

CHAOS CHILDREN

BY B. C. SIRROM

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CHAOS CHILDREN

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Corktown, the oldest neighborhood in Detroit, was still fighting winter. Trees bloomed only to wilt in a late frost. The lawns retained their muddy gray sogginess. All of the houses were built at the turn of the twentieth century. They presented a venerable façade of quiet resilience to the elements; all except one house. One house, a two story Carpenter Gothic style, wasn't braving the muck with cool dignity. Its residents applied fresh paint, trimmed hedges and mulched flower beds. Its shade trees leaved and thrived. The neighborhood wondered at the new residents on their street. Three

women, two young and one elderly, were often seen coming and going throughout the day. At night a number of men would accompany the women or go out alone. No one was sure exactly how many people actually lived there. Their eclectic behavior sparked some curiosity and debate. Some thought they must be college students renting together. Others thought they belonged to one of the new reurbanization groups. The local alcoholic that loitered at the quick mart, was sure the residents were members of a secret militant society against the United States. When asked how he knew if it was a secret, he only nodded knowingly and said, "I see things." For the most part, Corktown was happy for the resurgence of new residence no matter how odd. At a time when homeowners were leaving and the abandoned properties fell to disrepair, one less empty lot was a welcome sight.

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Beo had owned the house in Corktown for more than forty years, yet she hadn't lived there in twenty. The events of last autumn changed that. Now her home was near bursting. She couldn't be happier. Vampires slept in the basement and second floor guest rooms. A Wolf named Bir stayed behind when his pack left for open territory. Two human women had rooms on the first and second floor. Beo shared her attic apartment with her lover, the vampire chief of Detroit, Dis.

It had been weeks since a challenger came for Dis's title. Yet, they stayed ever prepared. Their daily life was surprisingly domestic. The humans cooked, ate and cleaned. The vampires read or told stories from their long histories. The informal family lived and fought together. Tonight the humans were finished with dinner, and the vampires were preparing to venture out for the night.

"Beo, where do vampires come from?" Beo, immortal, infinitely powerful and wise, had no idea. She looked at the child. Kaph, a tribal African, was turned into a vampire at the age of four. The others that shared her home: four vampires, one Wolf and two human women turned for her answer. If the question had been 'where do babies come from', she could have answered. She once had six sons.

"Well,..." she stalled. She knew the common notion if not the specifics. "It takes a vampire to make another vampire." She looked to Dis, a vampire from the time of Claudius II. Naturally quiet, he only shrugged. Beo sent a beseeching look to the other vamps. The only female, Rook responded, "It is very difficult, as birth always is...Most of the time the mortal dies."

“That is the only reason the streets aren’t overrun with us.” Sin sneered. He leaned negligently against the wall and twisted the gold crucifix around his neck. The others long accustomed to his outbursts, ignored him.

Kaph let out an exasperated sigh and went on in his multilingual syntax. “I know big vamp make little vamp, duh!” He recently added modern slang to his vocabulary. He smiled proudly. “But who made the first vampire?”

The philosophical question stumped the beings with combined millennia of existence. Beo knelt to the child’s level. She loved Kaph as she had loved her own sons. He was bright, loyal and brave. He would forever be a child. Beo couldn’t decide if that was a tragedy or a blessing. “No one knows, Kaph.”

John Fitzgerald, a much younger vampire, was ironically turned by Kaph during the American Revolution. He suggested, “I think we must have evolved, as other animals do.”

“We are demons!” Fitzgerald’s clutch mate, Sin interrupted. Of all the vamps, he had the most difficulty accepting his nature. “We are the Devil’s children, and we are damned.”

“Sin,” Beo stood in front of him. Dis silently moved to her side. This was an argument they had had in many different ways. Her patience was worn. “Kaph is NOT a demon.” She added more calmly. “And neither are you. That is the ramblings of ignorant priests. Vampires existed before the Church, before Christianity. They existed even before me.” The last was almost a joke. They all knew Beo was the oldest of them, by far.

“But they did not exist before me.” A new voice spoke amongst them. The new voice was slinky and amused. It came from all around them and yet nowhere. A black figure poured through the window.

“Hello, Alder.” Beo greeted her relation coolly.

“Ah, sweet Beo. Still angry?” The newcomer mused.

“Still.” Dis growled. Even though he had been the pawn in Alder’s last scheme, his anger stemmed from the mad being’s betrayal of Beo.

Alder was the personification of darkness and chaos. His hair and skin were oil black, but his eyes and teeth were blazing red. Beo didn't know if that made him a god or an element or a cosmic super villain. She knew he was older and stronger. He was also the only thing Beo's second vision couldn't see. Beo was able to perceive and manipulate all the matter around her except for Alder. Around him, she only saw... nothing. She still didn't want him in her house.

"Leave, Uncle." The endearment sounded more like a curse.

"But it is story time." Alder feigned hurt. "And Kaph wishes to hear how vampires came to be."

"And you know?" Alder didn't lie, but he rarely told all that he knew.

"I do." Alder looked positively wicked. "Who else would make a creature bound by darkness, strong, lethal and impulsive?"

"I knew we were the Devil's children. I just had the wrong devil." Sin grumbled.

"I am not the Devil." Alder's tone left the possibility for the Devil to exist or not. "I am neither good nor evil. I am part of the Balance. Light and Dark. Male and Female. Life and, of course, Death. Which is good? Which evil? Which are you?"

Sin's face was pained. That was the question that haunted him.

"So, you created the first vampire." Fitzgerald said what everyone else suspected.

"In a way." Alder alluded.

"How? Why?"

"For love."

Alder claimed the spot in front of the fire place. It was left unlit due to the temperate night air, yet flames sprang from the dry logs to Alder's back. Reluctantly the others filed around him. Fitzgerald kept his human companion, Maryssa close. The only other human, Maryssa's grandmother bayed them good night, claiming her medicine made her 'too sleepy for Alder's mischief'. Bir, Rook's lover and the only Wolf, paced for a moment before she pulled him onto the couch with her. Dis was never far from Beo, while she held Kaph in her lap. Sin compromised and chose to stand in the doorway. He was hesitant to listen, yet morbidly curious. Beo's living room, like the rest of her home, was comfortable and warm. It housed priceless relics, subtly tucked next to Kaph's toys and Fitzgerald's books. It was Beo's house, but everyone's home.

"Love?" Beo prompted.

"Yes. Love is the reason for everything. Love of Power. Love of Money. Love of Women. Love of one's self."

"What do you know of love?" Sin challenged.

"Much. But my story, the story of how vampires came to be is about the most primal kind of love. It is about a man's love for a woman that was not his."

