

Vamp Chronicles
REFLECTIONS
Book Five-point-Five

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Susie Hatfield, *editor*

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REFLECTIONS

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VAMP CHRONICLES

Diary of a Vampeen

Vamp Yourself for War

Hit the Road Jack

The Innocence of White (short)

Vamp Versus Vamp

Darkness Falls

Reflections (short)

Vigilante
The Break of Dawn (coming soon!)

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REFLECTIONS

Pick up shortly after Darkness Falls and follow Lexi and Kellan as they go on their honeymoon. It's more than merely a trip though; it's a chance for Kellan to reveal more of his past. It's a renewal, a reawakening for them, as tender moments are shared, memories are rekindled and a name is chosen.

This is a sweet short best read AFTER book 5, Darkness Falls, as it reveals and reviews plot details.

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*Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.
1 Peter 4:8 nasb.*

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Reflections

Chapter One

“Where would you like to go, Mrs. Bancroft?” Kellan nuzzled my neck, kissing it gently. “Pick any place in the world.” He spun me in his arms to face him.

I ran my fingers along the collar of his shirt. “Anywhere?” I casually lifted a brow.

His dimple appeared as he smiled down at me. “Anywhere.”

I wracked my brain, trying to think of a place I’d always wanted to visit. The possibilities were endless. There were so many remote towns with special pizzazz and equally as many amazing cities with much to boast.

Staring into his emerald eyes, I got lost in him. Our past was awash with emotions, memories assaulted my heart. Through the slush, gazing into his depths, I saw, and immediately knew, exactly where I wanted to go. “You’re my husband. I think it’s only fair that I know your hometown at least as well as you know mine.”

His brows rose as his grin broadened. I could tell he was shocked by my answer. “Seattle it is.”

I looked around at our wedding guests, mingling and chatting. “How long will it take to get everything together?” I asked absently.

“We’re ready as soon as you change, my love.”

My head snapped back to him.

Amusement danced around his eyes. “I meant everything I promised you today, Lexi. Part of marriage is

allowing me to bear some of the responsibility, especially when you, my wife, have so many." He kissed my forehead.

"Here you go. A dry outfit." Aunt Claire shoved a box towards me and handed a suitcase off to Kellan. "This is the last of it." Her focus returned to me. "You're all set." Red tears gathered in her eyes.

"Thanks, Aunt Claire. You've been amazing; everything she would have been and more." I hugged her gently to me, delighting in her motherly warmth.

"You just had to say that." Her voice squeaked. I felt a single tear splash onto my shoulder as she drew back, swiping at her cheeks. She plastered a smile on her face. "Go, honey. Enjoy being newlyweds before the baby arrives." She patted my burgeoning stomach.

Kellan wrapped an arm around my waist. "Go change, sweetie."

Sweetie? That's a new term of endearment from him.

"I'll be waiting." He brushed his lips to mine softly, sensually. It was a kiss that kindled my soul, touching my skin with sunshine.

I hated leaving him, but soon found myself carrying the box to the nearest room, a small storage room off to the side, stocked with extra tables and chairs.

No sooner had I closed the door than Mel and Gabi knocked once before barging in.

"I'm so happy for you, *chica!*" Gabi spun me around and began undoing my wedding dress, sopping wet from wading in the ocean with Kalel.

Mel came around in front of me and took the box. She set it down on a nearby table and opened it. She hadn't

said much today. Her few words showed enthusiasm, but I'd sensed there was something wrong with her.

Watching her, I knew she was reflecting on her own relationship. She and Craig loved each other, but there was a single key item missing from their relationship: consummation. They could never be intimate.

I thought back to the conversation I'd overheard between my parents, what seemed like, ages ago. My dad had been willing to give up intimacy with my mother forever, just to remain with her and me. I couldn't imagine loving someone so much, being with them all of eternity, without the ability to deepen the relationship on that primal level. I couldn't begin to understand the pain and frustration of wanting to connect with someone but having a firewall that prevented it.

In many ways, it was the ultimate proof of the love they shared between them...to remain with each other and remain bridled; and at the same time, it was an ultimate eternal torture, because they would always long for more but would never be able to explore it. It could be likened to having a gluten allergy. Bread; hot, aromatic, freshly baked breads and desserts permeate the air, torturing your senses; with a gluten allergy, you're forced to watch others consume the very delicacy that is so enticing, yet you're medically required to deny yourself, expected to involuntarily suffer in silence.

Mel removed the new Juicy Couture navy blue velour set packed with fresh undergarments. I smiled to myself, remembering the same one Aunt Claire had given me just over a year ago. I could tell the new one was a size larger to accommodate my baby belly. A long white pregnancy tank top was revealed beneath the last item in the box. She'd thought of everything.

Gabi slipped my clothes away and Mel began methodically handing me the new items one by one. As I adjusted my bra, I caught her staring down at my swollen belly. Longing flooded her eyes; despair swiftly washing away the desperate emotion.

I swallowed my guilt. If she and Craig couldn't consummate their relationship, then they also couldn't have any children. My heart broke at the heaviness settling over her.

When she caught me studying her, she quickly flashed a smile. I knew her too well though. I'd already seen the truth without having to hear her words.

I slid the tank top on over my intimate garments. She went to hand me the pants, but I stopped her, taking them and setting them aside. I didn't know if Gabi knew what was going on with Mel and Craig or not; as Mel's best friend, I couldn't chance hurting her like that.

"Gabi." I turned to her. "Thank you for all your help." I wrapped my arms around her, tightly but briefly.

"You're welcome. I really enjoyed planning an actual wedding. With everything going on, Jack and I have had to postpone our big ceremony." She kissed my cheeks as she moved away.

I held her hands. I knew our thoughts were the same. "Hopefully he'll forgive me for marrying him."

Her voice was reverent. "He only ever wanted you to be happy, Lex. That's true love. He loved you enough to let you go. He wanted this for you."

