but laugh with him. "You know I don't do Christmas, Raul."

His face took on a solemn look. "Oh right, right. I'm sorry. But really, Angel, I need your opinion on some things. Would you please come along with me today?" He lowered his eyes and looked at her with a sad, begging expression.

She stole a quick look at the store. It might be better to return later when they were open. She could possibly get some information from his employee.

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“Sure. Let’s go.”

Dante felt her presence close to the shop. He had been resting in the special room he had made when he opened A Christmas Night. It was here he did most of his experiments on the glass and where he slept during the day.

The winter sun was not as damaging on him as the summer sun, but he still could not walk around outside for long. When he had to walk in the daylight, it had to be in the early morning or the late evening.

In his mind, he felt her at the door. The rush of her blood beckoned him, reminding him of the way it tasted. He needed to taste her again, but the next time he would be very careful not to take too much.

When he had seen her at home, the shock of her darkened eyes and the paleness of her skin had frightened him. He fought with himself not to grab her and pull her into the protectiveness of his arms and tell her how sorry he was.

Then that man had appeared behind her. The bitter scent of him made Dante wonder why Angelina would be with someone so dishonest. So...evil. It had made him fight even harder to resist the urge to pull her from the room and take her to his home.

Dante left his room to go out into the store where he could see her in the doorway. Maybe he could figure out why she had come to him. What was she after?

He remained hidden in the shadows of the darkened shop, watching as she tried turning the knob.

“What are you doing, my sweet,” he whispered into the room. His eyes studied her as he watched something slip between her fingers. Then she jerked and turned around.

Unable to stop himself, Dante moved closer to the door, hugging the darkest shadows. He needed to see more of her. He wanted her to come into the store where he might be able to hold her again.

“Ah, her friend,” he said as he watched Angel and the man from last night converse. After talking for a few minutes, she walked away with him down the street, his arm linked with hers.

“Nooo!” Dante roared through clenched teeth. Something inside him tightened. His fists curled into balls at his side. His mind screamed for him to run after her, to stop her from walking away from him. He wanted Angelina Francesca Truheart. He wanted her for his own.

Vampire Christmas

Chapter 6

The slow movement of the sun across the sky aggravated Dante. He waited and waited for the fading light to be dim enough for him to brave its rays. The sun crawling across the sky at a snails pace infuriated him with each passing second.

"Mr. Wolf?"

"Yes, Mrs. Delight?" He leaned further back in his chair waiting to hear what she needed.

A familiar tingle played along his neck as he inwardly smiled. Angelina. She was close. Very close.

"A Miss Angelina Truheart says she needs to speak with you. Should I bring her back?"

"*I'm sure she knows her way,*" he muttered under his breath. "Yes, please bring her." He fought back the urge to rush from the chair and meet her in the hallway.

Mrs. Delight disappeared around the corner. He felt her movements down the hall and out into the store. Then he felt Angel's essence moving closer to him. His body stirred in response as the pleasant scent of lavender drifted into the room. Dante wanted to close his eyes and inhale the sweetness until it encompassed his whole body, instead he watched as her eyes quickly scanned the room.

Her coat was unbuttoned revealing the pink shirt underneath, accentuating the curvature of her breasts. Dante balled his fist at his side holding back the urge to adjust the sudden heaviness in his groin.

"Miss Truheart," When she smiled, he felt the world light up for him; he was sure her smile would light up a million buildings. He felt undone, but he managed to rise and extend his hand. Did he dare touch her soft flesh?

Yes he did dare, and it felt wonderful as she grasped his hand. Her grip was firm, but gentle, with expert fingers that would play havoc across his skin.

"Hi, Mr. Wolf. I wasn't sure if we had planned to meet somewhere else. Sorry about last night, I was a little off yesterday."

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"No worries." Dante fought with the sudden hunger roaring inside him. The beat of her heart and the steady flow of her blood ignited his hunger.

As Angel took a seat very close to the one he had occupied, Mrs. Delight entered the room. "Sorry, Mr. Wolf. We have an irate customer who is demanding to see you. She says she is unhappy with one of the ornaments."

Dante sighed. No one was unhappy with his ornaments. The spell in each of them would not allow it.

He turned to Angel, catching her looking at his desk. "I'm sorry, I'll be right back."

"It's okay."

Angel watched as Dante left the office. God, could it really be this easy. She got up to peek out the door to make sure no one was coming, then quickly went over to his desk to check out the carefully laid out piles of paper.

She began searching through papers, recipes, and notebooks, knowing he probably wouldn't have the formula just lying around. "It's in his head for all I know."

She peaked out the door again. No one. Turning back into the room, her foot caught on the floor and she stumbled forward into the wall. She landed with a thud.

"Damn it."

Pushing herself upright she pushed the lever, opening the secret door behind her, revealing a secret hallway.

"What the..."

She couldn't see much past the opening. Angel's heart beat wildly as she pondered what she should do. Feeling panicked, she rushed back to the door to check if he was coming. Relief flooded her when she found the hallway still empty. Excitement and curiosity raced through her.

She turned back to the opening, walking cautiously, she wasn't sure if it was booby trapped. Her heart raced in anticipation of a great find. Could the formula be behind there somewhere? Conflicting emotions warred for supremacy, should she enter or not? For all she knew, he kept some kind of wild dog in there. The thought made her body shake with uneasiness.

She got even with the threshold and leaned her head in as far as it would go. All she saw was darkness. Taking a step inside, she was overcome with the odor of exotic scents. So many she couldn't distinguish the different smells. A variety of flowers and perfumes

Vampire Christmas

seemed to live in the passageway, making her even more curious about what lay ahead.

"Miss Truheart?" Angel turned quickly, coming face to face with Dante. Close enough that his breath danced across the skin of her cheek. His dark eyes narrowed in anger. She could swear that she saw tiny lightning bolts flash in their depths. Her throat closed up.

He grabbed her shoulders in a fierce grip. "What are you doing?" His voice sounded primal. Suddenly she felt hunted.

"I...I...I tripped on the carpet. This door opened up and I was curious." Never before had she felt her calm slip away so easily. Not even drawing on her experience eased her shattered nerves. She was absolutely, utterly scared.

She knew what she had to do to take his attention away from her discovery. Angel leaned up, planting her lips firmly on his. Her arms, unsure of how she managed to move them, came up and captured Dante in a loose embrace. As their lips touched, everything disappeared, replaced by an urgent need to give herself fully to him. His lips felt cool as she darted her tongue out to touch the flesh, to taste, to lick, to devour the sweet feel of him.

Angel kissed along the edge of his lips before she coaxed him to let her inside his mouth. His tight body relaxed under her ministrations. A hot rush of fire raced to her groin as he wrapped his arms around her, roughly pulling her into his embrace, chest to chest. She had only meant to distract him, but she found the kiss too good to stop.

He tasted like air. The sweet rush of it infused her. She didn't think she would have to breathe ever again; his kiss would supply all that she needed to survive. Her tongue touched his, rolling against each other in an exotic tango. She was lost, overcome by the sheer power of his lips, the curve of her body snug against his.

Dante cupped her head keeping her from pulling away. Not like she wanted to, she imagined she could do this all day without any coaxing from him.

He kissed along her jaw line up the curve of her neck. "Oh Angelina," his sweet words gently caressed her ear. Allowing him to push her back against the wall, she realized the door had closed. She moaned as his body seemed to melt into hers; it felt as if they were one, so perfectly did they fit. His lips found their way back to her neck. "You taste so sweet."

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Only a moan escaped her lips in response as his hand came up to caress her breast possessively, he played with the tight little bud of her nipple.

What was she doing? She did not mean for it go this far. Angel pushed at his chest forcing him to step back. She rubbed at her eyes, hoping they didn't betray how affected she was by him. His eyes were no longer a black abyss, but a deep brown and heavy lidded with passion. Dante touched his lips. "I'm sorry, Angelina."

"No, no. I'm sorry, Dante. I should have called or something instead of just entering." She pushed away from the wall and headed to the door. A cool hand grabbed her around the wrist.

"Wait."

Vampire Christmas

Chapter 7

Dante pulled her back roughly against his chest. Her lips were a mere inch away from his. "Angelina, I cannot let you run away, my sweet." He slowly bent his head, brushing her neck with his lips. The fast flow of her blood woke his terrible hunger for her. He clamped down his need to sink his teeth deep into her flesh. It would happen soon enough, now he just wanted to hold her, kiss her.