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"This is not a happy story." When Alder spoke a tangible darkness filled the room. The light pooled around him. It shined about him, but never quite illuminated him. As ever, he stood as an opaque silhouette. Despite himself, Sin crept closer.

Alder started his story with a borrowed phrase. He said, "In the beginning" and watched Sin bristle. "My brother, Orin, and I were one. I did not exist as I am now. I had no form, no awareness. I simply was. And Orin was. Then Man came to be. His fear and imagination gave me substance. Orin became Light, and we were forever separated. Always aware of the other but destined to be kept as opposites.

I travelled then, following the night. I could be in one place instead of everywhere without being. There were so few people then. I haunted their camps, always at the edge of the firelight. They felt me lurking and made up stories. Each was more wonderful and terrifying than the last. The men of old did not venture far from their night fires. There were still beasts that could devour them.

But, one man shared my darkness...Amator.

Amator waited until the others were asleep before emerging from his den. He was no longer afraid of the night. The dark was his ally now. The young men of his clan slept at the cave entrance. Men with mates bedded further in with their women held close. Kept deepest in the cave were the unmated women. They slumbered huddled together with fires burning all around. Women were the clan's most precious citizens. They insured the clan's survival, but at a terrible price. Pregnancy and child birth claimed more women than not. It was the harsh way of Amator's people. A man must take a mate to secure the next generation of their people, but that life came often at cost of his mate.

Amator did not care about fathering children, nor the succession of the clan. He cared only for Dia.

She was the most beautiful, most protected of the women. Born during the same summer, Amator and Dia were raised together. Dia's mother died following childbirth, so Amator's mother nursed them both. They were treated as siblings, but Amator never felt like a brother to her. He was her protector, her friend, but never her brother.

As Dia grew, her beauty caused the young men to fight for her affection. Amator, smaller and younger than the rest, still pitched against the others. A band of ten wrestled with crude stone weapons for the right to protect Dia and father her children. Amator lasted longer than most, but a chance move landed him under the largest of the mob. His leg snapped and the fight was over.

Dia went the victor, Ngash.

Dia cared for Amator while he recovered. She made him swear to never again try to claim her.

Amator did not speak to Dia after that, but he watched. His leg healed. He would forever bear a limp. The other men mocked his weakness and left him behind when they hunted. He did not care. He stayed back and close to Dia.

When Dia became pregnant, Amator broke his promise. He challenged Ngash.

Amator did not expect to win. He only wanted to hurt Ngash as much as he could. He wanted to cripple or maim him. He wanted to give Dia a reason to turn away from him. Amator's rage made him stronger and numb to the initial blows. He cut Ngash first. The tip of his knife dug into the other man's hip. Ngash threw his knife. It sliced Amator's cheek. Amator instinctively cupped his face, taking his attention from Ngash. He immediately realized his mistake, but Ngash was already on him. He was flung to the ground. The larger man straddled his waist and pinned his arms to the ground with his knees. Ngash retrieved one of their knives. With malicious glee, Ngash cut into Amator's chest. He cut deep enough to scar but not cause permanent injury.

Amator refused to cry out. Tears streamed down his cheeks. He couldn't look at Dia, but he knew she watched. Her witness only added to his shame. Instead, he looked down to his own body being mutilated.

Ngash cheered when his task was done. He called for the other men to rub ash in the cuts while he held Amator. Once healed the raised scars would be a dark gray in the shape of the clan's glyph for 'animal'.

Ngash finally stood. He kicked Amator and called him 'Beast'. The other men attacked now the winner was clear. The ones that could not reach Amator, spat and threw stones. Amator covered himself as best he could. His bruised arms shielded his head and neck. Ngash laughed when Dia tried to help her childhood companion. He shoved her to the ground. She let out a sound like a sob and held her swollen stomach. The other women came forward to stand around her. The older, braver women scolded the men. That caused most of the men to halt their cruelty.

But Ngash wasn't finished yet. He drug Amator by the hair of his head away from the camp. He pulled Amator across the stream and threw him onto the muddy bank on the far side. "You no longer share our fire. You no longer sleep in our caves. You are an animal now. Make your place with them." Ngash waded back across to the camp. He pulled Dia from the crowd of women and took her to their palette in the cave."

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"Amator wasn't afraid, not even the first night." Alder continued his story. "I sat with him in the dark. His injuries were great, but he had no fear. He no longer minded dying. I found him to be good company. He slept for a long time. A fever burned through his body. His body was too weak to hunt. When he was well enough, I led an unwise rabbit to Amator's camp.

Amator didn't speak, but I think he knew I was there.

He brooded.

He started to rest during the day and keep watch over his clan's camp at night. He learned the sounds of the night. He knew the difference between birds in the trees and beasts in the understory. To taunt Ngash, he would leave the skins of his kills on the clan's side of the stream.

Weeks passed. Amator grew stronger, while Dia faded. The babe in her womb was too much for her. The clan ate well for their time, but there were no doctors, no prenatal vitamins. The baby sapped every bit of nutrition from Dia.

Amator could only watch with increasing anguish.”

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“He heard the cries that woke the camp and immediately knew they were Dia's. It was early dawn. I had to chase the dark, but I knew the sounds meant ill.” Alder truly sounded sad. “I returned at dusk. The screams were weaker and mixed with sobs. I watched Amator pace the stream bank. He longed to join Dia's side, but men weren't allowed next to the birthing bed. Ngashed lounged outside the cave bragging to the other men about the strength of his son being born.

Finally, one of the elder clan's women emerged with a small, quiet bundle. She presented it to Ngash. He pulled away the wrappings and scowled. He shoved the stillborn babe back at the woman.

‘Dia?’ he demanded.

‘She lives...for now.’

Ngash stormed into the cave.

The next part happened rather quickly.” Alder sounded surprised as he reflected. “Amator saw Ngash drag Dia from her bed. She was pale and sweaty from her labor. Her legs barely held her as Ngash pulled her along. ‘You gave me a dead son!’ Ngash released her, and she collapsed in the dirt. ‘Your body is weak and ugly now. You disgust me.’ Ngash spat.

Amator froze. He looked directly at me and said the words that would change everything. 'Help me destroy him.'" Alder paused and sighed. "I'll never know what Amator was really asking for. Maybe he didn't know himself. I acted without thought, as is my nature. I changed Amator. I changed him from the man he was. I made him stronger, harder. He still carried the scars from his past, but he was utterly transformed.

His once warm eyes looked coldly at Ngash. No one was looking at us. The entire clan watched Ngash with fearful horror. As he drew back to strike Dia, Amator charged. He was on Ngash before his blow fell.

