

I hated to admit it, but sometimes the clichés we hear about in stories are true. For instance, it really was a dark and stormy night. Just as well. I shouldn't have been at this shindig in the first place, but all the tourist traps and attractions closed at 9 o'clock and I honestly had nothing better to do. Mom was a bit under the weather and Dad was running late. Most parents wouldn't let their eighteen year old go to a party by herself, but we were an unconventional family, to say the least.

The rain bounced off the top of my umbrella, but odd droplets here and there splashed against my fishnet stockings, making me cold. I probably should have chosen a better outfit, but it was Halloween and this pirate getup was the only thing that was in my size. If I had it my way, I'd be sashaying my way into the room as Catwoman. I did love symbolism.

The doorway was high and arched and most likely real marble. A butler stood at the entrance wearing traditional tails and gloves, and even spats on his polished shoes. He was a bit chunky and his hair—what little was left—was grey. No costume for the help, I guess. Bummer.

"Name?" he asked in a polite but accented voice.

I smiled. "Cassandra Moody."

He scanned the guest book, waving a hand towards the entrance. "Welcome to Castle Dracula. Please check your coat and have a wonderful time."

I nodded and passed him, muttering under my breath, "Not likely."

I handed the coat check girl my fancy jacket as well as my umbrella and walked through the foyer to the main ballroom. The crowd was pretty thick for a party where only invited guests could attend. The room swarmed with huge hoop skirts and stove pipe top hats. Most opted for the 1800's Renaissance style costumes, which I found far too constricting. I was wearing a corset and my mom had to tie me up. My breasts floated beneath my chin like twin cannons and I hated it, but at least it made me look pretty good. As usual, I appeared to be the only black girl in the room, although there were plenty of other ethnicities, to my relief—a few Egyptians, some Japanese ladies in kimonos, and even a group of Native Americans.

I made a beeline for the bar, flashing my ID at the bartender. Hurray for Transylvania's lower legal drinking age. The Count must have been feeling awfully generous to have an open bar in his place, especially with so many supernatural folks hanging about. It was downright reckless.

"What can I get you, beautiful?" The bartender asked from behind the thick white bandages adorning his face. Had to be hard to hear under there. I admired his commitment to the costume.

"Surprise me," I answered, crossing my legs and adjusting the stiff tulle beneath my black-and-red skirt. He went to work with those long arms, tossing a few things together until he came up with an electric green concoction. I sipped it, rubbing my tongue against the roof of my mouth. Lime, lemon, vodka, and some sort of soda. Maybe Sprite, if they had that here. Not bad.

"Thanks, handsome." I gave him a five spot and swiveled my chair around, surveying the crowd. My Dad wasn't supposed to show for another hour so I'd have to fend for myself in the meantime. An orchestra stood on a stage in front of the massive fireplace, playing their most haunting tunes to amuse the crowd. The dance floor was crowded, but everyone was ballroom dancing, which I couldn't do. I had feet of clay and was a bit pigeon-toed too.

I continued sipping away, content to people-watch for a while. Unfortunately, I appeared to be the only teenager in the bunch and while I got along famously with the older crowd, no one else seemed to want to bother.

Half an hour crept by. Still no sign of my father. Annoyed, I wandered out of the main ballroom to check out the rest of the digs. Our gracious host had yet to appear, but then again, this place was huge and he could be upstairs bagging a babe. I hadn't seen him recently, though. All I had for reference were the old photos from the 1930's. He was less than six feet tall with brown hair, blue eyes, distinctive cheekbones, and a stocky build. Not much to look at, really.

There were seven rooms in this wing of the mansion—two libraries, three dens, a billiard hall, and a guest bedroom that was embarrassingly occupied by four different couples. Yeesh.

Thoroughly ruffled, I wandered upstairs until I found the kitchen. The staff was in full swing handling the food so I used my stealth and crept into the wine cellar. Thankfully, no one was down here. I breathed in the stale air and walked down the creaky steps. Moonlight peeked in through the slats in the boarded up window, illuminating just enough of the stone floor and the rows of wine for me to see. The wine bottles nearest to the staircase were polished but the further I searched, the dustier they got. I could tell the Count only took the common vintages out for guests and left the good stuff for himself. Well, he and my Dad were old college buddies, so to speak. He wouldn't mind if I partook in the private stash.