I felt tears sting my eyes. I swallowed the serum rising in the back of my throat as recollections of Kai flashed through my mind. My chest tightened, my heart skipping a

few beats. "I wouldn't be here without him." I took a deep breath, calming myself. "Or you. You girls really helped me this past week." I glanced back at Mel. Her fake façade was still firmly in place.

"I'll always be here, Lex, until my last breath, just like Kai. You're like a sister to me...more of a sister than my own ever were." Red tears glossed Gabi's brown eyes.

I shuddered. "Let's not turn this into a cryfest." I chuckled. "Can I have a few moments with Mel alone, please?"

"Of course. Call me if you need me." Gabi slipped through the door as inconspicuously as possible.

I blinked away the last of the tears that had gathered before looking back at Mel. "Talk to me, Melly Bee."

Her face pinched as her mask slipped. "You haven't called me that in years." Her voice was tight as she tried to suppress her emotions - unsuccessfully.

"Sometimes we need to be reminded of the past in order to face the future." I grabbed her hand, wrapping it in mine. "Do you remember what a spitfire you were back then?"

She laughed, despite the tears beginning to glide down her cheeks. "I was something," she conceded.

"You were more than something. You were a fierce, determined little girl who was going to steal the beehive's honey, regardless of how dangerous it was. You were willing to face any and all bee stings just for a chance to taste it." I locked eyes with her. "You have to decide whether the risk is still worth it knowing you'll never be able to taste the honey. Is the title of daredevil, and the sheer adrenaline rush, worth the lack of reward? It's not a

decision you have to make right away. You have time." I squeezed her hand, giving her an encouraging grin. "Love doesn't disappear; lust dissipates. Love, though, it never dies. A hundred years from now, you'll love him the same. The question you should be asking yourself isn't 'Can I live without him?' The question you need to ask yourself is 'Can I live with this?' Can you handle the pain of wanting more, but never being able to have more?"

A crushing whimper ripped from her chest.

"I'm not saying that to be cruel." Tears welled as my chest constricted. The ache in her heart was visible on her face. Her tears fell fast; her lip curled in despair. I hated seeing her like this. I hated the thought of her suffering such an awful fate. "I want you to be happy, Mel. I see the longing in your eyes when you look at my stomach. I see the darkness that clouds your eyes when you watch a couple grow more intimate before sneaking away. It's not a crime to want those things. You just need to decide if you can live without them forever. You have nine years until one of those wants is taken off the table."

She sobbed, her chest heaving. "I don't know, Lex. I love him, but I just don't know."

I yanked her into my arms, immediately enveloping her around my belly. My baby boy chose that moment to move, knocking both of us with his powerful kicks.

His moves distracted her from her distress for a moment. She giggled gaily, pulling away. She rubbed her hand over my bump. "I'm happy for you, Lex. I just want to be able to know firsthand the extent of your happiness. I want choices, not impossibilities."

I cupped her face. "You have choices, but they're not the easy ones you're seeking."

A knock sounded on the door. I dropped my hands, glancing backwards at it.

"Everything alright in there?" Aunt Claire's voice carried towards us.

"Be out in a minute," I called.

"Come on." Mel handed me the pants. "I don't want to be the one responsible for holding up your...honeymoon." She choked on the last word.

I knew that guilt would stay with me. I would always feel like I was throwing it in her face. "I'm sorry, Mel."

She frowned, her tears stalling. "I don't want you to pity me, Lex. You're my sister. I love you, and I want you to enjoy all that life - and love - has to offer, even the parts I can't." Her voice was strong, the infliction in her words carried conviction.

I nodded. "I'll do my best."

"Try harder." Laughter lightened her tone. "Rock his world." She smiled wide, her eyes glittering.

I snickered. "I'll try."

"Girl, the conversations I overheard between Kellan and Craig while you two were split up would blow your mind. He may screw up a lot, but he loves you; and he loves *everything* about you, if you catch my drift." Humor and mischief twirled around her final words.

Confidence swelled inside me. It was nice to know that your husband loved all of you, especially when you were pregnant. I slid into the pants, relieved when they didn't squeeze my belly.

“Have fun, Lex.” She handed me the jacket. “Do all I can’t and enjoy it guilt free.” She hugged me. “I’ll figure out my life. Just knowing that you’ll be there for me regardless of what I choose is enough.” She drew back, gazing at me solemnly. “After my mom’s death, I realized - scarily - that you’re the one person I can’t picture my life without. You’re my Kai.”

My gut clenched at hearing his name; the small black hole in my chest opened up, as I considered her words.

“You see everything they don’t, Lex; and I see all you try to hide. I’m always here if you need a shoulder to cry on...over him; even five, ten, or a hundred years from now. Believe it or not, I understand what he meant to you.”

Her words sobered me. “I guess we both need to work on communicating better and utilizing our friendship.”

“Agreed.”

“Group therapy every Thursday night?” I smirked.

She beamed, distant memories of Barnes & Noble pulling her away for a moment. “Blood blended coffee drinks at your place?”

“It’s a date.”

She squeezed me tight again, letting go quickly. “Let’s go before they assume you’re about to pull the annulment card.”

I laughed. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you more! I love Gab, but she is so not the same. I can’t get a word in half the time. Do you have any idea how that feels?” She grunted. “So frustrating.”

My grin widened. “Oh, I have an idea.”

She grabbed my wet wedding dress and stuffed it in the box.

I opened the door and jumped back as Auggy's fist nearly collided with my face. "I know you're pregnant, but how long does it take for two women to change one?"

Amusement furrowed my brows, tugging at my lips. "Come again."

He narrowed his eyes at me, opening his mouth to argue, but halted. "Oh, never mind." He pursed his lips, glancing down at my baby belly. I slid the jacket on my arms as I gazed in his direction. Something seemed a little off with him. His features softened as he shoved his hands in his pockets and shrugged. "You know how your aunt is."