He did not fight Ngash. He destroyed him. He snapped bone and ripped muscle. He curled his hands into claws and bit with his teeth. Soon there was nothing left of the man that was Ngash." Alder sounded delighted. The darkness at the edge of Beo's comfortable living room crouched further in. The fire had died down to its coals. They burned as bright as Alder's eyes.

"I saw the dread on Dias's face but Amator didn't. She pulled away from her would-be savior. In his battle lust, Amator didn't notice. He approached her, saying words of love that Dia did not hear. He gently brushed her hair out of her face with no regard for his bloodied hand. Dia tried to curl up on her side, but even that pained her. Her labor was too much. Amator looked at her stained garb and frowned. Without asking her permission, he scooped Dia into his arms. Shhing her weak protests, he carried her across the stream and away from her people.

None of the men were brave enough to try to stop him. The elder woman that acted as Dia's midwife caught Amator's arm and begged him to leave Dia with them. She begged him to let Dia spend her last moments with her family and be burned with her son.

Amator pushed the woman away. He was not going to let Dia die." Alder paused in his telling. He looked at the rapt expression on Kaph's face. It looked like he almost like he regretted telling the boy such a dark story, but he continued. "Amator did not understand medicine. His people only had a primitive healer that used herbs just as likely to poison you as cure you. He could only watch Dia continue to hemorrhage. He brought her back to the rock outcropping that was his home since his exile. There were no comforts, no domestic markers to make the place more bearable. Amator placed her on the smoothest of rocks sheltered by a deep overhang. Dia was quiet now, and that worried Amator more. He paced, looking for something, anything that could help her.

Dia tried to speak.

‘What is it, my love? What do you need?’

‘My son? Where is my son?’ Her voice was distant and unfocused.

‘He is with the women of the clan.’ Amator cringed at the lie by omission.

‘He died.’ Dia seemed to remember. ‘He was born dead. He felt so strong. He kicked.’ She lost focus again.

I watched from the shadows.” Alder confessed. “I have no skill to heal. I cannot stop death. Despite Amator’s complete ignorance of anatomy and the body’s systems, he recognized Dia’s trouble. She couldn’t continue to hemorrhage. Her lips usually rose pink were a sick gray. Her skin was an ominous white. She was going to bleed to death.

Amator acted without a clear plan, only intention. He understood that if blood was leaving her body, more blood must go in. He crouched against the rock wall and as gently as he could, he pulled Dia onto his lap. Her back was dead weight against his chest while her head rolled sickly on his shoulder. He didn’t have a knife, but that did not hinder him. He bit open his wrist. He pressed the wound to Dia’s lips.

‘Drink, my love. Drink and live.’

He held her in his arms. She was so cold and still, he feared she was gone already. His uninjured arm squeezed tighter. He tilted her head back and adjusted her jaw. He held his wrist above her open mouth. His blood dripped in. Dia’s throat unconsciously swallowed to prevent her from choking.

Amator held her like this through the night. When his wrist re-healed, another of my gifts,” Alder interjected. “He ripped it open anew. Over and over, he chanted, ‘Live, Dia. Live.’ It was repeated by his mouth and heart. He was trying to keep her alive by sheer will.

Slowly, Dia's breathing became relaxed. Amator let them slide to lay completely flat on the rocks. He was spent, yet he tore at his wrist again. When he offered it to Dia this time, she did not passively let him feed her. She latched onto his arm and drank.

I felt the sun rise, but I resisted the urge to flee from it." Alder told them. "I felt the darkness calling me from the other side of the world, but I stayed. I watched over Amator and his mate. The night is a living thing to me. I feel it always. It makes me strong. In the light, I am nothing. Hours passed. The shadows poured from the crevices in the rocks. I welcomed them as friends.

Dia was the first to stir. She turned her head from side to side, experimenting with the motion. She pushed from under Amator's hold. He made a weak sound of protest but remained sprawled on the cave floor. Dia held to the rock wall for support. She touched her deflated abdomen and gasped. That was when I realized she hadn't been breathing as a mortal needed to breathe. Panicked, Dia tore away her soiled clothes. She threw the bloodied rags without regard. Except for fearful shrieks of discovery, she was speechless. Naked, she examined her body from crown to sole. I saw no wound, no blemish. She was perfect. The damage done by pregnancy and childbirth were gone.

Dia sank down to rocks. She pulled her knees to her chest and sobbed.

Her crying woke Amator. Sluggish and weak, he pushed himself to a semi-upright position. 'Dia? Love? Are you well?' He rolled to his side to touch her. His fingertips barely brushed her arm, yet she pulled away as if burned.

'What did you do?' she accused.

'Saved you. I had to save you.'

Dia touched her mouth. 'You made me a monster.'

'No, Dia. You are beautiful. As always.'

Dia launched herself at him. Faster than any mortal could, she thrashed and beat him. Crazy and inconsolable, Dia would have killed him if he was still purely human. Altered as he was, she couldn't even bruise him. He managed to catch her wrists and reign in her jolty movements.

Frustrated with being held, she bit him.

They were shocked equally. Dia was instantly still. She sat back and stared down at Amator. He had clean incisor marks on his left pectoral, immediately over his heart. Dia was frozen. She brought a shaky hand up to her chin.

'I'm sorry,' she whispered. Amator only saw a glimpse of her fangs when she bit him again.

She went for the throat and he didn't stop her. He only wondered if his new body would keep him alive. Dia gasped in horror at her own actions. She forced herself to stop. With even greater effort, she scrambled from Amator's neck.

An expression that Amator had never seen before, crossed Dia's face. She whipped her mouth, 'I will never forgive you'. She gave him a final look, cold and hard, before she ran away.

I didn't try to stop her." Alder told the group in Beo's house. "Neither did Amator. He understood she hated him and why. But he couldn't regret his actions. So...he followed her, always staying one night behind. Dia travelled without destination or pattern. I expected her find her own end. I was again surprised. Dia instead chose to make new children." Alder looked pointedly at Kaph. "I do not know how she chooses those she makes. Some were old, some barely babes. Men. Women. Girls. Perhaps she has no reason. Perhaps she really is mad." Beo noticed the slip into present tense. "She moves constantly, urged on by some wild desire. She pushes on even now...and Amator follows."

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The living room remained quiet after Alder's story. The night was still early, but Beo handed Kaph off to Rook. "Time for bed." Miraculously, the boy did not argue. The rest quietly filed out. Only Dis stayed with Beo.

"She made him, didn't she?"

Alder nodded. For once he was solemn.