To my delight, I discovered an 1898 era bottle. I grabbed the cleanest wine glass I could find and poured it, my nostrils flaring with the sumptuous scent. Dry, very dry. Just the way I liked it.

I sipped carefully, my eyes closing in pleasure. "My compliments to the Count."

"They're reciprocated, I'm sure."

I whirled, growling in surprise as I spotted someone standing a couple of feet away. He was tall, about 6'2", with black hair parted down the center. He wore a cloak with a red interior and a huge diamond pinned at his throat. Half of his face was cloaked in darkness so I couldn't tell his age. It took a second for my instincts to abate and for me to remember I wasn't in any danger just yet. It was just that no one—and I mean *no one*—ever snuck up on me. This guy wasn't normal, not by a long stretch.

"You really shouldn't sneak up on people at a party like this," I said once I'd calmed myself.

The stranger held up his gloved hands in supplication. "Sorry. You seemed engaged by that wine and I didn't want to interrupt your moment of ecstasy."

I rolled my eyes. He was one of *those* guys, by the sound of things. "It's not that good. I prefer Ketel One any day."

He rubbed his chin. "I seem to recall some of that in the fridge upstairs. Should I call someone to get it for you?"

My mood instantly perked up. "Well, as long as it's not an imposition."

He shook his head. "Not in the least. Follow me."

He crooked a finger at me. I drained the rest of my glass, restored the stopper to its proper place, and trailed the mystery man. He walked into the kitchen without qualms and retrieved the booze. In the fluorescent lights I could see him better. He looked no older than thirty and he had classic features—a straight nose, dark blue eyes, a chiseled chin, and alabaster skin that confirmed my suspicions. Vampire.

Thus, I wasn't surprised when he only gave me one glass and didn't bring one for himself. He led me away from the throngs of people, occasionally waving to guests and kissing the hands of blushing ladies until we discovered a small drawing room on the east wing. It was chilly, but the vodka was warming me up so I didn't mind as much.

I settled on a crushed red velvet couch after finding a first edition copy of *The Three Musketeers*, content to flip through it in the dim light. I folded my legs beneath me as my companion settled on the opposite end, crossing one long leg on top of the other.

“You don’t have to be my escort, you know,” I said, eying him.

“Are you saying I’m no longer welcome to be in your company?” An insufferable grin greeted me.

“Do what you want. I’m just saying I know I’m not the belle of the ball and there are plenty of other girls dying to be entertained.”

He laughed—a dry sound. “True. However, I thought it would be prudent to take care of the daughter of one of my friends.”

I gave a start. “How did you know?”

“You have your father’s eyes. And his sarcasm. And his penchant for drinking.”

Fool that I am, I blushed and thanked God for my dark skin that hid it. “Oh. Don’t suppose you’re going to launch into a lecture about why young girls like me shouldn’t drink.”

“Not at all. It’s a necessary phase in becoming an adult anyhow. I wouldn’t dare deprive you of it.”

“Does it bother you?”

He cocked his head to the side, curious. “Does what?”

I brandished the drink. “Not being able to get drunk. You’re a vamp, right?”

“I can get drunk, just not easily.”

My eyes lit up. I loved hearing stories and facts about other supernatural creatures. Vampire lore was as clichéd as they come so I always wanted to hear what stuff was actually true about them. “How then?”

He clucked his tongue. “My question first. Why aren’t you out there mingling? I doubt your father would approve of you hanging out in a dark room with a stranger.”

I snorted. “I can take care of myself. I’m a frickin’ werewolf. No one’s gonna be dumb enough to start something, especially since I’m a friend of the host.”

His gaze was heavy, inquisitive. His face read playboy but those eyes said otherwise. “Interesting theory.”

Why did that sound vaguely threatening? Was he trying to drop a hint? Or was I hyper-paranoid? Then again, it wasn’t like those ideas were mutually exclusive. I sipped my drink, not letting him see my frothing thought patterns by keeping my face cool and blank.