I smiled up at him. "And you." I leaned up and kissed his cheek. "Thanks for walking me down the aisle, Pops."

"Call me 'Pops' again and I'll *pop* you, with child or not."

I giggled. "Oh please. You like it and you know it."

"Personally, I picture a popsicle when I hear that word. Considering that Auggy gives everyone the cold shoulder, it sounds pretty fitting to me." Mel bumped my back with the box, urging me forward.

"Watch it, Hartford."

"I don't work for you, Pops." Mel pushed past me, walking away before Auggy could reply.

"Have fun on your..." Color began to tint Auggy's cheeks, as he shifted. "Well, just have fun, and be safe."

"A little late for that last one, don't you think?" I couldn't help but rile him.

“I’m done. I don’t have to take this level of abuse.”

“You so have no room to talk, mister.”

“Don’t push me, Bancroft.” His voice bellowed.

I laughed. “Bye, Auggy.” I hugged him before he could move away.

I was surprised that he returned my embrace with equal fervor. “I’ll handle your army while you’re away. I’ll update you daily by email.” He stepped back, immediately sliding his hands back in his pockets and averting his gaze.

“Thanks.”

Kellan approached us. “You ready?” He smiled down at me.

“I just need shoes.”

“They’re in the limo that’s waiting for us.”

“Oh.” He really was on top of things now.

He held out an elbow towards me. “Come along, Mrs. Bancroft.”

I felt heat rouge my cheeks as I grabbed his forearm. He escorted me to the door. I stopped in front of a teary-eyed Beth. “Thanks for everything.” I hugged her.

“I’ll always be here, regardless of whether you and my son are together. Please know that.” She kissed my cheek as she moved away.

I focused on Al, embracing him the same. “I appreciate everything you’ve done.”

“Just as my wife said, we’ll be here...regardless. Okay?”

I met his gaze as I released him. I nodded, giving him a timid smile. "Thanks."

Beth hugged and kissed Kellan before Al shook his hand and gave him a stiff-necked half-hug. "Take care, son."

Kellan looked at me, a smile curling his lips. In a flash, he swept me up into his arms.

I screeched, my arms flying around his neck.

He laughed. "So worth it." He carried me through the door and towards the waiting limo.

Our wedding attendees were all gathered outside the door, waving us away.

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Chapter Two

An impeccably dressed older gentleman, with grey hair, crow's feet around his eyes and laugh lines framing his thin lips, opened the back door for us. "Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft."

Kellan gave the man a brisk nod.

"Hello," I said.

The man smiled and bowed his head once in reply.

Kellan slid into the back seat with me still in his arms.

The man closed the door behind us. I heard him walk around to the front and get into the driver's seat. A moment later the car started and we were moving.

I focused on Kellan. He gazed at me, unabashedly. There were no barriers between us now. He was allowing me to see the depths of his soul in his emerald eyes. He didn't hold back.

"I didn't think we'd be here a couple weeks ago," I admitted.

"Sometimes it takes nearly losing someone to appreciate them."

A twinge of pain pierced my chest. "Yeah." My voice was weak, as the past suffocated me. I couldn't seem to let go. I couldn't seem to accept the fact that *he* was gone. I could barely wrap my head around Kellan and me reconciling.

"I swear it'll be different this time. I'm not perfect, but I know you make me a better man."

“Please stop apologizing.” I caressed the side of his face. “No one is perfect. We’ve both made mistakes. What’s important is that we’re not giving up in spite of them.”

“I don’t want to fail you again.” His voice was earnest.

I nibbled my bottom lip, considering his words. I didn’t want to lie. I sought the truth. I’d heard the regret in his tone, and though I wish I could erase it, it was more important that I be honest. “As long as you love me the best that you can every day, I don’t see how you could fail. It’s when we put all the negativity in life ahead of love that we disappoint our mates.”

His eyes reflected the affection I knew he held for me. “You always have the right words.”

“I’m not perfect.”

“No, but you’re perfect for me.”

My heart fluttered as I took in his handsome features. This past week, he’d proven to me how committed he was to changing this time around. I think it was the combination of Kai’s death and our break up... My heart still ached over those weeks; my soul still wept for the time we lost over a lack of consideration for each other.

He crooked a finger beneath my chin and lifted my face towards him. “This isn’t the time to be sad, babe; it’s time to be happy.” His words faltered, his brows dipped inwards. He seemed so unsure of himself all of a sudden. “Unless you’re not happy.”

I pressed my forehead to his. “Of course I’m happy, but it’s still a bittersweet happiness because I know what was sacrificed for us to get here.”

“You were the one who told me I couldn’t hold onto the past.” His jaw was set, his eyes blazing as he stared into

me.

I sighed softly. "It's not so much holding onto the past as it's just that I'm stuck there. The news is fresh. It still hasn't sunk in. It's..." I took a steadying breath. "It's hard to wrap my mind around the fact that I'll never see him again."

"You'll always have your memories."

Tears stung my eyes. "But they fade with the centuries."

He captured my lips unexpectedly. One hand wrapped around my waist, the other hooked around my neck, drawing me towards him. His lips were tender against mine, yet urgent, as if he was trying to steal my thoughts as hastily as possible.

In a snap, our souls had connected. Tingles strummed my body, making me aware of his energy, of our entanglement on another level.

His mind opened up, an onslaught of thoughts and moments flooded towards my mind as he angled my head to deepen our connection. *"I'll save them for you. Always."*

"You'd do that for me?"

"One day, you're going to realize that I'd do anything for you...for you and for our son." He placed his hand on my belly.

"I love you."

"I love you." His lips molded to mine perfectly, nearly the same size; it seemed that we were made for each other. His hard muscles pressed against my feminine curves; his solid build alluded to his vampire strength.