“Why did she leave him alone?”

“Only she can answer that.” Alder replied. “Or maybe she cannot.”

“Why did you tell us this? What was the point?”

As he melted back into the shadows, he only answered, “So you would know.”

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Dis didn't worry about the others. He was focused completely on Beo. Alder's story didn't seem to upset her exactly, but she was quiet and thoughtful.

“Do you think that is the reason we are together?” Beo finally asked. “Do you think the reason you want me is because we are attracted by some cosmic sense of balance?”

Dis kept silent a moment longer. It hurt for Beo to question his love for her. Yet, he wouldn't disrespect her question with a hasty denial. “Have you ever felt the way you do for me towards another of my kind?” Dis asked instead of answering.

“I have never felt like this for anyone.”

Dis couldn't hold back a possessive smile. “I do not know if we were designed to be together or if it was chance, but nothing cosmic or otherwise, could keep me from you now.” Dis set out to prove his words in the best method he knew. He shredded their clothes in seconds. Beo was just as frantic as him. They both needed this. Dis lay on his back on their bed. Beo instinctively climbed up to straddle him. Neither required breath, yet their chests heaved in time with the other. Dis gently stroked the back of Beo's neck and urged her forward. He brought her mouth to his neck.

Beo didn't need to eat, drink or sleep to survive. She had endured time, the elements and the brutality of Man. What they did now was for Dis as much as it fortified her. He longed to reinforce their connection. He cherished the idea he nourished her, that he was a part of her. Beo knew what Dis wanted. She teased his skin for a few tantalizing moments. Dis arched beneath her. He turned his face to give her better access. Then he whispered, “Please.”

That triggered Beo. She bit down with her human blunt teeth at the same moment she guided Dis into her. Dis's moaning turned into a harsh snarl. In less than a second, he flipped their positions. Beo let him dictate their motion now. He rocked his hips with an almost brutal intensity. Beo held on and encouraged him to go even faster. Dis was too tall to reach Beo's throat in their current position. He watched her with hungry eyes that Beo understood. She pulled her left arm free. Rotating her scarred forearm away, she presented her wrist to him. He gently kissed the pulse point before sinking his fangs into her. Beo's near instant healing rendered immortal, but she could be initially hurt as easily as any human. Her flesh yielded to Dis's teeth and he drank.

Beo didn't know if everything stopped or happened at once. She cried out in bliss. She felt Dis tense and shudder. It seemed paramount she hold Dis down or he might drift away. He felt the same about her. Clinging together, they sank deeper into the mattress.

"Do you think it was like that for them?" Beo asked.

"No," Dis answered and held her tighter.

Want more Dis and Beo? Continue reading to see how their story began in the first chapter of 'Solstice Night'.

[SOLSTICE NIGHT](#)

Present Day, Detroit

Positive/Negative

Light/Dark

Male/Female

Life...

The universe really was that simple. At least as much as Beo understood it. She didn't understand herself at the moment though. Why after seamless thousands of years of existing did she still care?

"Damn, I'm tired," she muttered to herself as she approached the nondescript steel door in the plain brick wall in the dank alley. She wasn't tired, not physically, just terminally bored. That's why she was here. She told herself she didn't still actually care about humans, especially not stubborn little humans that get themselves into trouble.

She spent weeks probing and listening to whispers and now she was here, all because a centuries old random act of kindness.

There was quite a line forming at the door. The underground 'vampire' bar would do a good business tonight. Of course, vampires don't exist. However, that didn't stop them from collecting a hefty cover charge. The bouncer, in nondescript black trench coat, allowed her immediate entrance (free of charge). He was human, mostly, and knew she wasn't. She was not a vampire like his boss but she was definitely 'Other'.

Inside the club were vampires of all shapes, sizes and authenticates. Most were humans pretending to be vampires. The more interesting were the vampires pretending to be humans pretending to be vampires. Beo paused for the briefest of moments to take in her surroundings. In that instant she cataloged everything in the building. No atom escaped her probing mind. More astounding was her ability to comprehend this unholy amount of data. Now, she focused on finding her quarry.

* * * *

Beo stood by the bar. Sitting in her short white dress was a bad idea. While waiting for the bartender's attention she surveyed the mob. Of course, she knew everything that she would see. But the difference between her sense and sight was the same as reading the chemical compound H₂O and watching a waterfall.

There were no true vampires on the dance floor. Though one woman in black leather was pretty convincing. Beo 'sensed' a vampire in the balcony along with his guards, but couldn't 'see' him, probably Michael, the bar owner and Chief of the Territory of Detroit. Several more were scattered in the dark corridors that tunneled secretly below the dance floor. The only other vampire nearby was the bartender, pretending to be blandly human. He was failing spectacularly.

He was six foot six of marble splendor. He had a warrior's frame without being overly muscled. His ink black hair was buzzed close to his scalp and his face was clean shaven. As pleasing a composition he made, Beo would have paid no notice, except his eyes. They were black and bottomless. They were eternity.

* * * *

The bartender set the dirtied glass in the dishpan behind him before he turned to the next patron. He had registered her in his peripheral vision several minutes ago, but he did not hurry his pace. His leisurely speed did not seem to bother the woman or girl rather. She casually scanned the room with no sign of impatience with his poor service.

This bothered him.

She wasn't even looking at him. The only satisfaction he wrought from this crappy post was annoying the clientele.

As if sensing his gaze, she turned to stare levelly at him. He wasn't used to this kind of behavior. Humans usually dropped their eyes once he focused on them. Instead his midnight eyes meet a pair of light lavender ones. They were large, unwavering and luminescent. This time he was the one to avert his eyes.

He looked to take all of her in. She was petite with fine delicately sculpted features. Her ravine hair was cropped into a pixie cut. Her skin was fair, not the sickly pale of the pathetic human club hoppers. It was more golden, like backlit alabaster. His eyes travelled down. Her white dress was strapless and the fabric was unlike anything he had ever seen. Supple as lily petals, it flowed around her, acting on a breeze only she felt. He had to stay the impulse to lean forward and finish his assessment of her compelling form.

He was almost overcome by his body's urges and the sheer energy radiating from her. She seemed more alive than any being he had ever encountered. He was locked in this moment. The very first perfect moment he had ever known.

He realized he must move, soon, or he would be locked in her stare forever. "Not a bad fate," he thought.

He nodded to indicate he was ready to serve her.

"Soda?" she asked brightly.

He jerked his chin curtly. He wanted to gruffly slam down her drink as he usually did, but something stopped him. Instead he gently set the glass before her on a napkin. He raised a straw in question. She smiled a full dazzling smile and bobbed her head. Her pleasant manners and apparent innocence softened him. He felt the absurd need to scoop her up and run, carrying her out of this dark, vile place. She didn't belong here.