“Now answer my question. How can a vampire get drunk?”

A smirk stretched across his lips. “By sipping from the blood of an intoxicated patron.”

I tilted my head, thinking about it. “Wow. That’s depressingly obvious and yet it never occurred to me.”

“How many vampires do you know?”

I shrugged. “A couple, but they’re acquaintances. I didn’t think it was polite to ask.”

“You met me no more than ten minutes ago and yet you saw fit to ask me,” he pointed out, adopting a faint offended look.

“Yeah, but I’m on vacation. If I offend you, I won’t have to deal with the consequences.”

“You wound me.”

I rolled my eyes. “Drama king.”

He laughed again and this one wasn’t dry. It was a bright, boisterous sound. Cultured, even. Suddenly the book didn’t seem as interesting as him. Then again, maybe it was the Vodka

talking. “That is an understatement, I’m afraid. I could rival Shakespeare himself with the scandal and tragedy my eyes have beheld.”

I drained my tumbler, shifting to face him. “Do tell.”

He shot me a warning look. “Are you sure? It’s not for the faint of heart.”

“Well, lucky for you, I’m a lionhearted girl. Let me have it.”

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The corset hurt like a bitch, but it was only because I was laughing so hard. Definitely a poor costume choice on my part. Then again, I hadn’t expected to be so amused and certainly not because of some vampire I’d just met.

“—so the police were forced to drop the charges and they gave me the stake to keep as a souvenir.”

I slow-clapped, which was a little harder than I thought after six glasses of Ketel One. “Bravo, bravo. Wonderfully told, sir.”

He bowed his head, making his dark hair slide across his forehead and into his eyes.

“Thank you, m’lady. Glad I could keep your attention.”

“So I am,” I giggled, reaching for the bottle. My purse buzzed next to me and I realized someone was calling me. I fumbled with it momentarily and then answered with a breezy, “Yuh?”

“Hey, baby girl. How you feelin’?”

“Fine. Where are you?”

“Your mom’s not feeling so hot so I had to high-tail it back to the hotel. Looks like you’re on your own tonight, kid.”

I groaned. “The only reason I went was because of you. You suck.”

“Bite me.”

“Don’t tempt me.”

“Ha-ha,” he said in his driest voice. “Tell Vlad I said hi. You comin’ home now?”

I met the vampire’s gaze, hesitating. “No. I think I’ll stick around for a bit longer. The crowd’s not as dead as I thought it would be, no pun intended.”

“Alright. Be good. And watch out for the Count. He’s been with more women than there are capillaries in your veins and you’d better not add yourself to the list.”

“Oh, please. I’ve been here three hours and he hasn’t showed. He’s obviously got better things to do. Night, Dad.”

“Night, baby doll.”

I hung up. The stranger smirked. “You have a curious relationship with your father. Most girls your age find their fathers to be unreasonable trolls stopping them from having fun.”

“My Dad was a bookworm and his parents were die-hard Catholic. He didn’t get to do anything when he was young so now he basically wants me to have free reign to make up for lost time. Hell, he pushed me into half the crazy shit I’ve done.”

“How does your mother feel about that?”

“She doesn’t care for it, but she knows I’m responsible enough not to get myself in too much trouble.”

“Mm. How do you think you’re doing so far?”

I realized then that at some point during our long, amusing conversation, he’d slid closer to me and I’d done the same. We were both seated in the middle of the couch with our legs

trailing onto the floor, mirroring each other with an arm along the back of the cushion. The sly look never left his face throughout the discourse between us and now I could see a hint of danger there as well. He was about to try something. I was in good enough condition to stop him if it was something I didn't want, but no more than that.

"Pretty good," I said with a bit of challenge in my voice.

His smirk stretched until I could see a dimple in his left cheek. "Of course. Well, then I have a favor to ask in exchange for the stories."

"And that is?"

"It's been quite some time since I've been inebriated. Would you be adverse to me having a taste of your blood?"