I slowly pulled away as I felt the car come to a complete stop.

“Looks like we’re here.” He kissed the tip of my nose and then slid me onto the seat beside him. He reached for a bag on the floor. He surprised me, first, with shoes for himself.

I looked down at his feet, shocked to find them still bare. I giggled. “I didn’t even realize you were barefoot.”

“I was too focused on stealing you away as soon as possible.” He winked.

He grabbed my legs and turned me until they were in his lap. He slipped on my cushy silver ballet flats, the last one falling into place right as the driver opened the back door.

The airport was busy despite the moon being high in the sky.

“Thank you, Robert.” Kellan got out of the car. I saw a flick of his wrist before green flashed, he was tipping the driver.

“Thank you very much, Mr. Bancroft. Will you require my assistance beyond this point?”

“No.” Kellan held up a hand, signaling someone over.

I watched, as Kellan handed a young man the bag from inside the car and the driver directed him back to the trunk.

I glided along the seat towards the door. Kellan twisted at just the right moment to offer me his assistance exiting the vehicle. I smiled up at him as he tucked me in his arms. “Thanks.”

He kissed the top of my head before releasing one arm from around me. He maneuvered towards the airport doors and led us inside.

I glanced back at the skycap with the dolly of our luggage. "Shouldn't we stay with him?"

Kellan leaned down near my ear. "He's a vampire, sweetie. He doesn't screw over his own kind."

I mulled over his words. "How can you be sure?"

"The look."

A laugh burst from my chest. My hand flew to cover my mouth as I tried to stifle my amusement. "A look?" I quirked a brow in his direction.

Confident, cool and collected, Kellan simply smirked at me, his dimple making a grand appearance. "Yes. A look." He escorted me to the check-in lane. When we stopped behind an older couple, he hugged me tighter to him. "Don't worry about anything, okay, babe? Let me take care of you the way a husband should."

The couple in front of us spun around. The woman smiled at me, her eyes lighting at the sight of my baby bump. "You're glowing, dear."

I felt heat touch my cheeks. "Thanks."

"How long you been married? You two seem awful young," the man said, scratching at his grey beard. He was a stoutly man and looked like a mountain man; someone who had worked hard his whole life.

"We just got married today," I blurted.

Out of the corner of my eyes, I saw Kellan look down at me and smile. He squeezed me closer.

“Oh my! Congratulations!” The woman’s eyes brightened as she looked over at her husband. She placed a hand on his chest. “We’ve been married almost forty years.”

The man grunted.

“Oh, stop Albert.” She frowned at him, but quickly plastered a smile on her face as she turned back us. “Don’t let him scare you. Marriage is wonderful as long as you make commitment and love your priority...*especially* during the trying times.”

“How old are you two?” Her husband looked at us quizzically, as he fixed his eyes on my stomach.

“Old enough,” Kellan stated, his voice becoming brusque. He used a tone I hadn’t heard him use much. It rang with finality, saying the subject was done.

“Excuse him. He’s always cranky when he flies.” The woman blushed. “Honestly, Albert. You needn’t scare these children. Open your coffin of memories and remember when we were newlyweds.” Her voice didn’t escalate, but I could hear the frustration and embarrassment in her words.

I didn’t know what came over me, but I blurted the answer he wanted. “He’s nineteen; I’m seventeen, and, before you ask, I’m six months pregnant.”

“Now you’ve gone and gotten her upset,” the woman fussed. She crossed her arms over her chest and scowled at her husband.

His lips formed a hard crease, and he nearly rolled his eyes at what, he obviously thought, was his wife’s dramaturgy.

“Perhaps this is a trying time,” the woman admitted.

I didn't know how to reply, so I didn't. I wrapped my arms around Kellan's waist, clinging to him. *"Please don't let us become like that."*

"Never, babe."

It's not that they were an awful couple; they clearly did love each other. Although, rather than being committed to making the best of things, they seemed more committed to nitpicking each other; choosing to focus on flaws and attitudes that likely had always been there. Hopefully, they were leaving on vacation and would be able to patch things up.

The line moved, and it was their turn to approach the desk.

The woman gave us a warm, apologetic smile. "Congratulations, on both accounts." She gave a small wave before rolling her luggage towards the counter.

The next available agent motioned us forward.

Within ten minutes, we had first class tickets, Kellan insisted, on a direct flight to Seattle that left in just over an hour. Kellan gave me a cocky smile as the skycap handed over our luggage to the check-in agent at the end.

I swallowed my pride, the first rule in any relationship. "Okay; I admit it. You were right."

He angled his head, jutting his ear towards me. "I'm sorry, what was that? My awesome vamp hearing didn't quite catch those impossible words pouring from those beautiful lips."

I smacked him from the side playfully. "Don't push your luck."

He laughed.

It took us thirty minutes to get through the security line. Kellan helped me take off and put back on my shoes, really playing up the role of a perfect, human husband.

I caught sight of his ring, the light dancing off his band as he stood in front of me.

His eyes sparkled. "You like knowing I'm yours." He tugged me closer to him.

I played coy. "Maybe." I tilted my head to the side, flirtatiously.

He nuzzled my neck. "I like knowing you're mine." He kissed my pulse point. Warmth spread through me as ripples tingled outwards from where he'd pressed his lips.

My heart reacted, beating a little faster. The baby responded to my excitement and began moving frantically inside me, as if he was trying to dance and celebrate my happiness. I winced as he knocked into a particularly tender spot.

"He's a Kung Fu master before he's even born." Kellan smiled proudly, rubbing my belly. "You okay?" His eyes locked with mine. He peered deep into my soul, searching for sincerity.

I shook my head. "Yeah."

He pulled out his cell phone. "We better get going. They'll be boarding soon."