That put him on his guard. Why was this golden flame in a sleazy vampire bar? Drinking soda?

As he slid the straw down into her glass, she gently touched his long fingers. He went rigid, everywhere. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath to calm himself, a relic habit from his mortal life. That, he soon realized, was a huge mistake. Her scent enveloped him. She was sweet and soothing. Like honey and forest after the rain, simple and wholesome, yet indefinable. Luckily, her voice interrupted his thoughts about springing across the bar.

"umm...hi, my name is Beo...I know you don't speak..."

His eyes flashed open.

"... I need to get a message to Michael...He needs to know, Maryssa is tainted...Can you get the message to him or can you get me to him?" She spoke slowly and evenly, not in a condescending way, but how you would approach a wild animal.

He studied her hard. Was it a trap?

Probably.

He stared as her small hand still resting on his fingers.

He turned away to find Michael.

* * * *

Michael sat on his throne overlooking the dance floor. His posture was stiff and proper. Distaste was his permanent state of being. He was born "Michelle" in Paris, but the modern American misconception that it was a female's name disgusted him. Americans disgusted him. They were loud, rude and lazy, but also foolish and delicious.

He heard the bartender mount the stairs. His personal guard stepped aside so quickly he did not break stride. Michael had no illusions about his servants. He knew the bartender could gut his guard at will.

"Speak, Canis." Michael sneered, not turning to face him.

He growled in response.

"Yes, what is it you want?" Michael turned but did not meet his servant's black eyes.

The bartender pulled a moleskin notebook from his back pocket and scribbled, "There is woman with a message for you...warning." He paused over the word "woman". He didn't know what she was, but she was certainly more than 'woman'.

Michael's face hardened, "Bring her to the Office."

* * * *

The bartender returned to the main level to retrieve the woman. "Beo." His inner voice reminded him. She said her name was Beo. He did not want to take her to the Office. It was a dark place for doing dark deeds.

He went to the bar, but she was gone. His black eyes searched the pulsing human mass.

She burned like a candle.

She swayed slower than the blaring music, but in time with some primal rhythm that was felt more than heard. He stopped mid-step, transfixed. The center of the universe was this woman child. He felt his body begin to draw close to her like gravity. The little reason he still possessed held him back. Her eyes met his alone. She continued to dance as she came closer. Faster than her sinuous movements implied she was before him, smiling up at him.

He stare dumbfounded for a long minute and blessed the structural integrity of denim. In a fleeting moment of whimsy, he waved his arm in a grand sweeping gesture for her to follow him. She placed her hand lightly in the crook of his arm as if he were escorting her to a ball. He laughed humorlessly to himself at their unlikely coupling: a princess and a slave.

He led her down a flight of stairs and then through a lightless hallway. At the end was a steel door. He unlocked the industrial sized deadbolt and ushered Beo inside. The interior was bare wall-to-wall tile, save for a stainless steel counter height table, like those in commercial kitchens. It was bolted to the floor and a mirror on the opposite wall was centered on the table. There was a drain in the floor.

Beo smirked at the mirror. She knew it was one-glass and Michael sat on the other side. Almost immediately, a server arrived with another soda. "For while you wait. Michael shall be here momentarily."

Her escort barely contained a growl at the sight of the beverage. He could smell it was laced with hydra, an immobilizing poison that made the drinker feel as if she were burning. He had another, now familiar urge to protect the unknown girl, but he was powerless.

Beo took the drink and beamed at the server. "Thank you." As the server turned to leave, he glared at the bartender, "You are needed elsewhere, Canis." He snarled.

He involuntarily glanced at Beo to judge her reaction to his beastly outburst. She playfully hopped up on the table. "Don't worry about me. I can entertain myself." Reluctantly, he stalked from the room. A guard was waiting for him in the hallway. "He is waiting for you in the Observation Room."

* * * *

The Observation Room was all together different from the Office. Wood paneling, overstuffed arm chairs, plush sofas; it was designed for lounging.

"ahh, come in Canis. Come. Enjoy the show."

* * * *

Beo sat on the table for some time idly sipping her soda.

"She looks bored." Michael remarked. Hydra usually acted very quickly and it was potent against all known beings, vampires included. Michael began pacing. He never faced anyone on fair terms.

Beo tipped her glass and drained it, except for an odd violet film at the bottom. She turned her glass in her hand and said directly to the mirror, "It's bad manners for a host to poison his guest, Michael." Then she smiled mischievously as the glass began to morph. It twisted and stretched into an exquisite live orchid. She extended her arm saying, "A peace offering."

Enraged Michael stormed into the tiled chamber.

"Who...WHAT are you? What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Who I am is Beo. Pronounced bay-o. Spelled B-E-O. What I am is...I have no idea, but I am older than anyone you have ever known or even heard of. What I am doing here is warning you and restoring Maryssa to her family."

"Warning me about what?"

"Maryssa has been tampered with. She was injected with Spun Silver." Spun Silver was trace amounts of silver bonded to iron and infused in human blood. It was vampire death in a vial.

"Pas passible You Lie!"

"I never lie."

"How do you know this? Why tell me? What do you gain?"

"You couldn't begin to comprehend how I know things." Beo commented dryly. "As for gain I simply did not want Maryssa to be slaughtered once the poison was discovered."

"Canis! Bring the feeder!"

The bartender who had been observing from the doorway disappeared instantly.

"What is the feeder to you?" Michael fired. In his anger he failed to notice Beo had risen from the table and within easy striking distance.

"I am a friend of her family."

"Who injected her?"

"Someone who wants you dead."

The bartender returned with Maryssa in tow. She was much thinner than the last time Beo saw her and she needed sleep desperately. "Bay, what you are doing here?" she asked distractedly.

"I came to take you home." Beo said with all certainty.

"No way! Did Gran send you?"

"Yes she did and yes you are."

"You're not the boss of me. You're not even family." Maryssa didn't see the hurt cross Beo's face at that statement, but the bartender did.

"Hush, Maryssa. I am taking you home, tonight." At her words, Maryssa sat defeated. Beo had not raised her voice or betrayed any frustration, but her resolve was absolute.

"We are not finished." Michael asserted, "I will not allow you to run off with her...with no proof...without questioning her."

"I did not ask your permission," Beo countered.

"This is a trick. These are lies so you can take her. Her blood is pure!"