Angel's palms spread wide across his chest in a gesture that would allow her to push away from him. But he felt the apprehension in her touch; her eyes looking deep into his told him that she wanted this as much as he did, but she was scared.

Leaning in, he captured her lips not allowing any other thought but of himself to enter her mind. It took a moment, but she slowly relaxed against him. Feeling her surrender was a seduction in itself. He needed to feel her, taste her.

"Dante." She whispered.

He let her passion filled plea infuse him. She was holding back, but he planned on making her break lose. Dante wanted to feel her explode around him.

Pulling her harder against his chest, he captured her lips in a heated kiss. At first, she hesitated, then slowly her lips relaxed. He deepened the kiss, exploring her mouth with everything he had. The warmth of her lips was addicting.

When their tongues touched, she shuddered, before losing herself into the kiss. She tasted as if she was made from one of the exotic flowers he dealt with everyday in his lab. He wished he could capture her scent and mixed it into one of his formulas for a very special lovers' ornament.

Her hands moving on his chest made him groan; the palm of her hands scorched his skin. He cupped her face, holding it so that he could kiss along her jaw before travelling to her neck. Should he taste her now?

"Dante," she whispered, her head was thrown back exposing the length of her neck.

"Yes, my sweet," he replied against her skin. He felt her shiver and it made him smile.

K.L. Bjork

"You really must stop." She tried pushing him away, but he wouldn't allow it.

"Tell me what I want to know." Dante felt Angel's body stiffen and this time when she pushed away, he allowed her a little room. His arm still twisted around her waist keeping her still, Angel looked at him unsure how to respond. He did not think he could let her go just yet.

"Why I'm here? You believe I'm after something when it was you who said that we were going to talk today."

The room grew still around them as he contemplated her words. "Yes. I did." His eyes seemed to penetrate her soul as if trying to determine what her true reason for visiting his shop; her home held nothing of Christmas.

He felt the rush of air brush over his face as she let out the breath she had been holding. Slowly, her body began to relax and her palm eased their tension against his chest. Did she think the subject dropped?

"Dante?" Angel looked up innocently through her lashes in hope of distracting him. It worked. Everything in him told him to pick her up and carry her far away, so that he could make her his mate. Holding her in his arms felt like the best thing in the world. He never thought he would be able to feel this way about anyone. Now, as she stood in his arms, he felt the hardness he had developed around his heart over the centuries begin to soften. Suddenly, his power flared and he felt a shiver race through her. Pulling it back into him, he rubbed her shoulders to warm her.

"Yes, my sweet." He answered. Her eyes looked around the room searching for the reason for her chill. His lips curved in a wry smile. "Tell me what you are after? It is not ornaments, you have no tree, it looked to me like you do not even celebrate Christmas."

"Tell me what they hold over you."

He did not want to let her go just yet, but he saw the pain in her eyes and released her from his embrace.

"I can't tell you," she said as he quickly escaped through the door.

Angel ran quickly through the isles with only one thing on her mind. Getting home. She was failing at her job. At every turn there was some obstacle, especially one huge obstacle she was not counting on - Dante. She felt he was more of an obstacle against her heart than anything.

Vampire Christmas

Angel could not allow such a thing, as much as she wanted to confide in him, she could not. Her sister's life was in danger. She needed that damn formula.

The bell jingled wildly as she rushed out into the cold air. Night had fallen and the streetlights cast eerie golden rays on the snow-packed ground. She buttoned up her coat as she quickly rushed down the sidewalk.

The world around her blurred as the severity of her failing engulfed her. Tears fell fast down her cheeks. She quickly brushed them away with the back of her hand.

From behind her, she heard footsteps quickly making their way through the snow. Fearing that he had come after her, she looked over her shoulder as she picked up her pace.

Turning around, she ran into a solid wall of muscle. Her eyes slowly scanned the massive chest in front of her. Enormous hands clamped roughly on her shoulders, her eyes jerked up to the darkened face of her captor.

A voice came from behind, laced with contempt. "Where you successful, Angel? Did you get the information?"

Angel struggled, but the man's arms tightened on her shoulders, slowly lifting her off the ground.

"Let me go," she said through clenched teeth.

Just as she spoke a hand came out of the darkness slapping her hard on the head. She winced at the new pain, but fought from crying out. These types of men loved to see pain on their victims' faces.

"Answer me!" He growled, yanking her hair, causing her head to arch back until all she could see was the darkness of the sky. "Answer me, damn it woman! Do you want to see your sister alive?"

"No, I haven't gotten it yet. One more day. I'll have it tomorrow." She thought for sure he was pulling out fistfuls of her hair; pain sliced through her skull. She tried to reach up to grab her skull in hopes of easing the pain.

Warm breath touched her left ear, "One more day, Angel. This time tomorrow, you'd better have the formula."

The man released her suddenly, causing her body to collapse to the ground. Looking around, the sidewalk was empty. Her frustration mounting, she raised her fist and pounded the pavement. Fresh tears rushed down her cheeks.

She did not care that a few people had materialized on the sidewalk; none seemed too keen on helping her anyway. They just

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walked past as she slowly made her way to a nearby bench. Even the cold did not matter anymore.

That was how Raul found her. The shivering had long since stopped as she sat staring at the dirty snow lining the walkway.

“Angel?” His voice was soft and his arms wrapped around her. “Are you okay, honey?”

“Oh God, Raul.” He pulled her close as she lowered her head into her hands.

“Take your hands off her.” A dark malevolent voice came out of the darkness. She felt Raul stiffen. Looking up, she saw a dark figure outlined by the streetlamps, even in the shadows he stood tall and powerful. He stepped further into the light, his eyes on Raul.

Vampire Christmas

Chapter 8

Upon seeing Dante, she wanted to throw herself into his strong arms, tell him everything and beg for his help. Maybe if he knew that a life was at stake he would give her the formula. He might even be able to help her find her sister.

Raul's deep voice cut through her thoughts as he rose from the bench, blocking her view. A shiver of fear raced down her spine.

"You're that shop owner, aren't you? Angel is my friend and if you have done something to upset her, you'll have to answer to me."

Angel looked up to see Raul had moved to stand inches away from Dante, chest puffed out, hands fisted at his side in some male projection of authority. What had gotten into him? He was never this protective of her. And his voice had taken on that strange deep male tone again.

She studied Raul's broad back, noting how muscular he was. The jacket he wore stretched tightly over his shoulders, dropping off at his narrow waist. Dante was not as bulky as Raul, but Angel knew that he would not be the one getting hurt if this came to blows.

Dante spoke, his voice more powerful than Raul's. It made Raul's sound like a boy trying to play being a man. She closed her eyes and let the cadence gently glide along her skin. It infused her body, wrapping her in a cocoon of warmth and security.

"Yes, I am he, and I am taking Miss Truheart back with me. Move aside so I may collect her."

"The hell you are." Raul's voice spiked with agitation. Why was he so upset?

Standing, she went to Raul's side, placing her hand on his sleeve, hoping her presence would calm him. "Raul. Calm down."

"I will not calm down," he said, his eyes never leaving the locked gaze he held with Dante.

"Raul, please. I'm fine," she pleaded. "What has gotten into you?"

Slowly he turned his head, the anger in his eyes pierced through her, she released him and involuntarily backed away.

At that moment, she wasn't sure if she should run away from them both. Her feet took a few steps away as if urging her on, pleading with her to flee the two wild beasts in front of her.

K.L. Bjork

Watching both of them carefully, she backed away, hoping not to attract their attention. She needed to escape. She had to figure out a plan to get her sister back. Just as she got around the edge of the building, she slipped on the ice.

She closed her eyes anticipating the unrelenting ground, but it never came. Instead she landed in strong arms. Angel hated to see who they belonged to, but she was thankful that she hadn't fallen on the hard ground. But how could that have been? They were both standing many feet away, too far to prevent her fall.

Looking up, she saw in his dark eyes that he wanted to punish her for such a foolish action. Dante looked pissed that she had tried to escape. She gave him a sheepish grin as she tried not to focus on his arms wrapped protectively around her.

Even through the thickness of their clothes, she felt the pounding rhythm of his heart. Hers fluttered to keep in sync with his.