I let him lead me to the right gate. After all, he was prepared. He had everything ready at the reception, while I mingled with our close friends. He had my photo ID and our tickets all set for security; he'd also had his card out to pay for the tickets as if it was nothing.

Oddly, money was the one area of our relationship that we didn't communicate much over. I was sure that if the budget was tight, it would have definitely been a point of contention. We were lucky in so many ways. Kellan made his money from the Vamp Army and the Bladangs, working as a dual agent. I made my money with my army, my bakery and my own work with the Vamp Army and the Bladangs. I also had income from the several businesses my grandfather had owned and left to me. Thank God for this, because babies, weddings...well, life in general...took money, *a lot of money*, especially when you were immortal.

We arrived at the gate right as they were boarding preferred and first class ticket holders. Kellan walked us directly up to the agent.

She smiled politely, her eyes softening at my protruding tummy, as she scanned the tickets. "Have a good flight."

Kellan nodded, taking the tickets and escorting me down the ramp to the plane. He immediately requested a pillow and blanket for me once we boarded. The flight attendant handed over the items as soon as I sat down.

I beamed at Kellan. "You're on top of your game." I knew my eyes were gleaming, hinting at my mix of joy and amusement. I was delighted in experiencing this side of Kellan, although it was a bit strange. He'd had moments like this before, but never a full week.

He rolled his eyes, sighing softly in humorous dismay. He lifted the armrests that sat between us and laid the pillow in his lap. "Come here." He stretched out an arm, inviting me to lie down and get comfortable.

"Don't I have to stay upright for takeoff?"

“You’re married to a vampire, babe. Just relax, and I’ll take care of them.”

The moment my head hit the pillow, exhaustion consumed me. I’d been on such a high from the excitement of everything that I hadn’t stopped to listen to my body.

Kellan swept his fingers through my hair and down my back in one fluid motion. I found comfort in his presence, security in the way he was taking charge of everything and peace in his attention to detail. The moment we said ‘I do’, it was as if it all fell into place for him. That little piece of paper put everything into perspective for him, igniting a passion in him to be more than he ever was before.

This was the Kellan I wanted forever. Had this Kellan been with me all along, Kai never would have stood a chance...yet, now I understood that, had Kellan *not* been the way he was, Kai never would have loved me enough to save him. It was both Kellan and Kai who had brought us here...fate has a funny way of working things out; irony at its finest.

“Rest.” His tone was soft, yet commanding. The single word seemed to assure me I could let go and lulled me into slumber.

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Chapter Three

I shifted, seeping deeper into the warmth and comfort of the fluffy pillows and luxurious blankets - wait! I opened my eyes, shocked to find myself in an upscale hotel room.

"You were tired," Kellan stated, rubbing circles on my back.

I rolled towards him. I looked down at the bright white linens covering the bed, the taupe drapes covering a wall of windows. "How long was I asleep?"

He skimmed a single fingertip along the side of my face, trailing it down along my jaw and under my chin before withdrawing it. "About ten hours."

I scrubbed my forehead. "Ten?" I was sleeping longer and longer it seemed...on our honeymoon, too. "Sorry."

"Don't be sorry. Tell me, what you want to do today?"

My stomach growled, always with such perfect timing. I felt heat filling my cheeks.

He chuckled, smiling endearingly at me. "I'll feed you first thing. What are you in the mood for?"

I moved onto my back, noticing the tray ceiling. The walls were a medium grey tone with a fancy silver design stenciled on them, creating a wallpapered effect. The color palette melted onto the ceiling. The angle at which the ceiling was cut allowed a gradually darkening of the tone until it gathered around a beautiful chandelier. The furniture was a stylish, Parisian inspired design with antiqued mirror fronts. All of the linens, aside from the curtains, and all of the accessories were exquisite creams and whites, portraying the sort of luxurious beauty that

inevitably sparks an inherent fear of staining or ruining something. I didn't even want to know how much this room cost per night.

The baby started moving around, causing the blanket to ripple. My expression became pensive, as I caressed my belly. "We really should start thinking of a baby name."

"Promise me you won't go all *Twilight* and start combining our parent's names." He smirked, while planting a wet, smacking kiss on my cheek.

I laughed, shoving at his chest. "Actually...I do sort of like my name and your dad's name together," I admitted.

He cringed. "Do I even want to hear it?"

I rolled my eyes. "I happen to like the way it sounds; I just don't know if I like it for a first name. Alexandro."

He touched my baby bump beneath the blankets. "Hmm. I guess I have to give you genius points for that one. I do like it."

"Told you." I beamed.

He cut his eyes at me, humor illuminating their depths. "Don't push your luck, Mrs. Bancroft."

I snuggled into him. "I like unusual names that are pronounceable. I love your name." I kissed his chest.

From somewhere, I got a whiff of sandalwood, a coconut touched, clean beach scent, that reminded me of Kai. Without him, we wouldn't be where we were; my son wouldn't be able to grow up with his dad. "How would you feel about using Kai's name?"

"As a first name?" He lifted a brow, angling back to peer down at me.

I shrugged my shoulders. “Kai Alexandro Phoenix Bancroft doesn’t sound bad. It has you, me, Al and Kai in the name, four of the people who brought him here.”

Kellan eyed me, raising a single brow as a smirk played on his handsome features. “You do realize people would probably call him Kap for short.”

I frowned. “I don’t know if I like that.”

His expression grew solemn. “It’s not that I don’t like the name Kai, but the people closest to us would probably struggle with the memories every time they said his name, including you, my love.” He drew his fingers up and down the side of my belly.

“I’m tired of calling him ‘my baby’ or ‘our baby boy.’ I want a name to attach to him. He deserves an identity that isn’t wrapped up in us.”

Kellan pursed his lips. I could tell he was mentally searching for more names. “Do you want to stick with a ‘K’ name?”