"Blockhead!" Beo shouted this time. "Okay, fine. I should have known you wouldn't believe me... I'll tell you what, let's make a bet. You drink from her. If I am right: You die and stop annoying me. If I am wrong: her blood is harmless and you may pierce my heart with your blade. Either way problem solved."

The bartender watched the exchange in amazement. The tiny female was fearless. If he was lucky this wondrous creature might kill Michael.

Maryssa sat unfocused and untroubled. Michael unsheathed the knife at his waist. "Canis, keep it on her," he said handing the knife to him.

Michael approached Maryssa from behind. He unceremoniously brushed her hair to the side. He bent to bite but stopped.

"Are you afraid, Michael?" Beo taunted. His nostrils flaring, he viscously sank his fangs into her throat.

The effect was immediate. The color of Death took Michael's lips and spread to his cheeks. Weak, he staggered back and called, "Canis Attack."

The bartender's mind screamed in protest, but his body obeyed. His bondage robbed him of control. Michael's word was supreme law. The most he could do was mouth, "I'm sorry."

* * * *

The knife point plunged three inches into her chest. He withdrew the blade, letting it drop to the floor. He stared at his bloodied hands and then to his gasping master. Rage boiled inside him. For a hundred years he had wanted nothing more than to rip out Michael's throat. Now he could watch Death claim him and be finally free.

He spun defensively at the curse muttered behind him.

"Dammit. Michael!" The bartender marveled as Beo stood completely whole, inspecting her dress. "I have blood on my dress now." She walked over to Michael, now slumped against the wall below the mirror. His eyes widened in genuine fear now.

"Why couldn't you just listen to me?" She knelt beside him while gently scooting the bartender to the side. "Now, now hold still and I will help." She spoke patiently as if she were helping a toddler with a tangled shoe-lace.

"No! Let Him Die." The bartender wanted to scream. He started to stop her, but at the sight of her blood on his hand, he stalled. If she chose to help Michael after he ordered her execution, so be it.

Beo placed her small hand on Michael's chest. He stiffened, but the by standing bartender felt a pang of jealousy at her touching him. A black liquid vapor spewed from Michael's mouth. The ashen color retreated to his lips. The poison continued to spill out and swirl in the air. When she had drawn out the last of it, she cupped it into her hands. Rising to her feet, she held her arms out from her body. The toxic fog swirled into a tight vortex and combusted in a flash.

Everyone was still.

"You should be dead." Michael whispered.

"So should you" Beo retorted.

"But you said if I drank and she was not tainted..."

"Ahhh, I said you could pierce my heart. I never said I would die from it."

"What are you?" Michael asked half terrified, half awestruck.

"I don't know." Beo answered sadly.

An awkward silence followed. Michael shifted and stood clumsily.

"Can-" Without warning Beo struck. Her backhand landed Michael on the ground again.

"Never call him that again! He is NOT a dog!" She looked at the bartender, "What is your name?"

He shook his head shamefully, not meeting her eye.

Michael, still lying on the floor, laughed, "The Roman son-of-a -whore has no name."

Beo kicked him in the mouth. "I didn't ask you."

She stepped forward and took his hand in hers. "What do you want me to call you? You can have any name you wish." He stood immobile. He was terrified by kindness. "May I give you a new name, just until you decide?"

He bowed his head.

Beo placed her hand under his chin and raised his face to look at her. "I will call you Dis."

He smiled a truly wicked smile in answer.

* * * *

"Well, it is time I go. Dis would you mind helping me get Maryssa to my car?" He looked to Michael for permission. This time he did not interfere but his eyes promised murder.

During the entire episode Maryssa had sat in an unseeing stupor on the table. Beo touched her shoulder and she slumped over asleep. Dis gathered her up easily. They left without regarding Michael as he remained on the floor.

They walked without speaking. If Dis had any sense of self-preservation he would have been wary of the power of this pocket-sized female. Instead he welcomed Death in all its forms. He half smiled to himself. His death would probably piss Michael off (unless, of course, if Michael ordered it).

"Waite a moment," Beo stopped the procession at the top of the stair going back out onto the dance floor. She ran her hands over the stains on her snowy gown. They vanished leaving only pristine fabric. Dis wondered what that fabric stretched over her tight form felt like. He shook himself mentally. She was a goddess and he was a slave. Also, she was good. Nothing in his life was good.

She touched her fingertips to the puncture wounds on Maryssa's neck. The tissue knit itself closed and the streaks of blood faded away. Finally, Beo placed her warm palms on Dis's hands as he held the feeder. She stroked him from fingertip to forearm and gently erased the signs of his violent act.

He closed his eyes and for one minute let himself pretend things were different. He was her lover. Her soft caresses warmed more than his frigid skin. He felt his fangs extend and reality returned. He was a chained beast again.

* * * *

They exited the bar without incident. If anyone noticed a brooding vamp carrying a faint woman, they attributed it to the theme. Beo didn't need him to carry Maryssa to her car. She could have done easily. For that matter she didn't need a car, but she wanted the excuse to get him alone.

"Here I am," she said and pointed to a sleek BMW that had definitely not been there when she entered the club. She hit the combination keypad on the door and the dome light flicked on. She opened the back door for him to dump Maryssa. He set his catatonic load down on the backseat with ease. When he turned, Beo was so close he could feel the heat radiating from her body.

"Thank you," she said in a whisper while stepping aside for him to close the car door. He stiffly nodded. Her proximity was almost overwhelming. It was a bittersweet torture. He was not sure how much more he could endure without either fleeing or succumbing to temptation. As though reading his dilemma, she stepped in closer. He was forced to retreat until his back was pinned to the side of the car. She smiled up at him before she closed the last gap of space between their bodies.

She kissed him full on the mouth.

Dis was shocked to utter stillness. Except for feeding, he avoided physical contact. As a human, touch meant punishment. As a vampire, most were too afraid to come near him and he liked it that way. But this imp was daring. She stood on her toes and climbed his chest to explore his mouth. She tasted like honey. He growled in his chest. He began to kiss back in earnest but kept his arms poker stiff at his sides. He had never been more terrified in his entire existence.

Beo secretly smiled at his obvious internal conflict. She leaned on his solid frame and trailed her fingers along his jaw line. Her hand traveled down the column of his neck and paused at the collar of his button-up shirt. With her face serious, she started undoing the buttons from the top.

He shouldn't be allowed to wear shirts, Beo decided after exposing his chest and stomach. She continued her exploration with curious fingers. Dis submitted to her inspection until she encountered a thread of silver chain. It crisscrossed his abdomen like a harness. He caught her wrist as she fingered the clasp in the center. He was ashamed by his binding, the symbol of his servitude. He pushed her back and started to walk away.