A smile crossed her face as she studied the dark recesses of his eyes. The streetlights faded, the other shops faded, until all that remained was her dark god holding her in his embrace.

No, she couldn't allow this. He was another man that if allowed behind her defenses would not only shatter the wall she had erected, but destroy her as well. The smile that just moments ago graced her lips slipped away.

"Are you okay, my sweet?" His eyes dropped to her lips. She fought the urge to moisten them.

"Yes, I'm okay. Please put me down, Dante." Angel struggled in his arms as he slowly lowered her down the length of his body until the tips of her toes touched the sidewalk. Putting distance between them, the strange pull to his body slowly faded. She stepped closer to feel it again.

Raul was there wrenching her out of Dante's grasp.

"Let's go, Angel." Raul grabbed her wrist furthest from Dante, keeping a good distance away from the menacing figure. Raul pulled her down the street; glancing back Angel swore she saw two glowing orbs where Dante's eyes should be. She quickly looked away, shaking her head to clear the hallucination, because clearly that is what it was, some trick of the streetlights.

Raul squeezed her wrist, so that she could focus solely on him. The way he was pulling her down the street infuriated her.

"Let go of me. I am not a child," yanking her wrist out of his grasp.

Vampire Christmas

He stopped abruptly, casting a quick look behind them. Apparently pleased that Dante had not followed, his attention turned to her.

"What the hell was that about, Angel?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Are you in trouble? Who were those men that held you?" His brows drew together as his questions flew from his lips. Angel listened, but she wasn't concentrating on his words and the meanings, but on the way he delivered the questions.

Something wasn't right with him. No sweetheart, honey or sugar accompanied his words. The feminine lilt he usually spoke with was gone. In its place was the newly acquired masculine southern drawl.

"Angel, why did you visit his shop again? There is something not right with him."

"Raul?" She could not stop watching his mouth. Surely, any second he would ease back into the flowery tone. She watched. She waited.

His hands came up of their own accord and rubbed her shoulder. She stepped away.

"Angel. What?"

"What happened to..." Her hand waved wildly through the air, "your...voice."

Slowly her mind started processing his questions. The men? How had he known?

"Raul, how did you know about the men?"

He lowered his head until he could whisper close to her ear. "I know more about you than you think. I'm Jonah's partner. I'm with the FBI, sweetheart."

K.L. Bjork

Chapter 9

Somehow, Raul managed to bring her back to her apartment. His voice drifted in and out, but she could not focus on what he was saying. He was going on and on about something her father had done. She had thought she would never hear Jonah's name again.

As she sat on the couch, her head buried in her hands, the only thought that registered was regret for not telling Dante what he wanted to know. He could have helped. She sensed that he would. They had a connection.

Angel was not even sure what kind of connection or how it was forged, but it was there. There in the back of her mind, she felt him. The touch was like a soft cashmere sweater wrapped protectively around her, he was there.

"Angel, you better start listening to me. Have you heard anything that has come out of my mouth since we walked through that door?"

She didn't even have the energy to look up at him, but visualized him pointing at the door. How could Raul have betrayed her? He acted like such a friend when all others could not be trusted to accept her the way she was. He looked beyond that, to the person hidden behind the pain. Now, finding out that he was part of the group that had her family murdered, she felt like she was reliving the whole accident all over again.

"Don't you touch me," she screamed as she got to her feet, glaring at him. Pulling her hair over her shoulder as if she could rid herself of his touch, she worked her fingers wildly through the strands.

Raul's eyes sparkled and his mouth had a nasty smirk as he walked closer to her. "Oh, I'll touch you." He ran his finger down her cheek. She cringed. The look in his eyes grew lustful. Her heart tore into pieces, as the friend she once knew disappeared.

"Why?" She managed to ask.

He laughed. "It's simple really. Your dad failed. And we watched you, Angel. We watched you grow into your abilities. Better than your father even." Raul turned and paced the room.

Angel could not believe what she was hearing. She went back to the couch and sat down; letting his admission wash over her as new grief consumed her.

Vampire Christmas

A strange feeling, an invasion of sorts, calmly made its way outward to her limbs; in its wake, her muscles relaxed. Shaking her head, she could not imagine what was going on. She rubbed her temples hoping to ease the tension housed there.

"My sweet, you need me. I feel your distress." The words formed inside her mind.

Angel glanced around the room knowing that it was Dante's voice that she heard, but she was not sure how. Her eyes scanned the corners, even the darkened recess behind the chair. Nothing, but she felt him wrap a phantom arm around her shoulders.

"How," she tried forming the words in her mind, a little surprised that she even thought to try it. Shrugging, she reached out on the mental link.

"You were right thinking that we are connected. Why are you distressed?" His words caressed her mind.

"Raul. He's bad, Dante. God, I'm so sorry. I should have told you everything."

"Shhh..." Dante whispered, gently stroking her mind into calmness. "We'll discuss this soon."

A tight grip on her chin brought her back from her thoughts. The pain sliced through her and she wondered if Raul planned on breaking her jaw. She pulled away, but Raul's grip only tightened forcing her to look into his eyes.

"Have you not been paying attention to me? AGAIN! Damn it, Angel. Abby is at death's door and you're the only one that can save her."

"Let me talk to her, call her" she pleaded, tears threatening behind her eye lids, "please."

Raul pushed her away from him, and resumed pacing the room. Angel dried her tears, she could do this. Her father would have been able to handle this.

"Yes, maybe by talking to her you'll get your ass in gear." Facing away from her, Raul pulled a cell phone out of his pocket. Dialing, he lowered his voice as someone answered. Angel strained to hear the conversation, but all she heard was mumbling, nothing that made sense.

Remembering her conversation - could she call it a conversation - with Dante she reached out with her mind hoping that it wasn't just a one way connection. "Dante?" She whispered with her eyes closed, as she tried to focus.

No answer.

K.L. Bjork

"Dante?" She tried again, this time focusing on projecting the words to him. Soon, she felt the breeze in her core and the gentle tingle working outward to her fingers. The feeling was stronger making her aware that he was close.

"Yes, my sweet," he answered. She didn't realize how anxious she was to feel him in her mind.

"Will you help me rescue my sister?"

"What do you need?"

"I need the formula for your starlight ornaments."

A long pause had her wondering if he had severed the mental link, before he answered, "I am sorry, Angelina. I cannot."

She felt angry that he would deny her; she broke their connection abruptly as Raul thrust the little phone into her face.

"Here," Raul said with his lip curled in disgust, "make it quick."

All thought of Dante vanished, but she felt the renewed connection and his sorrow that he could not give her what she needed. She was hurt that he thought his formula was more important than a human life. Her sister's life.

Trying to forget Dante, she quickly grabbed the phone. "Abby, baby? Are you okay?" Emotion washed over her as she heard the rough intake of breath on the other end.

"Angel? Oh, Angel?" Angel's heart exploded at the sound of Abby's weakened voice.

Unable to hold back her tears any longer, she let them flow freely. "I'm so sorry, baby." She stroked the phone, wishing that she could ease the pain she heard in her sister's voice.

"Angel, I'm so scared. Please, hurry. Do whatever they want. It's awful here."

"Yes, sweetie, I will. I'll have you out soon. I promise." Raul yanked the phone out of her grip and slammed it close, cutting off Abby's screams for her sister.

"God, No! Let me talk to her." She got up and pounded her fists into Raul's chest. He grabbed them holding them tightly together. He pulled her up until her toes barely touched the floor.

He forced their eyes to lock, "Get the formula, Angel or you and your pretty little sister will end up like your mother and father."

A new rage consumed Angel. She felt something inside her break, infusing every cell throughout her body. This was her, not someone breaking inside her head, but her. The anger boiled into a new fury and she knew what she had to do.

Vampire Christmas

Checking the clock, she knew somehow that if she wanted that formula she would have to wait until morning. She was not sure how or why the information flooded into her mind.

"I'll get the formula, but it has to be in the morning. He works odd hours, and he'll be away from the shop. I know it's there. I'll get it for you."

"I'm coming with you to make sure the job is done this time."

"No! I have to do this myself." Her body stiffened as he held her close.

Angel couldn't believe she had allowed this man into her life. He was supposed to be one of the safe ones. One she didn't have to worry doing anything to hurt her; he was her friend.