I stared at him for a long while, trying to peer beneath his foppish mask but getting nothing. "Does it hurt?"

"A bit."

"How do I know you won't drain me dry?"

He leaned in, dropping his voice to a whisper. "You don't."

"And how do you know I won't turn into a wolf and try to tear your handsome face off?"

"I don't."

Silence pervaded the air. Then, slowly, I stretched out my arm. His gaze slid from my neck to my wrist and his expression didn't quite shift so much as it became darker, more sinister, more intriguing. I watched too much television so I expected him to grab me and ravish me. I expected his eyes to glow a fiery red and his perfect white teeth to become sharper than daggers. Instead, he gripped my elbow in his cool grip and lifted my arm. I shivered as his hot breath rolled over the delicate skin. He kissed the inside of my arm as if thanking me for the precious gift and then his lips parted. His incisors lengthened to fangs and he bit down. The pain was immediate but I didn't wince, too entranced by what he was doing to really feel what had just happened. His mouth opened and not a drop of blood was wasted. He drank deeply, mesmerizing me with how his Adam's apple bobbed with every gulp. I felt lightheaded and part of me worried he wouldn't stop and that I didn't want him to because it didn't hurt. It was exhilarating. My heart raced. Impossible warmth climbed through me.

Just when I truly began to worry, he pulled away and licked the twin pricks his fangs had left. A strange tingle buzzed up my arm and then I watched with wonderment as the wounds sealed like magic. My wrist was smooth once again. Amazing.

His eyes remained closed as he let the effects of my blood and the alcohol take over his system. He sighed, a wistful sound. "My, how I have missed this sensation. It is a defining characteristic of humanity."

I shook my head, sounding tired and yet pleased at the same time. "How so?"

He looked at me then. "Only beings with higher brain function feel the need for it. We can't accept the world around us so we choose to blunder through it with an altered perception."

I blinked slowly. "This is what you sound like when you're drunk?"

He chuckled. "Not quite. It'll take a minute or two to kick in. Thank you."

"You're welcome. Just make sure you don't tell my Dad I let you do that. He told me to stay away from vampires who drink from supernatural folks. Says they're dangerous."

He offered me a cryptic smile and then flipped my hand over, kissing my palm. "He's right."

"Are you trying to scare me?"

"Are you scared?"

“No.”

“Then no, I’m not.”

I frowned, trying to make sense of that statement. “I don’t get you.”

“Few people do,” he confessed, lowering my arm into my lap. His fingertips danced across my thigh, following the ridges on the ends of my ridiculous skirt. It tickled. Why the hell was I letting him do that? My head felt like it was full of cotton balls. Maybe it was the blood loss.

“Are you tired?”

I nodded wordlessly. He wrapped his long fingers around my arm and tugged me towards him. For one terrifyingly spectacular moment, I thought he would kiss me, but instead he turned me over onto my back and laid my head on his shoulder. It was a shockingly intimate thing to do with someone I’d only known for three hours, but with a pint of blood missing and the rest of it compensated with alcohol, I couldn’t find it in me to care.

“Are you going to kill me if I fall asleep?” I asked, my eyelids drooping. He settled his arm around my waist, tilting his head back to rest on the couch.

“Probably not.”

“Hm.” I let my eyes close.

“Who are you?”

“Go to sleep, Cassandra.”

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“Miss Moody? Miss Moody?”

I rolled onto my stomach, a feral growl crawling from my throat. “Go ‘way.”

“Madam, I’m sorry to bother you, but it’s half past five o’clock. I was told to see you home safely.”

“Home?” I muttered, shifting my wily black hair out of the way so I could see. The pounding headache made it nearly impossible to focus, but after a moment I could see the fat butler from the party last night standing over me with a worried expression. I realized then what had happened. I’d fallen asleep on the couch, which was now sans the handsome mystery vampire. Shit.

“You said it’s five-thirty?” I said, sitting up. He nodded.

“Good. If I hurry up, I can make it back to the hotel before they figure out I was out so late. Sorry you had to find me like this, Jeeves.”

“It’s quite alright, madam. Please, follow me.”