He only made it a half step. Beo grabbed his shoulder and spun him back against her car.

"I am being manhandled by a pixie." He thought coldly. Then her nails scraped his chest and his head whirled. Her fingers went back to tracing the chain. He wanted to snarl but her mouth on his turned the sound into a moan. As she pressed her body rhythmically to his, he forgot the damn chain.

Suddenly he became distracted by a tickling sensation running down his chest and stomach. He looked down to see...nothing.

* * * *

Nothing but bare skin. The fragments of disintegrated chain lay at his feet. Beo smiled triumphantly up at him. He felt joy and dread in equal measure. He was elated to be free from his enslavement to Michael, but he feared being indebted to anyone.

"You look like a condemned man, Dis." He shook his head and pulled his notebook from his back jeans pocket. He wrote one word, "cost".

Her smile faded. "I don't want anything. You may do as you wish. You are welcome to travel with me. I think I would enjoy your company or you may set off on your own. If I had to guess, you plan to return to the club and settle the score with Michael." His eyes told her everything then. He would kill Michael, with relish. "I wish you good night and good luck then, Dis, but I warn you don't become a slave to vengeance."

* * * *

The world around him seemed more alive. The air was electric, teeming with energy. If he had to guess his mood, he would say he was happy. He couldn't be sure. He never remembered being happy.

The club was much quieter now. More vampires had arrived to pick up 'dinner' and they were turning away the rejects. Dis walked passed all of them. He did not stop until he stood in the doorway of the Observation Room. Michael was lounging in a winged back chair as he watched two male vamps consume a human female in the tiled chamber.

"I see the witch let you return. I suppose she wasn't as fond of you as I thought. Michael's faux confidence was very shaky. He tried to keep his eyes on the action of the trio on the table, but his face turned to study Dis. "I don't care for the name she gave you. Too mythological. Named for a god, how absurd." Michael stood to pace. "I have made inquiries. I intend to destroy that she-demon. She will not play me for a fool."

If Dis was undecided about killing his former master before, he vowed to now. He stepped in front of Michael and forced him to look directly at him.

"Stand back, Canis."

Dis grabbed Michael by the lapels of his jacket and pinned him to the mirrored glass. The feeding in the next room continued uninterrupted.

"Stop! Has the demon possessed you?" Michael shouted his bravado fleeing him.

Dis showed his fangs and clearly shook his head. Dis was a very old vampire who lacked the streamlined sophisticated fangs of his modern counterparts. His mouth was like the maw of a lion. His fangs grew out from the canine sockets and though they took much longer to fully extend, they were much longer. Michael began frantically beating the glass behind him. A silent chuckle rumbled in Dis's chest. Michael should have known this moment would come. A dog can be beaten only so long before it turns on its master.

A thousand ways to kill him ran through Dis's mind. He had dreamt about doing this for so long except then his death always immediately followed as a result of his bondage. The bridle, Dis's bane and the source of his misery was gone. Now there would be no consequences. Quick and brutal, that is how he would do it. He would take no part of Michael into his body.

He was going to enjoy this.

He sprang. Biting. Ripping. Shattering glass. He wrung Michael's head from his body.

Dis heard silence. Never again would a master beacon him, order him. He would forever feel loyal to Beo for giving this to him. He wanted to kill her for making him feel that way.

The vampire duo ravishing the woman on the stainless steel table froze. Michael's decapitated body fell through the punched opening in the mirror. The vampires abandoned their meal and fled. Dis bent to retrieve Michael's head. He stood upright, his back straight and his own head held high.

Dis knew his deed would not be kept secret, so he intended to claim his crime proudly. He stood on Michael's balcony over the dance floor. He overlooked his cohorts with their evening meals. They disgusted him. They were lazy and selfish. He could destroy them all and now he had the liberty to do so. His flesh burned for action.

He raised Michael's departed head high above him. He did not shout out, but the smell of blood and death were enough. Every eye turned to him.

Most ran, some bowed in acceptance, and a few attacked. Dis sprang from the ledge and two vampires fell. He used no weapon other than fists and fangs. He was a sublime terror of grace and gore.

Five attacked at once. All were young and foolish and thought they could bring Dis down for their own gain. Dis only killed the one. The surviving cowards ran in horror.

Finally, he was alone.

* * * *

Beo pulled Maryssa's slack body over her shoulder. It was much too late for traditional company at 31C Apricot Lane, but she was anticipated. Malcolm, Maryssa's twin, opened the door. Ida, her maternal grandmother, peeked from behind his shoulder.

"Is she dead?" Malcolm asked without emotion.

"No, just exhausted and dehydrated," Beo said as she deposited her into Malcolm's unexpected arms.

"Thank you so much, Bay." Ida smoothed over graciously.

* * * *

"I'm so glad it is over with," Ida said over coffee as Malcolm settled Maryssa on the sofa.

"I think the worst may yet come." Beo added after a pause.

Even at midnight, Ida Whitehouse's kitchen was bright and cheery. "What do you mean?" Malcolm asked joining them in the small kitchen.

"I fear Maryssa will resent our involvement in her life. I think she may try to return to Them. It is unsafe at the best of times. But Detroit is vulnerable. Its decay is attracting vermin. The vampires are set on the edge of a civil war and they don't even realize it. As a feeder in a chief's clutch, Maryssa would be an easy casualty. Only then her death will not come as a feeding gone too far. She would be captured, interrogated, tortured then executed. She must be kept from them."

Ida shuddered. Malcolm glared at Beo, "Stop upsetting Gran."

"She must know the truth about the situation. You all need to know."

"More coffee, Bay?" Ida interrupted their impending fight.

* * * *

"Why'd you bring her back? We all thought she was already dead." Malcolm resumed his feud with Beo as soon as Ida had gone to bed.

"Ida did not think she was dead and neither did you." Beo retorted simply.

"You should stay out of it. Leave my family alone!"

"Like you left Maryssa alone," Beo countered.

Malcolm had been pacing the kitchen. He froze at Beo words. "You have no idea what you are talking about. I did everything...I do everything I can for that girl, but she's given this family nothing but heartache."

Beo was bored with the argument. Malcolm was lashing out in anger and guilt. "Listen, Malcolm, she is here now. There is no avoiding that. Where you go from here is up to you and Ida. I will stay only a few days to keep her from running off as soon as she wakes up. Then I will go." With no further explanation, she ascended the stairs to take a long overdue bath.