As she opened her mouth to argue with Raul the door burst open sending shards of wood flying throughout the room. Raul dropped Angel to the floor. She landed on her hands and knees, looking over at the ruined door.

Dante had raced through the sky feeling the pain lash through Angel's heart from his denial. He could not give her the formula. It was far too special for anyone to ever have access to it. He knew he should never have made it into the ornaments, but he wanted to share the special feeling with others; even if they were just humans, they could get some happiness from holding the glass in their hands and anyone in the same room with the ornament would feel the gentle wash of peace take over their bodies. It was something he wanted to share with the people who had taken to him so easily. It was his way of giving something back to the community.

He never thought that the people after the formula would bring innocents into their little battle. He was saddened that Angel's sister had been kidnapped because of it.

Dante felt a new wave of pain wash over his body, Angel was hurting badly; he needed to reach her. The clouds rolled with his rage. Raul was hurting her.

Dante raced up the flight of steps in apartment building. His fast form went unnoticed by any tenants that gathered in the hallway. He paused at her door before using every ounce of his power and strength to break it in.

"Get away from her. Now!" His voice shook the pictures on the wall.

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Dante fought back the need to rush to her side to ensure that she was unharmed, instead he reached out on their mental path, and felt her push him away. At least she was okay.

"Just the man we need." Raul crossed his arms over his wide chest. "I suppose I could just kill you now and I wouldn't need Miss Truheart to get the formula."

Angel rose to her feet. He saw the darkness in her blue eyes and felt the mental touch, gently probing the recesses of his mind.

Their connection was growing, she was welding this power effortlessly now. He was pleased by this new discovery, she was truly his mate. He let the thought wash over him, letting his passion for her fill his heart.

The mental connection was also a sexual touch across his body. Since she was his true mate their connection and sexual awareness would grow the longer they were in each other's presence. Even now, he felt the need to lower her to the ground and claim her.

"Get out of here," she screamed, quickly extinguishing the rush of his desire. "Get out, you beast."

Beast?

Dante stopped a few feet into the living room. Angel stepped around Raul as she screamed yet again for him to leave. "*You'll ruin everything.*" She screamed in his mind.

As she took a few steps closer to him, he hoped that she would get within reach. He could grab her and escape, but Raul reached out, grabbing a hand full of her blond hair.

Her scream pierced Dante's soul.

Vampire Christmas

Chapter 10

A dark rage consumed Dante. His eyes went red and his fangs dropped further as his anger rolled inside him. He leapt through the air with only one thing on his mind. Killing Raul.

As he flew through the air, Raul pulled a gun and fired. A pain shot through Dante's stomach. He dropped from flight, landing heavily on the carpet. Trying to sit up, he quickly covered the wound with his hands as blood rushed out through his fingers. He looked down unbelieving at the gap in his stomach.

Still holding Angel by the hair, Raul walked up and kicked him in the face.

"You were lucky to elude us these past few years. I've wanted to do this for a long time." Raul's foot swung back and kicked him in area of the wound. Dante gasped. Closing his eyes, he scanned his body for the damage.

Dante heard Angel's scream, but the white-hot pain lanced through him making him curl up into a ball on the floor.

His blood was spilling out around him, the precious fluid that made him strong. A sweet coppery scent filled his nostrils. The gunshot wound would not kill him, but the loss of blood was draining his strength.

"Dante, Oh my God, Dante." Her warm hands ran through his hair, over his cheeks, and then back into his hair pushing it away from his face. The blood slowly oozed out of his body and his strength slowly fading. How could a mere bullet do this to him?

Angel's hands were gone as Raul leaned close to his ear, "You are the undead, aren't you? The bullet was laced with holy water just in case. The formula will be mine soon."

Dante managed to open one eye. "I'll kill you," he warned looking deep into Raul's soul. The man quickly stood up and grabbed Angel.

"Let's go." Raul said, pulling Angel behind him.

Unable to move, Dante tried to relax on the floor, but he heard Angel fighting with Raul, wanting to return to make sure he was okay. Dante reached deep inside himself searching for his connection with Angel.

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"Dante! I'm so sorry." She spoke in his mind. He let her essence infuse him, providing a measure of strength.

"No, I'm sorry, my sweet." He pushed the connection further back into his mind so he could focus on summoning something to him. He needed to feed. The blood was seeping from the wound faster than his body could heal.

He could not focus too much energy and he was almost scared what would answer him, but he needed blood and he needed it now.

Soon, he felt the gentle rustle of air as something came into the apartment. *Yes, come*, he coaxed with his mind.

Rolling over on his side, he opened his eyes to see what had come to his calling. Two small brown eyes outlined in white curly fur looked down at him.

Damn.

He grabbed the dog and pulled it to him, casting a memorizing spell. The dog turned away exposing his neck and Dante sank his teeth in.

Raul pulled Angel by the arm down the now all too familiar sidewalk. Angel wondered how had things gotten so out of control so fast? Her feet slipped on the pavement as she tried to keep up with Raul's swift stride. Her body was warm from the unexpected exertion and partly fueled by the fury that was steadily building inside her.

Was it true that Dante was the undead? A vampire? She had heard the legends, but who believed in such things. A little thrill raced through her. It would be fascinating if he truly was.

Angel felt the gentle pull from him and knew that he still lived. Would he be able to heal himself or would the holy water really kill him? The damage the laced bullet did to him still appeared in her mind. His body lay so still on her floor and the amount of blood he lost could not be good for him.

A freaking vampire. She was attracted to a freaking vampire! She could not get the thought out of her mind. How could vampires keep themselves hidden for so long?

Uncertain until that moment, she knew that she would do whatever it took to keep him alive. Vampire or not, he had managed to break through her barriers. Now, she was about to steal the one thing that meant more to him than her, the formula for his ornaments.

It was close to midnight and the street was empty. The newly fallen snow lightened the area making it appear almost daylight.

Vampire Christmas

Cinnamon and peppermint drifted through the air highlighting the fact that Christmas was coming soon.

If Dante lived, she swore she would buy a Christmas tree. She would decorate it with every ornament he would allow her to take. If only he would live.

Raul pushed her, making her stumble in the snow. "Get to work, Angel." He motioned at the large glass door with a slight shake of his head as he looked over his shoulder. She knew the street was empty. Silently, she hoped that someone would see him manhandling her and stop him.

She pulled out her kit and worked the pick into the lock until she heard a loud click. Turning the knob, the door slowly opened under her gentle push. The room was dark except for the string of Christmas lights that lined the trees. It left the room in a romantic state. Angel's mind instantly turned to Dante.

He was doing something. She felt his energy waver, then strengthen slightly. Whatever it was, she hoped he continued. Angel prayed that he would be okay and be able to forgive her for handing over the formula. She wanted to explore in more detail the way he made her feel. The heated passion that erupted when they touched was so potent that she found she was craving the feel of him between her legs.

"You think it's here?" Raul's hardened voice asked in a whisper, bringing her back to the moment.

"Yes. Back here." Angel closed her eyes and hoped she would find the formula.

They made their way to Dante's office. Feeling around the wall for the latch, her finger found the groove and she pushed. The hidden door slid silently back into the wall revealing a dark hallway. Raul's excited laugh made her wince.

Angel looked back and saw the glitter in his eyes. The hope of power danced across his pupils.

"So, why is this formula so important?" She asked.

Ignoring her question, Raul pushed her to the side. He hesitated at the doorway before he stuck one foot over the threshold. When he entered into the darkness, the hallway lit up with tiny lights. He laughed.

"Oh my God," he said underneath his breath.

He looked back, making sure that she was still there. When he realized she wasn't directly behind him he reached out and grabbed her wrist, twisting it until he pulled her closer to his back. She gritted her teeth against the pain.

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“Come on. We’ve got some searching to do.” She had no option but to follow him down the hallway. “Where is it?”

Unable to see what he was talking about she responded, “Where is what?”

Raul turned and yanked her against his chest. “Where is the damn room?” He said through clenched teeth. Anger rolled in his eyes. “Get me into that goddamn room, now!”

Vampire Christmas

Chapter 11

Dante pulled his body up from the floor. The dog lay at his side, its little heart working overtime to replace the blood that Dante took. He'd be okay in the morning. He hated taking blood from animals.