“If we can’t name him Kai, it’s the least we can do.” I was slightly disappointed that I couldn’t honor Kai in that way, but Kellan was right. If we named our son Kai, there would be nights when I would be in the nursery rocking our baby back to sleep, and the moment I spoke his name, tears would gather. I knew that all I’d remember was coming home that fateful day, and facing everything Kai had left behind.

“What about Kyler? You pronounce Kai’s name in the beginning, it’s unique for you and it’s awesome enough to be a superhero name.”

I rolled the name around in my head; particularly checking for any cruel teases kids could create using the

name. When I came up empty, my fondness for the name doubled. "I don't know about it being a superhero name, but it's a good one."

Kellan's dimple winked at me. "You can't tell me Kyler Kent doesn't sound good."

I laughed. "Alright. I'll give you that one." I tossed the name around, feeling a smile tug at my lips. "Genius points for you, because I actually like it better than Clark Kent."

"A super name for a super baby." He brushed his lips to mine. "I believe we just chose our son's name."

I smiled against his cheek. "Kyler Alexandro Phoenix Bancroft."

"Drop the Phoenix."

"Kyler Alexandro Bancroft? But then he doesn't have anything of you."

"He has half my DNA, babe. I think that's enough."

It did flow better and wasn't quite a mouthful, but I felt somewhat guilty about it lacking any part of Kellan. Regardless, it had a ring to it. I'd also never come across anyone else with the name. "I love it!"

My tummy rumbled as *Kyler* moved around.

"Sounds like somebody's hungry." He kissed my lips again, as if he couldn't get enough of me. He didn't linger; instead, he quickly pulled away. "Let's go get you *and Kyler* some food."

I squealed with excitement, quietly clapping my hands. "I can't believe we finally have a baby name."

He laughed. "We can celebrate the name, after you eat. Come on." He rose out of bed and offered me a hand.

“I’m a vamp. I don’t need the typical pregnant woman assistance.” I sat up and got out of bed.

He immediately gathered me in his arms and claimed my lips again. Our souls entwined instantly. His breath became my own as he tilted my head back. I slid my tongue along the seam of his lips. He growled, nipping my bottom lip. “Don’t push me.”

I tossed my shoulder up, peering at him sideways, flirtatiously. “I wasn’t aware that I was pushing you.” I feigned innocence.

“If you weren’t pregnant we would be doing something completely different by now.” He licked a trail up the side of my neck, lingering over the contour of my vein. “Let’s get ready and go before even *that* doesn’t save you from me.”

I giggled, slipping from his arms. “Alright. I won’t torture you anymore...for now.” I wagged my brows before dashing off for the bathroom to shower.

Twenty minutes later, I was showered, dressed and ready to go. Aunt Claire had gone shopping apparently, since I didn’t recognize any of the clothes in my bag. Worse, they were expensive upscale maternity items that were a waste, especially considering I probably wouldn’t be able to have another baby: if the vamp statistics were any indication.

The silk fabric was a choker-halter style with a colorful pattern; the shirt flowed wider around my waist with a final flare around my hips. I paired it with black maternity skinny jeans she packed, and my silver ballet flats. I pulled a soft, black cardigan from the bag and slid my arms into it, knowing I needed to at least pretend I was somewhat chilled by the air outside. Being pregnant let me get away

with not walking around in a marshmallow jacket, what with the hot flashes and all. My hair cascaded down around my shoulders.

As I walked out into the living room/kitchen area of the posh hotel suite, I found him leaning against the kitchen counter. He was wearing dark wash jeans that rested perfectly on his hips, paired with a red graphic tee. He completed his ensemble with a black leather jacket I'd never seen before. His locks hung downwards, giving him a darker, more elusive appearance.

His eyes lit up the moment he noticed me. "You look beautiful." He came around and pulled me in for a kiss.

Kyler kicked outwards, knocking into Kellan; it was as if he had a sixth sense for where his dad was standing. "Um, can we go? I'm really hungry."

"What do you want, babe?" He opened the door, escorting me out.

"Surprise me?"

"That's an intimidating request to someone who hasn't eaten food here in over three years." He laced his fingers through mine as we boarded the elevator.

I looked at him as the doors closed. "I trust you." My dual meaning wasn't lost on him.

He wrapped an arm around my shoulder, leading me through the over-the-top hotel lobby; contemporary and ancient European styles collided with clean lines and daring colors.

A doorman promptly opened the tall, glass door, revealing the well-lit city beneath the night sky. The cool November breeze slapped my face the moment we stepped

outside. An unexpected shiver ran through me, causing me to wrap my arms around myself.

Without asking, Kellan immediately took off his jacket and wrapped it around me. I stuffed my arms through the slots, my hands covered by the long sleeves I could never fit perfectly into. The jacket was enough to take the chill off for me though.

“Thanks.” I leaned into his side.

As he hailed a cab, my gaze wondered around our downtown location. Off in the distance, I could see the space needle high in the sky. Bliss was the word that came to mind as I studied the tall focal point. We were here. I was finally going to be able to know all of him, including his past.

“You want to go up?”

I shook myself mentally, focusing on his voice. “Huh?”

“You’re staring at the space needle.”

“Oh.” I looked back at the city icon before meeting his gaze. “I want to see everything.”

—

Chapter Four

Within an hour, I had eaten, and we were in an elevator climbing the space needle. Kellan had his hands wrapped around me from behind, gently cradling me to him. When the doors opened to the observation deck, he escorted me over to the windows facing downtown Seattle.

I stared out of the glass, taking in the glory of the city below. Tall buildings of varying heights dotted the vertical stretch from where we were. I wrapped an arm around his waist, as I enjoyed the monumental view.

“Downtown is where I used to party and get into trouble. I could have easily passed for a Twilight newborn in this city. I had no mercy - and no conscience.”

I was surprised by his admission but didn't clue him in. I didn't want to discourage him. I wanted to know everything.