* * * *

A hot bath was close to divinity as far as Beo was concerned. Cleanliness was not the goal. Relaxing and distracting her from choking Malcolm were. The modern fiberglass tub was not elegant, but it filled quickly. Feeling spontaneously feminine, she sprinkled in scented oils and rose petals. Cutting off the spigot, she peeled off her white dress. She eased into the steamy water.

She had to force herself not to smile as she felt a pair of midnight eyes watch her from the darkness.

* * * *

Dis lay beneath the stars. For the first time in his existence he was free. Beholden to none...except Beo. He was almost giddy. Such unusual sensations. He lay without moving, without breathing. He thought, really thought beyond his typical survival instinct. He had choices. He felt oddly detached.

His solitude was not meant to last.

"Greetings Roman," a cool slinking voice sounded above him, "or shall I say chief now?"

Dis did not respond. The voice was a stranger and enemy until proven otherwise.

"No, not chief...rogue." The newcomer continued in his monologue. "I came looking for Michael and I find his head has had a disagreement with his body." The voice baited. Dis remained as stone.

"I was calling on Michael in response to his inquiries. He didn't seem to know whom to ask, but I heard and came... It seems he ran afoul, well, before he ran afoul of you, he pissed off another." Dis turned involuntarily to the speaker, a tall slender black man. He was not African or dark-skinned. His skin, hair were a shining black. An onyx sculpture given life. Only his eyes and teeth had a different pigment, and they were blazing red. He was grinning at Dis's reaction.

"Ahh, I see you met her as well." There was only one her. "Exquisite, isn't she." It was not a question. "I have crossed paths with her a few times over the past millennia or so. I keep my eye out, but she is like smoke."

Dis considered the statement. Given what he said, if it was true, Beo's offer of companionship seemed out of place. She was stronger and older than he thought.

"I see I have missed her again. Well, I take my leave. Chaos calls." He shot straight up like a cork from a bottle and disappeared in the heavens. "I am Alder by the way."

Without allowing himself to think, he stood up and leapt from the rooftop.

* * * *

Dis had not set out to find her. He didn't want to find her. She may elude Alder, but he was a tracker of unfailing skill. Once he had met someone, all he had to do was think about them and a tingling would occur in the center of his chest. It was like the child's game Hot or Cold. The closer he got, the stronger the sensation. The further away the weaker. It was compulsion and talent that led him to be perched outside 31C Apricot Lane. His gift directed him to a second story window. He crouched on the eave below it. He had no plan or even will of his own.

The curtains were drawn open to reveal a homey guest suite. He was completely unprepared for the effect seeing Beo would have on his body. His heart should be racing and his palms should be sweating. The only outward change was his total stillness. He was a statue of tension.

She was stunning in the lamplight. She seemed unaware in her own thoughts. She firmly closed the door behind her. She leaned her back against it and let out a pent up sigh. The suite was laid out with a queen-sized bed, vanity and adjoining full bath.

He was so engulfed in studying her, he almost didn't notice that she was walking straight toward the window. He ducked down as she raised the lower pane of the casement window. She breathed in deeply with pleasure. She withdrew into the suite leaving the window ajar to let the night in. He had gone apparently unnoticed.

He had to leave immediately.

He would have succeeded in leaving had he not heard her drawing a bath. He turned for a quick glance and was lost.

Her movements were fluid and mesmerizing. He watched her sprinkle bath oils and rose petals in the steamy pool. Instead of turning on the electric lights, she lit a single candle. He feared she would close the bathroom door. When she began to undress, his hands clamped down on the windowsill. She neatly folded the white electric silk dress and set it aside. She turned the water off and nimbly eased into the steamy pool. Perfectly content now, she lay back and closed her eyes.

Now was his chance. "Leave!" the rational part of his mind screamed. "You can't even see her in the tub....yeah, but I know what is there." He argued with himself. "Okay then, leaved or get closer."

And he could get closer. He was very gifted. Most vampires received a single gift after the conversion. Dis had two. That was why he had been Michael's favorite assassin. He could track and hunt undetected. He could draw darkness around him like a cloak. He would be only detected as a void in the nightscape. In tonight's new moon, he would be invisible.

"Get Closer." He decided.

He slipped through the open window like a phantom. He stalked toward the bathroom door also left ajar in invitation. She lay still in the tub, only idly swaying her fingertips in the petals.

His body seized up. His ears buzzed and his vision sharpened. He took in her shining flawless skin. She wore a faint smile on her lips. Those lips he was burning to taste again. She seemed so vulnerable that a wicked part of him wondered what would happen if he boldly stepped forth and claimed her. It would be sweet payback for how she manhandled him earlier. Instead he was caught in an insane balance.

He stayed at the threshold for uncounted minutes. He could have stayed forever, as long as she remained, he would stand as silent sentinel.

She stirred and stretched, giving him ample time to prepare for her to leave the tub. She rose, switched the lever and began toweling off. His eyes were still trained on her, but he turned his body ready to bolt out the window. She spent a few more moments patting herself dry and combing her fingers through her hair. She blew out the candle, hung her spent towel on a rack and walked out of the bathroom.

She seemed comfortable with the dark. She didn't turn on any lights as she made her way to the bed. Her shoulder faintly brushed along his chest. Heat seared his muscles. He leapt backward just beside the window. She didn't break stride. She approached the bed, pulled the quilt all the way to the foot of the bed and climbed in under the fine sheet. She arranged herself gracefully on her back with her right arm above her head. Dis crept closer to the bedside.

His skin began to prickle, a warning instinct against the impending dawn.

She mewed softly as she snuggled deeper into the mattress.

His face drew level with hers. If he were brave enough to close that last insurmountable inch of space, he could taste her.

Laying on her right side, she pulled her left arm up to her chest. Her arm twisted to reveal her only imperfection. Seven red hairline scars cut across her forearm. They were equally spaced one finger width apart beginning at her wrist. The lines were slightly raised ropes of scar tissue. He brushed his hand over the scars and then a feather soft touch of her cheek. Her lips were is ultimate temptation. He ran the pad of his thumb over her lower lip.

Rose petals.

Without further thought, he spun and launched himself out of the open window.

Want more? 'SOLSTICE NIGHT' visit [Melange Books](#).

This title is also available in print.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from rural West Virginia, B.C. currently lives in Tennessee with her husband. She studied architecture and landscape architecture, earning degrees in both. She loves creativity in all its forms: art, music, literature, etc. B.C. has always enjoyed storytelling, but until recently never put one of her stories to paper. Writing began as a way to relax during graduate school. No one knew she was writing until her first novel, Solstice Night was under contract. She writes stories that she would enjoy

reading, such as fantasy, sci-fi, mystery and paranormal romance. Now working full-time, B.C. still finds time to write every day.

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