Foul words drifted through Dante's mind at the thought of a stupid poodle being the only thing that heeded his call. The small amount of blood that flew through his system instantly went to the wound, knitting the flesh back together. He felt the nerve endings pulling tightly, the epidermis coming together to form his new skin. The burning pain almost made him pass out again, but he knew he needed to get to Angel.

Dante chuckled as he recalled Raul's last words. *"You are the undead, aren't you? The bullet you'll soon realize was laced with holy water."*

Holy water? It no more hurt him than crosses did. The bullet is what did the damage. Wouldn't Raul be in for a surprise? He leaned up on his hands, stopping to let the room quit spinning. He needed to call something larger than a poodle. Closing his eyes, he searched the other apartments for a human. He needed something with more sustenance.

Finally, down at the end of the hall, he found a man sitting in front of his television with a beer dangling in his hand. A deep snore echoed in Dante's mind. Gathering his energy, finding the man's mental link, he reached out through the connection and called him forth.

Within minutes, a dreamy eyed man stepped into the apartment. The scent of beer and sweat assaulted Dante's senses, his lips curled in distaste. Normally, he would not take blood laced with any type of stimulant, but right now, he had no choice. The man stepped slowly to him. His dark green eyes stared out into nothing, waiting for Dante to feed.

"Much better," Dante said as he pushed his body up from the floor. He struggled to stand before he got his bearings. He staggered over to the man who now had his neck angled for easier access. A large blue vein called to Dante. His teeth lengthened as his mouth began to water.

He felt a sharp pain in his mind and quickly searched out its source. He held the man by his shoulders while he found the cause of the pain. Angelina... His head arched back and he struck down on the dark blue vein.

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The sweet coppery taste of the blood flooded over his taste buds. It took everything he had not to moan with pleasure. He felt the rush of arousal gather in his body. It wasn't normal for him to feed from a man, because the feeding process was such an erotic act. It often accompanied sex, but not always. Now he would check his libido and save it for his sweet little thief.

His muscles churned, the nerve endings exploded with strength, his mind grew sharp and focused on the precious fluid. He loved it. His tongue savored the metallic taste as it slid down his throat.

Once satisfied, he laid the man down on the floor sending him a mental compulsion to rise in an hour and return to his room. Sated, he leapt to his feet and sailed out into the darkness, a deep fury boiling inside him.

Angel looked at the end of the passage. Normally, she would enjoy the excitement of breaking and entering, but not now. Now her throat felt tight and her mouth was dry. Swallowing hard, she calmed her nerves and padded around the door with her fingertips, praying she would find something, anything that would open up the hidden door.

"What the hell is taking you so damn long?" Raul's angry voice sounded behind her.

"The latch is here, somewhere, just give me a minute. What's so important about this formula?" She asked again as her hands tried the corners for something.

Raul chuckled. "Have you ever held one of his ornaments in your hand, Angel? Peace, happiness washes over the person. Do you know how rich I'd be if I had that formula. I wouldn't just limit it to stupid Christmas ornaments." He laughed again, a deep throaty sound. "People want to feel happy."

Angel kept searching. How could an ornament hold such a thing? "You really believe it works?" she questioned, trying to keep her voice light. She could smell that sweet scent of flowers drifting up from somewhere and was a little excited at what she might find behind the door.

Inch by inch her fingers slid over the surface. Then she felt it, a small indentation in the wall. She found the secret lock and laughed with triumph. Pushing it in, the hidden door slid inside the wall revealing a room bathed in candle light.

Her eyes grew and for a moment, her heart stopped beating.

Vampire Christmas

"Move," Raul said as he pushed her aside. Angel watched him carefully. He was full of selfishness, waiting to see what the room held for him. His mouth hung open while he scanned the contents of the room. The vastness of it was awe inspiring. Her eyes widen at the enormous cauldrons lining the wall. Smoke bellowed up from one, but she didn't see a fire underneath it.

Unaware of Raul, she looked around the room for a computer, a binder, or something that Dante would use to keep his information in.

Dante.

Her mind instantly turned to their connection. She could feel his rage like a rock in the pit of the stomach. Her hand instinctively covered her belly where the knot of rage burrowed inside her. An intoxicating smell drifted to her nose. Something about the fragrance made her relax, like she had all the time in the world.

"Get the damn formula, Angel." Raul's voice cut into her thoughts. "All I have to do is push one button and little sis will be history." He danced the cell phone in front of her face, a reminder of what he could do.

Deep in her throat, she growled, truly growled at him. She felt the tingle of hair at her nape and the tiny hairs on her arms stood up.

"Fine," she said through clenched teeth.

Going over to a desk, she pulled out a binder. She blinked in disbelief as the images began to move before her eyes. The flowers on the pages swayed across the whiteness of the paper. Flipping another page, she gasped. An iris bloomed before her eyes then it closed, drooping a little. Hesitantly, her fingers reached out and touched it. Jerking quickly back, the silkiness of the flower surprised her.

What the... .

Reaching out again, she could not help the smile that crossed her face. The glory of being able to see the flower come to life made her happy. She reached out to touch it; this was such a gift to be able to see something so special. Why had Dante not shared this knowledge? Then again, how could he? Bad people obviously wanted what he had.

"What have you found?" Raul peered over her shoulder. She quickly shut the book and put it aside. His agitation was apparent as he went back to pacing beside her. She didn't have much time.

"Nothing, just some...invoices filed away." Looking back at the desk, she spotted a leather bound book, tucked behind the computer.

She glanced over her shoulder to see where Raul was; he dipped something into the smoldering caldron and eyed it carefully. Angel took

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up the book and examined it, the leather appeared crinkled and old, a faint scent of musk drifted up as she turned the pages.

Her heart skipped a beat as she looked down at the elegant scroll of penmanship on the page. Deeply curved letters reminded her of something written hundreds of years ago. Her finger gently traced over some of the words. Some of the words written in some foreign language she had never seen before. She flipped through the pages, feeling how hard Dante worked on each page. It must have taken him a forever to fill it up.

"Well. Well. Well. What have we here?" Raul said as he plucked the leather bound book from her fingers. She tried holding on it, but she was afraid she would damage it so she reluctantly let go.

Flipping carelessly through the pages, Raul's eyes glowed with excitement. Slamming the book shut, he grabbed her arm and viciously drew her towards the opening. "Let's go!"

He stopped and turned towards the room; an evil glint in his eyes. Raul strode over to the caldron and heaved until the contents spilled across the floor. Water and bits of flowers raced across the floor, the scent overpowered the room. He moved over to Dante's desk, and pushed the computer over; it landed heavily on the ground as sparks exploded around them.

I'm so sorry, Dante. Her heart broke as she glanced back at the destroyed room. She could feel how much work he had put into building it and how much it meant to him. Angel tried to feel where he was, if he was close, but all she felt was a deep empty hole inside her.

Vampire Christmas

Chapter 12

The cold fell upon her face once again as Raul hauled her through the shop doors out into the night. A brisk wind whipped her hair around her face temporarily blinding her. She pulled her coat up around her neck.

Raul clutched the book tightly against his chest. Angel's heart ached; she could not find a solution to keeping Dante's secret safe.

Just those few moments of being in his arms made her long for more. She wanted to spend her life with him and feel those delicious lips on her neck again. She wanted to feel them all over her body. Their lives could be so full of joy, even if they did have to be together only at night.

Angel wanted her Christmases back. She wanted to be able to share them with someone that made her feel special and loved. The walls around her heart were crumbling little by little each time she thought of him. Okay, so he was a vampire and would have to spend his days asleep or whatever vampires did. Was that myth even true? Maybe he could walk in the sun. Did he want her to become vampire too?

At that thought, she got a chill that went deeper than the cold she was feeling. A little tingle of excitement raced through her. What would becoming a vampire entail?

Warmth swept through her body. She felt phantom hands glide deliciously down the flesh of her arms, in between the warm layer of clothing. Instantly, she knew it was him. She felt the warmth slide over her shoulders and down to cup her breasts, making the nipples stand erect beneath the fabric of her shirt. The gentle rub of the material sensitized them even more.

"Damn it, woman. Pay attention." Raul cursed as she stumbled across a rough patch of ice. She ignored him and tried focusing on where the sensation was originating.

Dante felt stronger, making her wonder just where he was able to get his strength from. How was it he was able to heal so fast?