I peeled myself off the couch and followed him out. The windows were blacked out as sunlight was deadly to vampires, but the chandeliers illuminated the hallway and thus my walk of shame. The worst part was that I hadn’t even gotten laid. I just fell asleep like a stupid child in his arms. God, what a loser. I didn’t even get his damn name.

“Martin, who’s that?”

I froze, glancing over my shoulder at the staircase above us. There stood my nameless entertainer in a red silk robe, which gaped and revealed his bare chest and black pajama pants. His hair was sticking up in several directions and there were dark smudges under his eyes as if he’d just woken up. His gaze fell across me and some of that sleepy look departed.

“Cassandra. I forgot you were still here.”

“Yeah, I noticed. Why didn’t you wake me up when you left?”

“Forgive me, but you looked so sweet that I couldn’t bear it. But I’ll call a cab for you and I’d be happy to explain what happened to your father if need be.”

“It’s fine. What the hell are you wearing, anyway? Did you borrow those? Are you one of Drac’s relatives or something?”

He arched an eyebrow. Martin the butler decided to chime in at that exact moment.

“Which car service shall I call, Master Vladmir?”

The blood rushed out of my face. This guy wasn’t a friend or the Count’s son. It was fucking Dracula himself. I’d slept with Dracula.

Holy. Shit.

“Whichever one is the fastest,” Dracula answered, waving a hand to dismiss his servant. My God, I was an idiot. Then again, he looked nothing like he did in the photos. How the hell did he look so young?

“You look unwell, my dear. Do you need something to eat before you go?”

“How come you didn’t tell me who you were?”

Again, he cast a confused look in my direction. “I thought it was obvious.”

“Obvious?” I screeched. “You look nothing like you did in my Dad’s pictures.”

“I’m a vampire, sweet. I can change my appearance. I haven’t looked like that in several centuries.”

He stepped down onto the landing, crossing his arms over his broad chest. I put a wide berth between us, flustered now that I knew the truth. “Besides, what does it matter? Are you implying you’ll treat me differently now that you know who I am?”

“Yes. You’re friends with my Dad. We shouldn’t have done any of what we did last night,” I mumbled, wrapping my arms around my waist for stability.

He continued observing me with that penetrating gaze. “And what was wrong with what we did? Share some alcohol? Fall asleep?”

“You know what I mean.”

He touched my chin, forcing me to meet his intense gaze from inches away. “No, I don’t. What did he tell you about me?”

I slid out of his grip, shaking my head. My hair fluttered out of its ponytail, hiding one side of my face to my utter relief. “Doesn’t matter. Thanks for inviting us to the party. My Dad says hi.”

I scurried down the steps and out the door.

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Luckily, my parents didn’t get up until well after eight o’clock so I had enough time to get home, shower, and crawl into bed. They had no clue what happened and I aimed to keep it that way. At breakfast, they asked me how the party was and I fabricated most of it, praying that he’d never figure out what I’d done. It was wrong on so many levels. Good girls didn’t give it up to strangers at Halloween parties. Though the proverbial ‘it’ was blood instead of sex. I wasn’t sure if that was any better, though.

A week breezed past. Each day, I calmed down a little more. Eventually, I convinced myself that it was just the booze and I wasn’t a bad person for flirting with the guy. I hadn’t the foggiest idea that he was one of the most notorious players in the world. It wasn’t my fault. Really.

Midnight crept around and I felt restless for reasons I didn't feel like addressing so I threw on my best outdoor gear and escaped into the woods. The full moon was another week away so I didn't have the lunar cycle to worry about while I hunted. Most people thought werewolves were murderous beasts, but in truth, we weren't that bad. I didn't kill my prey. I just liked the stalking part of the hunt. Being smarter, faster, and stronger than whatever I was looking for and giving it a bit of a scare was fun to me. Cruel, but fun.

The doe two yards out had no business being away from its den at this time of night. She deserved to get spooked, if you asked me. I inhaled her scent, my wolf senses telling me about how old she was. Three years. She stood at the edge of a small stream, her pink tongue lapping up the water. Crickets and frogs broke through the silence with music. It was too cold for my liking in Transylvania, but at least the wildlife was familiar.