He guided me over to the right where I got a beautiful view of Safeco field, with a visual of Mt. Rainier further in the distance. Moving me a bit more to the right, we lost ourselves in the impressive view of the Seattle waterfront and Puget Sound.

He secured his arms around me from behind, his head hovering near my shoulder as his hands splayed over my belly. “Tomorrow, I'll take you out on the ferry. You can smell the salt water and the faint fishy scent that lingers in that part of town, but it's also the perfect place to get a coffee beverage.” He knew exactly how to entice a pregnant woman who had a human fixation with Starbucks.

I smiled, gazing out at the serene silence of the dark water. Boats floated, even in the night, across the calm

water. One had to guess what was within its murky depths; it wasn't a clear, bright blue like the Caribbean, but that didn't take away from nature's beauty. The apartment buildings lucky enough to be near the shore were probably equipped with the perfect balcony for a cup of hot blood on a chilly morning, the quiet magnificence of the water offering a sense of peace at the start of each day.

Walking further around the circle, we saw the Olympic mountain range. Growing up in Charleston, it was a foreign thing to me for a city to have both water and mountains. So far, Seattle seemed to be a perfect balance of all things. Residents had their choice of altitude; it gave the impression of a rushing, free spirited city boasting something for everyone. I was already losing myself to its appeal.

Kellan guided me along the glass. "There's the Seattle Center and KeyArena; essentially, home to all things entertainment." He pointed to the oversized complex. It was like a city within a city, with a modern, family-friendly design.

Gliding along the rail, we moved around a few couples to view another body of water and more buildings. "That's Lake Washington. It's a fresh water lake."

I scanned out over the puny buildings, particularly stunted in comparison to the grandeur of downtown. Allowing my eyes to stroll off in the distance, beyond Lake Washington, I saw a patch of land that was full of more low-rise buildings, several of which appeared to be businesses, manufacturing plants and warehouses. As we continued to amble around the circle, I caught a glimpse of the Cascade Mountains sliding into the background behind downtown Seattle.

“Where did you live?” I asked, absorbing the colorful palette of the city lights beneath the brilliant stars.

“How about I show you?” He swept my hair away, kissing the side of my neck.

“Now?”

“Yes.”

I peered out at the breathtaking view once more, before spinning in his arms to face him. I placed my palm on his cheek, brushing my thumb across his full lips. “Take me.”

“One thing first.” He captured my lips; his touch was gentle, yet strong. He took command of our connection as soon as we collided, twining rapidly together. *“I had to kiss you on top of a city.”*

He swept his tongue along mine, tenderly cupping my face as he explored my mouth. His thoughts were an open book, a cardinal glance into his past here in the city; a preface for all he had yet to show me.

I felt a soft energy capsule us, like our auras melding into one. *What had I been thinking? How could I ever believe another man could offer me a connection anywhere close to this level?*

I knew it never would have been this way with Kai, but I also couldn't accept that the reason for our connection was merely for him to die so that Kellan and I could go on. I wasn't lying when I said I loved Kai, but it was for this very reason that I would always love Kellan more. We had an untouchable connection that I still hadn't entirely wrapped my mind around.

Tingles ran down my spine, as Kellan slid one hand down to my lower back and pulled me into him. Apparently,

Kyler didn't like that; he immediately put up a fight, abruptly ending our kiss.

Kellan loosened his grip on me as our kiss broke into several small pecks before we separated. His eyes were shining, glossy with some unidentifiable emotion. "Let's go."

I nodded, allowing him to steer me towards the elevator.

—

KELLAN

My heart swelled as I watched her in the cab. She was enamored with everything around us; her response was more sentimental because she was reacting to a city that I loved. This was the last place I expected her to choose, but she couldn't have made a better decision. I was excited to show her a part of me she hadn't seen yet. I was eager to share all of me with her. Marriage has no secrets, or at least it shouldn't. Bringing her here allowed me to reveal the secrets of my past in one sweep.

Her blouse bounced as we rounded the corner towards my old, Fremont area home. Kyler was becoming more active every day. She didn't fuss about it, but occasionally, she would flinch; unable to hide the pain of her initial reaction to his tough kicks. She was amazing; she pressed onwards, upholding all of her responsibilities despite any setbacks. I wasn't ashamed to admit...I admired my wife.

She glanced back at me as the row of houses came into view, her eyes wide with amazement. I loved seeing her genuine fascination.

Modern designed, three and four story homes infringed our view. The houses were close together, long

and narrow, architectural opulence. Glass and cedar was the typical front design of the homes along my street; the insides were sleek lines with upscale décor.

When we stopped in front of my home, I paid the driver and opened the door to help her out.

She grabbed my hand and held it tight. Her eyes were focused on the three-story home in front of her. Her gaze slid higher as she moved from the car. "It's beautiful."

I laughed. "You haven't even seen it yet."

She flushed. "From the outside, I mean."

I closed the cab door and waited for the driver to leave.

I wrapped an arm around her shoulders and led her up the driveway. I pulled my keys from my pocket and unlocked the door.

She stiffened at my side. "You didn't sell it. Why?"

"My mom loves this home."

She seemed to accept that answer. "I can see why, just from the outside. It's a nice neighborhood, and I really like the design. It's so different from anything Charleston has to offer, even in the waterfront areas."

I scented the air, ensuring that danger didn't linger. You never knew if anyone would break in while you were away. When the air came back clean, I ushered her forward. "Go inside, my love." I pushed the door open and allowed her to walk ahead of me.

I flicked on light switches behind her, immediately going for the thermostat to crank on the heat, mindful of her earlier chills. It rumbled at first but eventually began

working. We'd never used it before. As a vamp, I wasn't as susceptible to the weather as my mother and Lexi. Though, my mother preferred to bundle up in front of a fire rather than turn the heat on.