"One of your neighbors was very happy to oblige in my time of need." He chuckled softly. She wanted to close her eyes and just absorb the sweet feel of his mind as it cut a hot path over her breasts, down her belly, and to warm the place that had begun to ache between her thighs.

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"What are you doing to me?" Even in her mind, her voice sounded breathless and her heart raced. She had to force her feet to move to keep up with Raul, when all she wanted to do is fall to the ground and allow the heat to overtake her body. Most likely, she would melt right through the layers of snow.

"In due time, my sweet." Angel felt him smile, really felt it and knew that he had a lust filled smirk across his gorgeous lips.

"I'm sorry, he has your book." She really did feel regret that she didn't hide it once she realized what it contained. Now it was in the hands of evil men. Men who would take the credit for themselves. At least, she thought that was why they wanted Dante's formula.

Instinctively, she knew that probably was not the case. She had a fear that whatever they planned to do with it was not in the best interest of anyone but themselves.

A surge of warmth pulled her back from her thoughts. Wetness pooled between her thighs and the ache intensified within her. Once this was over, she would make him pay.

"Oh, it will be my pleasure." His dark voice said in her mind, answering her thoughts.

"Dante, can we stay focused, please. How are we going to..."

Raul pushed her into the backseat of a dark vehicle. The connection with Dante ended, leaving her suddenly cold.

"Ow! Damn Raul. Do you have to be so rough?" She yelled over the seat. The smell of stale cigarettes, beer, and old food made her gag.

Raul entered the car, placing the book carefully at his side. There was no way she could reach it.

The car ride was long, she even caught herself dozing on the way, but she fought to stay awake, memorizing the landscape, in hopes of sending her location to Dante. Distinguishing the landscape turned out to be quite difficult due to all the snow, everything looked the same.

Raul did not speak to her on the way; instead, she just got a couple of hard looks through the rearview mirror.

Unable to stand the silence any longer, Angel asked, "Are you taking me to Abby?" She only received another mocking glare through the mirror and a wry smile that set her nerves on end.

"So, you never planned on letting her go, did you?" As she questioned him, she wondered if she should try to jump from the car, but then her sister would be left to the mercy of these monsters. No, it's better if they just take her to her sister and maybe together the two of them could

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figure out how to escape. Because she was not going to die tonight. Not now!

She had finally found someone that had gotten behind her barriers and she was anxious to see just how much he could make her feel. Angel knew Dante would come. He would not have played with her earlier, if he didn't plan on finishing what he started. After all this was over and her sister was home safe, she planned on spending hours, if not days, naked with him.

The car turned a tight corner and slowed. Angel looked out the window at a large building. The multiple windows were dark and some were cracked or broken. A metal fence lined with razor wire outlined a deserted parking lot.

The hair on her neck tingle with dread as the car slowly crept through the lot; the building grew more ominous the closer they came. God, if her sister was in there all alone, she would kill him. Plain and simple.

When they came to a stop, Raul leapt from the car and quickly pulled her out, dragging her behind him. The book was held tightly against his body, out of her reach.

He took her to the third floor where he pushed her through the elevator door so that she could precede him into the empty room. One standing lamp in the far corner cast eerie shadows from the square columns onto the floor. The cold from outside seeped through the damaged panes of glass.

Angel saw Abby. Her body slumped haphazardly in a chair, her chin touched her shoulder and it looked to be in an odd angle. Angel's heart stopped.

"What have done, you evil bastard?" She flew at him, sinking her nails into the skin around his eyes. He screamed as he pushed her off him. Raul looked at her and wiped away the blood that was starting to form from the gashes she managed to inflict around his eyes.

"You bitch! She isn't dead. But for that little act, I should kill you both right now. Manuel!"

A dark haired, dark-skinned man appeared from around a corner. A large rifle rested in the crook of his arm. He watched her, as if waiting for her to make one wrong move so that he could fill her torso with holes. One finger rubbed lovingly over the trigger. The man looked the type who'd enjoy killing.

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Pushed from behind, she fell on her knees onto the floor. Manuel was quickly there with the barrel of his gun pointed directly between her eyes. Angel swallowed hard.

"Get up. Go sit by your sister," Raul said as he hauled her body up by her elbow, pushing her in the direction of her sister. Manuel repositioned the gun and stepped back allowing her to move to her sister.

Angel ran to her. Dropping down to her knees by the chair, she moved the dirty strands of hair out of Abby's eyes.

"Baby, are you okay." Angel tried rubbing off the dirt on her cheek; Abby groaned in response to her touch indicated that it was a bruise. She rubbed it lightly as tears gathered in her eyes.

Abby whimpered, "Angel?"

"Yes, sweetie, I'm here."

Abby slowly raised her lids revealing red-rimmed eyes. She appeared heavily drugged. "Angel. Are you really here?"

Angel heard footsteps come up from behind her. Turning, she saw a smiling Raul still wiping at his eyes. Angel tamped down the urge to claw at his eyes again.

"What have you done to her?" Angel screamed, her voice strained.

"She'll be fine. She's just a little drugged; not that it will matter."

A lump formed in Angel's throat. "You're really going to kill us?"

"Yes, I am. You see this." Raul stroked the leather covering of Dante's book. "Our government has paid me well to make sure that this was delivered into their hands." His eyes lit up as he looked at the bound book, lust filling his eyes. "And now I have it, so you are no longer needed, Miss Truheart."

"How could you be my friend for so long and then do this without a care in the world?" She spat out, anger infusing every word.

Raul chuckled and rolled his eyes. "That was a mighty fine act, wasn't it? I did start to care for you in the end, Angel. That's why this year had to be the one. We watched Dante for a while, but we never were able to hold onto him. But you see..." He leaned down close to her face. "He did always come back to his little store to open up his precious shop for Christmas."

"But why did you need me?" Angel toyed with Abby's limp fingers. She could feel the slow pulse pounding at her tips. The flow of blood could be heard faintly in her ears.

"Why did we *need* you?" Raul repeated sarcastically as he stood tall and began to pace around the room. "We didn't really need you, but Jonah and I talked..." His dark eyes turned and cut right through her.

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"Yes, Jonah and I talked and we figured since you didn't get murdered in the explosion with your parents – which were supposed to happen by the way – we could just off you now."

She could not contain her impulse any longer. She threw herself at Raul's chest. Her nails raked his cheeks, creating crimson pools. She heard screaming and did not even realize it was coming from her. All she knew was that she wanted to shut him up. Shut him up and kill him.

Raul grabbed her forearms, squeezing them tightly until they tingled from the lack of circulation. She did not care; her fingers and nails flew across his face. He finally managed to push her away before retrieving the book he had dropped.

"You are a crazy bitch!" He screamed, wiping away the blood running down his face.

"Manuel!" He yelled, noticing the man had disappeared.

K.L. Bjork

Chapter 13

"Are you looking for him?" A deep voice resonated in the room, sending thick liquid down her spine and caressing that secret spot that started to ache with need. Dante's voice echoed power and authority.

Angel looked behind Raul as Dante stepped out of the shadows. In one hand, he held Manuel, his head dangling at an awkward angle. Blood dripped from a ragged wound at his neck.

"Dante," Angel whispered. A feeling of protection washed over her. She felt a familiar tingle on her own neck as she watched the Dark God slowly walked into the light. The red glow of his eyes made her gasp. At that moment, she could not deny that he was something other than human. His presence sent her body up in flames. She wanted to run to him so that he could hold her in an embrace that would keep everything bad away.

With a quick jerk, Raul turned around to face Dante. He sneered and clutched the book tighter against his chest. "What are you...?"

"Doing here?" Dante finished for him, "I'm going to kill you for hurting what is mine."

Angel's heart soared as his movement commanded every living thing inside the room, except Raul who held the book against his chest like a child with his favorite toy. His head shook with denial as he began to approach her. Before she had any idea what he had planned he whirled around, catching her arm and twisting it behind her. She let out a pain-filled squeak, as the tendons in her arm stretched beyond their limit.

"What's yours?" Raul questioned with contempt. "This you mean?" He shook her indicating that he was talking about her. "Or this," Raul held out the leather bound book at his side before quickly pulling it back against his chest not taking any chances with Dante so close.

Angel's eyes closed as the pain in her shoulder burned fiercely down to her fingers. She tried pulling her arm down, but Raul only made the pain worse by yanking her arm towards the back of her head.

She squeezed her eyes shut, letting out a small moan.