I exhaled slowly, slowing my heartbeat and concentrating on the animal. Five. Four. Three. Two.

A branch snapped overhead. The doe's head popped up, her ears flicking to catch the sound. Then, she fled. I groaned, standing up from behind the bush and scowling.

"There goes my night."

"Surely not."

My claws instantly shot out, black and curved, and I snarled at the voice above me, ready to transform and kill the intruder. However, as my newly golden eyes searched the treetops they found that same tall frame and black cloak stark against the moonlight. I sighed, forcing my body to resume its full human form.

"You have *got* to stop doing that."

Dracula smiled, bright white teeth cutting through the dark. "But it amuses me."

"I don't care," I grumbled, marching through the underbrush and not caring that it would scare off any other potential prey. I heard a large crunch behind me, indicating that he'd vacated the tree. Swell.

"Stop stalking me."

"You're on my land, you know. I could have you ejected," he said in that same smug tone.

"Fine."

"Come now, you can't be that upset that I scared off your midnight snack."

I glared at him, stopping. "I wasn't going to eat her, you barbarian. I was bored. Just wanted to chase something for a bit. What's your excuse?"

He watched me and then smiled—a slow, wicked gesture. "Same."

Again, I groaned. "What is it with you? Is there some sort of fetish you have for your friends' daughters? I'm about six centuries younger than you. I've got an average rack and a flat butt. What do you see in me that warrants this much attention?"

"Don't sell yourself short, my dear. You're more fun than a barrel of explosive monkeys."

"Thanks, but I'm not buying what you're selling so why don't you just leave me alone?"

I turned and he was suddenly in front of me. My pulse skyrocketed. Damn, he was really good at being quiet and it scared me. The smile was gone and in its place was a surprisingly firm expression.

"What exactly did your father tell you about me, Cassandra?"

I leaned my back against the nearest tree, folding my arms. "He said you're a player. He said you like to trap girls and use them and then throw them away."

“And you believe him?”

I shrugged. “I just met you. I don’t know what I think about you.”

“Then why are you so defensive now that you know who I am? You didn’t care last night.”

“Because I’m not stupid. I don’t know what your endgame is, but I don’t want to be a part of it.”

“Who said it was just a game? Maybe I like you. Maybe I like your eyes. Maybe I like your voice. Maybe I like the little birthmark on your right thigh. Is that so wrong?”

“Yes!” I exclaimed as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. “I’m practically a baby compared to you. It’s creepy.”

“It’s only creepy if you know what I want from you. And you don’t.”

“Fine. What do you want from me?”

At last, the smile returned and sent butterflies flocking through my stomach. “Ah, ah, ah. A gentleman doesn’t kiss and tell.”

“My god, you’re annoying.”

“And you’re hostile.”

“Your cape looks stupid.”

“You can’t hunt for shit.”

We glared at each other. Five seconds later, a giggle built in my throat and I covered my mouth, wishing I could keep a straight face but neither could he. We ended up laughing like complete psychopaths in the middle of the forest, drowning out the crickets and the frogs and the rest of the world.

“As much as I’d love to continue this conversation, it’s late. You should be getting home,” he said, his expression sobering.

“Guess so. Do you trust me enough to get back on my own?”

“Not in the least. Lead the way.”

I didn’t bother insulting him this time. I just walked back the way I came until the hotel was within sight. I turned to bid my persistent stalker adieu, but he snuck up yet again and kissed my hand. I caught off-guard, gulping in the cold air to combat the warm feeling spilling through my abdomen. He lowered my hand, but kept in his grip a bit longer.

“My birthday is next Saturday. Would you care to attend?”

Say no, my mind told me. You know where this is heading. You know where it ends. Say no and be done with it. You leave for America in six days. Just say no.

“Sure,” I said softly, cursing myself. He smiled and it wasn’t naughty or teasing. It was genuine.

Damn him.