"You will let my Angel go." Dante's voice was barely audible. His eyes were a blaze of color, red swirling with black, as they focused on Raul.

Vampire Christmas

No one could help Raul now. He shuttered behind her as he held her tightly, not allowing her any leeway for possible escape. She was the only reason Dante didn't attack.

"You better back off. I'll kill her now without a second thought and take your precious book with me."

"Afraid not, Raul. I'll reach you before you take two steps. Do you want to take that risk?" Dante's gaze never wavered from Raul.

"You would put her life in danger?" He pulled Angel's arm making her squeak with pain.

Dante started towards her, but stopped.

She reached out yet again on the line of energy to find Dante and felt his fury. Silently, she communicated that she would drop to the floor so that he could rush Raul, she could handle a broken arm if it came to that.

Dante sent back waves of encouragement. She knew he was bidding his time, waiting for the perfect opportunity to attack, so she would create it for him.

Taking a deep breath, she dropped her body to the ground. Distantly she heard a snap and knew it was her arm, but she pushed the pain away as her body hit the cold floor and rolled away from Raul. Just as she cleared Raul's feet, she felt the wind move over her. A loud crash sounded. Rolling into a sitting position, Angel cradled her arm close to her body.

The two men rolled around on the floor in front of her sister. Crying out, she crawled with one hand until she reached the back of the chair and pulled her sister to one of the large columns so that she could work the binding free and still see the fight.

Raul crashed against the wall sending the book flying from his hands. Dante did not let his attention waver. He knew he must kill him.

Dante grabbed Raul up off the floor and flung his battered body across the room. Raul's body landed across a table sending glass and paper flying in the air and before crashing to ground. Moving quickly, Dante raced back to the downed man and hauled him up by the collar of his shirt. Raul tried to swing weakly, but missed. His movements were much slower now. Dante pulled back his fist and started to strike his face, but Raul surprised him by pulling up a pen and jabbing the end deep into his shoulder.

Dante grabbed his shoulder, screaming in outrage. Raul dropped from his grasp and the man scrambled toward the elevator. The smell of Raul's blood and fear was thick in the room fanning the deep hunger

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within. Dante was determined that it must end immediately. He was tired of this fight.

He looked over and saw Angel hugging Abby close against her chest and whispering words of encouragement. Her sister's head bobbed back and forth over her shoulder. Satisfied they were okay, he returned his attention to Raul; he allowed him to get within inches of the elevator before he flashed before him.

Raul lifted his hand in a staying motion and Dante held back.

"This won't die with me. Just remember that. This will not die with me. They want the formula and they'll do whatever it takes to get it. I was just a pawn, just like Angel." In one last bid to escape he attacked Dante, wrapping his legs and arms around his body.

Dante stumbled into the wall before he decided to take full advantage of the position. He pulled Raul's hair back exposing his neck and he sank his teeth deep, letting the blood flow over the puncture wounds. He was not using him to feed, but to bleed him dry and he did not mind that he was being careless. He drained him until he felt the last flicker of his energy fade away. One final beat of Raul's heart signaled the end. Rising his head, Dante dropped the lifeless body to the ground.

"Dante!" Angel's called. He rushed to her side and noticed the tears flowing freely down her face as she held her sister close. She looked up and the pain in her eyes struck him.

Pushing her hair away from her face, he said, "What is it? Is your sister okay?" He looked down and noticed the paleness of Abby's skin. He tuned his hearing to her heartbeat and noted the slowing of its pace. The blood in her veins sounded thick indicating that whatever Raul had used on her was meant to kill.

"Hurry, we must get to a hospital," he said. He grabbed Abby from Angel's grasp.

"She needs help Dante, please." He searched her eyes and she reached up and cupped his cheek. He found that he would do anything she asked of him to make the pain in her eyes go away.

"Meet me at the hospital, Angelina, and stay out of trouble. The building is secure, I made sure. Use the car Raul brought you in and get there as fast as you can. I'll make sure your sister is safe." He bent his head and captured her lips in a searing kiss. He tasted the salt of her tears and, more importantly, he tasted what was uniquely her. Unable to control himself, he grew hard as she ran her tongue over his lips before she pulled away.

"Go," she said.

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Leaving her behind was the hardest thing he had ever done, but he knew that her sister was the last of her family and he would make sure she remained alive.

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Chapter 14

The sky was ablaze with oranges and pinks as the sun broke the horizon. She was making her way to the hospital to check on her sister and hopefully to see Dante. If what she knew of vampires was true, which wasn't much, she felt he probably wouldn't be there, but gone someplace to sleep. It had taken her a little longer than she anticipated because she had to find something to bind her arm with. She didn't think it was broken, but she feared that it was out of socket.

When she finally made her way into her sister's room all other thoughts fled from her mind, as relief flooded through her at seeing her sister alive. Tubes and wires connected her small body to a machine at her side. Different beeps and clicks echoed in the room. Taking Abby's slender hand in her own, Angel lightly squeezed. Pale eyes looked up from gaunt features.

"Angel, I was so worried that something happened to you, but Dante told me you were fine." Angel felt the desperation in the way Abby's fingers tightened around hers. She patted her sister's hand to reassure her that she was there.

"Don't worry, Abby. I'm fine, you're fine. We'll be out of here and back on the sofa watching old movies soon. Although I think it's time we started celebrating Christmas again. What do you think? I feel so blessed to have you." Bending down Angel placed a kiss on Abby's forehead, before too long she heard the even breathing of sleep.

Letting her sister rest, she pulled a chair closer to the bed. There propped against a vase of flowers she saw the note. Elegantly written on the front was her name and she knew instantly who it was from. Her heart leapt as she eagerly flipped it over and tore out the missive stored inside.

Dearest Angelina,

The sun is rising faster than I had hoped. I wanted to drink in your beauty to last me until we meet again. Your sister is a tough woman with a lot of spirit. She should be out of the hospital in a day or two. I will be honored if you would meet me at my shop after the sun goes down.

Until the sun sets,

D.

Vampire Christmas

Angel closed the letter and moved to stand at the window. Orange, pink, and purple streaked the sky. What would it be like never to see those brilliant colors again? Then again, what would it be like to live without Dante?

The sun slowly rose over the treetops.

Her sister woke, they chatted about their ordeal and Angel tried to make her sister feel safe and secure in the hospital. She even told her about Dante and after much contemplation, she revealed that he was a vampire to her sister's shocked dismay.

The alarm in Abby's eyes soon turned into curiosity. "So is he going to turn you into one?"

Angel just shrugged her shoulders, "I don't know, but when I am not with him I feel this emptiness inside me. It's like a hole that only he can fill."

Abby's eyes turned dreamy and Angel tried not to laugh. "You're in love with him, Angel. I'm so glad to see you happy." She gazed out the window. "It's almost dark."

Angel's stomach tightened with nerves and she swiftly gave her sister a peck on the cheek. "I will be back shortly. You'll be okay while I'm gone."

"I will. Just go sis. The guard Dante posted will keep me company." Shaking her head and laughing, Angel left room. She noticed the tall, imposing figure standing at attention by the door. He was quite handsome with his blonde hair cut close to his scalp and a lean face. His eyes never wavered to acknowledge her, but she knew he was more than aware. Abby would have a field day breaking down those walls.

Feeling satisfied that Abby was safe, she left the hospital with one thing on her mind. How was she going to get a vampire to make a commitment to her?

The butterflies in her stomach grew more frantic the closer she got to the shop. The heavy cold in the air made her lungs labor. People walked wildly down the sidewalk in hopes to get those last minute Christmas gifts. Tomorrow was Christmas Eve. The bustling crowd formed an obstacle for her to weave in and out of, almost as if they were purposefully moving in front of her to slow her progress.

Reaching the front door, Angel looked through the window and noticed the old woman smiling happily as she helped a customer; many others stood around the decorated trees in awe of the fabulous

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decorations. The looks on their faces showed happiness as many gently held the ornaments in their hands.

Her heart began to swell at the remembrance of her family being together at Christmas. They had such fun together, maybe it was time to let her family go and start making some new memories.

As she stood there, looking into the foggy window, her heart felt lighter and the ghosts of her family were finally put to rest.