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I convinced myself I wouldn’t do anything reckless since my parents both attended Dracula’s 700th birthday along with me. The cake was enormous and of course it was red velvet. He was anything but subtle, after all. He came by only once while the three of us were together, mentioning nothing of our earlier escapades, much to my relief. I ate enough food to put down a rhino and stayed at the bar, drinking the night away and watching my parents laugh and twirl on the dance floor. A couple of guys asked me to dance, but I politely refused. Wasn’t in the mood.

Sometime later, I became embroiled with two girls in a discussion about sea monsters and discovered that my parents weren't in the ballroom any more. I called both their phones and they rang and went to voicemail. Exasperated, I bid my conversation companions goodbye and began the irritating search for my wayward guardians. I searched all the usual places until I couldn't find them and then headed back towards the east wing. However, I didn't feel like going back just yet so I stole away into the billiards room.

The storm outside made branches occasionally scrape against the glass. It was dark here and I had no clue where the lamp was so I fumbled about with my hands outstretched. Normally, my night vision was excellent, but I'd had way too much to drink. I touched several things on the way. Bookshelf. Globe. Vase. Piano. Coat rack. Hat stand.

Then, something cool and firm. I flattened my palm over it. Smooth skin. No pulse. Goddammit.

His hand closed over my wrist, holding my palm against his chest. He didn't say anything. He didn't have to. We just stood there, breathing heavily, neither one of us making a single movement. Then, a flash of lightning. I saw his face for the briefest second and knew it was too late.

His arm wound around my back and he crushed me against him, kissing me hard. I was a fly in a spider's web. A mouse in a snake's coils. Trapped. Desperate. Stupid. Needy.

Even though his lips weren't as warm as mine, heat crept down from my mouth to my chest, my chest to my navel, my navel to between my thighs. The silk dress did nothing to hide my figure and he discovered it only seconds after kissing me. He ran his hands down my sides and carefully palmed my backside, rubbing until I made a sound. The second I did, he swept me up in his arms and carried me over to the pool table.

He used my hair to tug my head to the side, exposing my neck, and for an instant, I thought it was all over. His seduction was nothing more than a ruse. He wanted my blood, my life, my light. I had fallen for it.

I squeezed my eyes shut and waited for the inevitable pain, but his lips met my neck in a kiss. There was only one way to describe it. Bliss. Pure bliss.

"Cassandra," he breathed, a question in the echo.

I licked my swollen lips, digging deep to find my voice. "Yes?"

"You are exquisite."

"Thank you."

I didn't know what to expect afterwards, but he lifted up towards my face, leaned down until our bodies were pressed completely against each other, and kissed me like I was the most beautiful thing in the world. All of the viciousness in him seemed to dissipate, leaving him soft and kind. He kissed me with slow tenderness, brushing the curls away from my forehead. I wrapped my arms around his neck, losing myself in him yet again. I no longer care what was waiting for me after this moment. He was worth hell and everything in between here and there.

Once we'd had our fill of kissing, he rested his sweaty forehead on mine, his voice hoarse. "Forgive me. I couldn't resist any longer."

"Don't apologize. Not for that. Don't ever apologize for what just happened," I murmured back.

He opened his eyes halfway, still serious. "You are not offended?"

"I'm a wolf. I like it wild."

He tilted his head, brushing another kiss across my lips. "So you do. However, we should desist before someone stumbles upon us."

“Good call.”

With one final kiss, he straightened up and moved away. The sudden absence of him made me feel a bit cold until he held out his hand and helped me down, keeping my hand in his as he led me through the darkness.

We stood in front of the door, not quite facing each other, but not quite turned away. I didn't want to say the next sentence, but I had to anyway.

“I'm leaving tomorrow.”

“I know,” he said in a quiet tone. “I suppose you were right about me. I did take from you.”

“You didn't take anything. I offered. I could have stopped you. I didn't. On purpose.”

“Most girls would call that foolish.”

“Most girls aren't honest with themselves.”

“True.”

He took my hand, held it to his lips, and kissed my palm. I couldn't resist asking one last question.

“Will I ever see you again?”

“No,” he whispered as he opened the door.

“But I'll probably see you.”

FIN