Dante walked into view and her breath caught in her throat. She pushed greedily through the door and walked to where he was at the back of the store. The familiar scents of cinnamon and peppermint filled the room. Taking in a deep breath, she savored the smell of Christmas on the back of her tongue. Finally allowing herself to feel the Christmas spirit, or maybe it was the effect of the ornaments, it did not matter, because she was happier than she has ever felt.

When he turned around, their eyes locked and she thought she might be falling into the depths of the darkened orbs. She stood motionless in front of him, not sure if she should make the first move or if he would. He quickly took her option away by striding up to her and pulling her close, tucking her head under his chin.

"Dante," she whispered; burrowing close to his chest. The scent of irises and lilies smelled heavily on his clothes and she knew he had been working on putting his lab back together. Her belly ached at the thought of his loss.

Quickly pulling back to look in his face, she said, "The book..."

He covered her lips with a finger. "I recovered it, Angelina. No worries." He pulled her close again and she sank into him, suddenly wanting to feel more of him, to show him how much he meant to her.

They stood like that for a moment before he gently guided her to the back. When they entered his office, he shut the door behind them, and pushed her up against it. He crowded his body close to hers and she felt his overpowering masculinity. She had to remember to breathe as he stood looking deep into her eyes. His right hand came up and a finger slid down her cheek, slowly tracing the outline of her jaw.

Closing her eyes, she savored his gentle touch as it seared a path across her skin. She felt the breath on her lips a second before he covered them with his own. His tongue played with the seam of her lips before pushing its way inside. Her knees buckled at the erotic sensation and he wrapped his arm around her waist holding her close to his body. She felt the object of her desire hard against her belly.

Vampire Christmas

Feeling brave, she reached down and caressed his erection lightly with her fingertips. He growled as his cock jerked in response to her touch. Angel shrugged out of her coat and pulled him closer. He bent down so that he could rub his lips over her neck. He let his fangs lightly nip her, sending chills down her back.

"Dante. Please, make me like you," she whispered.

He pulled back with a start.

"Like me? Are you sure, Angel?" The way he asked, she felt that he wanted to jump on the offer, but needed to make sure she was certain of her request. Even though she had no idea what it required, she knew she did not want to live without this man, even if it meant no more sunrises. He would be her sun, and their love would glow as brightly as any sun.

Her finger played along the seam at his shoulder as she looked up with innocent eyes. "I love you, Dante. I want to be with you."

He moved her hands until they wrapped around his waist. Her head lay against his chest and she felt the strong muscle inside his chest. "Ah, Angel. My Angel. I love you too. I knew you were mine the first moment I fed from you."

"You fed from me?" She wanted to be mad, but instead she found it quite arousing.

"Yes, my love. And I'll do it again." He nipped her jaw as he moved the hair back from her face. His finger brushed her chin, angling it up so he could press his lips against hers. Their kiss was passionate, heated; with it they let go of all their fears. His energy reached out on their shared connection and searched for her energy.

She shivered as she felt the sweet invasion in her mind. As their tongues danced wickedly together, their energies swirled behind her eyes in vibrant pink and purple colors. At this moment, they were separate, winding around each other in an exotic dance. Angel's head fell back against the wall as the ghostly apparitions of their energy slammed into each other in an explosion of color, creating one energy.

She felt their combined energies humming inside her, deep to her core. Dante pulled her deeper into his embrace until she thought she might dissolve into him. Opening her eyes, the room was dark with just the soft glow of their bodies.

"Are you ready, Angel?"

"Will the change hurt?"

Shaking his head, he rubbed his thumb across her lips creating a gentle pull between her thighs. She wanted to physically feel him inside

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her now, wanted their bodies joined as one like the energy that was now dancing around them.

Dante lowered her to a small couch in the corner, while he worked the buttons free of her shirt and then he moved to the waist of her pants working them down her body. Making quick work of it, he laid her clothes on the floor as one hand rubbed her abdomen. Her stomach twitched in response as he lightly touched her; his hand cupped her breast through her bra, gently kneading her breasts. Her body arched into his palms, coaxing the playful fingers to continue. Shards of pleasure exploded inside her and unable to stand it, she pulled his shirt open sending buttons flying. She rubbed her hands across his smooth chest, wanting to explore every inch of him.

He pulled away, making her reach out for him. She saw that he was taking off his pants. She squirmed on the couch as she took in the full impact of his gorgeous body.

Every well-defined muscle begged for her touch. His dark skin was not what she expected, considering he was not able to go out in the sun, but it made him appear more the Dark God she named him.

When he covered her body with his own, easing between her spread thighs, she moaned her pleasure.

"Angelina, my Angel. You have made me complete." He took her in one thrust, burying his shaft to the hilt inside her. Her body relaxed allowing this new intrusion. The pain heightened her arousal and she began to move underneath him, coaxing him to join her. He worked his cock deep inside her, massaging the walls, and reaching deep to touch her core, simply stroking her body to life.

The smell of their lovemaking filled the room as their orgasms built within them. Dante began to pump faster as she felt the building momentum. Her body stiffened and her muscles tightened around him as she went over the edge.

"Dante!" She screamed her climax as he struck her neck with his teeth. He found his release following her, while taking in her sweet juice. Her body relaxed beneath his hard form. The pull of his lips sucking greedily against her neck sent her into another orgasm, before she drifted into darkness.

Vampire Christmas

Epilogue

The wind howled outside the window of Angel's apartment as the fallen snow made light tapping noises on the glass. Abby left the hospital after convincing her sister that she was fine. Angel knew she would recover easier at home so had allowed her to leave. The guard had offered his protection there as well, but Angel suspected it was because he was smitten with Abby.

The smell of cinnamon lingered heavily in the air of her apartment and feminine laughter echoed from the kitchen.

"I told you that was too much, Angel," Abby said leaning over the stove to stir the pot of potpourri. A large smile lit her face; the signs of her ordeal were slowly fading from her face.

Angel walked up to peer over her shoulder. Shaking her head, she pushed her sister aside, picked up the wooden spoon and began to stir. "When Dante gets here with the tree, he'll be able to tell us what we did wrong. He should be here soon. I can feel him close." She felt his phantom arms wrap around her and she could not stop the blush that stole through her cheeks. Being a vampire had many interesting little tricks. She found they could touch each other just by thinking about an area of the body. It had gotten to be a game with them.

"My God, Angel. Tell him to stop," Abby said, rolling her eyes. She leaned over the counter as Mitchell, the guard from the hospital, came to her side, wrapping an arm around her waist. Angel watched her sister's eyes light up. Happiness did not seem like something they would have again after her parents died, but now looking at the glow on her sister's face and thinking about the way Dante filled her heart, she knew her life finally had meaning.

The vampire conversion did not turn out as she expected. When she finally woke up after she passed out, Dante opened a vein and coaxed her to take his blood. She thought she would throw up, but once the fluid touched her tongue she had never experienced anything so full of taste. Human food could not compare to the delicacy. The tiny droplets exploded across her taste buds and she drank from him heartily, filling her veins with the precious fluid of his life.

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When she had regained her strength, Dante informed her that he was an ancient Vampire, vowed to keep one-half of a powerful formula safe until the making of a Vampire Queen. Right now, the vampires were scattered throughout the world to keep their kind safe. Therefore, he had tried to hide, only emerging during Christmas hoping he would not draw attention to himself. Unfortunately, he had and now they knew that Raul was just a minor player in greater scheme that needed to be uncovered.

The sound of the door slamming brought Angel from her thoughts. She turned off the stove where she had absently been stirring the potpourri and went into to the living room with Abby and Mitchell close behind. She was shocked at the huge pine making its way into her apartment.

“Dante! My goodness, where did you get such a huge tree?”

“It’s your first Christmas with me, my sweet. I had to get you a decent tree.” Dante moved the tree to the corner then stood back and looked at it. “It’s perfect. Come, love. Let us decorate. I have the perfect ornaments.”

The End

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Author Bio

K.L. Bjork is a full time telecommunications analyst, a wife and a mother of two small children. She started reading romance in 2003 and when all her favorite authors were in between books she decided to do some writing on her own. That is when she discovered the joy of creating characters and building worlds full of magic. Christine Feehan was the first author in romance that she read and instantly fell in love with the Carpathians, soon following Feehan she discovered Sherrilyn Kenyon and the Dark Hunters. She anticipates each book coming out, but now understands why it takes so long between stories.

You can email K.L. at klbjork@sbcglobal.net.