I watched as Lexi skimmed her fingers along the clean lines of the furniture. Rather than a clutter of art, there was a single, oversized piece of art from local artists on each of the focal walls. Chocolates, rich greens, warm honey and opulent oranges was the primarily color palette in the living room, dining room and kitchen. It always reminded me of a modern cabin in the woods.

Lexi strolled towards the back deck, gazing out at the patio furniture that matched the inside decor. I easily recalled the many nights I found my mother lying on my father's lap sleeping on the outdoor sofa. My father was never more at peace than in those quiet moments with my mother. He was always prepared with a blanket to cover her, and a pile of books to read, while she slept.

Watching Lexi now, I could just as easily envision us doing the same on a cool summer night. Perhaps not in the next eighteen years with our son, but in twenty years, I vow to bring her back here and do just that.

There was so much I wanted to experience with her. I was looking forward to every day of forever with her, however many days I was fortunate enough to be granted.

—

Chapter Five

LEXI

“What’s upstairs?” I turned away from the sliding glass door, moving towards him.

He immediately opened his arms and pulled me into him. “The second floor is my bedroom, the guest bedroom and a bathroom. The top floor is the master bedroom suite with a bonus room my parents used for an office.”

I smiled up at him. “I want to see your room.”

He chuckled. “Of course you do.” He looked me up and down, pursing his lips. “Let’s go.”

He escorted me up the stairs and steered me to the left. His bedroom faced the back of the house.

I grabbed the doorknob, hesitating for a moment. My heartbeat sped up; for a moment, I felt like a schoolgirl sneaking into her boyfriend’s bedroom for the first time.

“I think you’ll be surprised how familiar the room is to you,” he stated, stuffing his hands in his jean pockets.

I opened the door, allowing the knob to slip from my grip; the door glided backwards, revealing a familiar space. I looked back at him; I knew confusion was written all over my face.

He guided me into the room before leaping onto the bed and landing on his back. Immediately rolling onto his side, he playfully patted the empty space beside him.

I slipped off his leather jacket and laid it at the foot of the bed before climbing in beside him. I watched him

closely, trying to get a clue as to why his room in Seattle was identical to his room in Charleston. I couldn't find a single piece that was different.

Our eyes locked, and he gave me a shy, wistful smile as he played with my hair. It wasn't long before his hand strayed south to my stomach. "Moving away was hard for me. I wanted to take a piece of Seattle with me. My solution was recreating my room. Even though it was a different house, it felt the same. I could be on my bed and stare at the ceiling, believing I was back in my favorite city." His eyes traveled around the room.

I listened intently. I could see so much flickering through his mind despite our connection not being open at the moment. There was so much he wanted to say, but it was almost like he didn't know where to start or how to begin. I wanted to help him, but I knew this was something he had to do on his own, in his own time.

I ran my hand up and down his bicep, encouraging him.

His attention immediately focused on me. "I didn't want to accept the new direction of my life. The only reason I even agreed to move was because my father threatened to hand me over to the High Authorities if I didn't come with them." He paused. "I'd been that reckless."

He took a steadying breath, our eyes meeting once again. "I resented them at first, especially when they began insisting that I hang out with some soon-to-turn vampire." He smirked.

I giggled. "I was just as mortified when my mom kept pushing me on you." I narrowed my eyes at him playfully. "Plus, I was the one who had to suffer through asking you

out on a group date. You were such a jerk too, torturing me with no response until the bell rang.”

His smile widened. “Guilty.”

We both grew somber; our gazes drifted down to my belly. *That’s* what had become of our parents’ insistence.

His eyes glittered as he looked at me. “I guess I owe them an apology at some point.”

My chest tightened, sadness creeping in quickly. *I never thanked my mom for her persistence. I never thanked my parents for anything.* I may have been a good child, but I was an ungrateful child nonetheless.

His finger gently slid beneath my chin, raising my focus back to him. “It wasn’t until I started to fall in love with you, right around the time of your transformation, that I accepted my past for what it was. It led me to you. Had I been a well-behaved little vamp, my parents never would have left all this behind. I never would have met you. We wouldn’t be here now, and that’s the worst kind of travesty.”

I became lost in his emerald eyes. He’d opened himself up, body, mind and soul. He allowed me to see and feel all he did. His struggles overwhelmed me; his love stunned me.

“I love you, Lexi. I haven’t always been the best man over the years, but regardless of my actions, please don’t ever doubt my love for you. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.” His jaw was set, his eyes looking beyond my physical to find my free-spirited soul: a soul that certainly would have rebelled at hearing his words in human form. It was clear, he meant every word he said; I felt it down deep.

I swallowed hard, dumbfounded by the power behind his declaration. "I know I've betrayed you; I know I've dismissed your feelings at times, but know that you'll always be my first love and the most important person in my life aside from our son."

His lips began to caress mine, his arms circling my body and drawing me into him. I felt the potent link binding us together as our lips feathered across each other's. His thoughts lifted me to a higher place; his touch bound me to Earth with him, when I felt like I could fly.

Abruptly, he flipped me onto my back; his muscled figure loomed over me as our connection continued to deepen, to open more and more doors that had remained closed between us. There was always something new to discover.

"Aside from Junior in your belly, I'm oddly reminded of the time we tried to do it, but kept getting interrupted." I sensed the smile, even in his thoughts.

I chuckled, pausing over his lips. *"At least this time we know your parents won't be popping in at any moment."*

"Let me claim you, Lexi." He caressed the side of my face as he continued to kiss me.

I tensed, my lips pressing lighter to his. *"You already have."*

"Not since Staten." I heard the plea in his thoughts.

"It could make you sick though. We don't know the full extent of what's flowing through my veins right now."

"I don't care. I want everyone to smell you on me, to know that you're mine in every way."

I cupped his cheeks, drifting back and allowing my eyes to flutter open to take him in. "I don't want to lose you. I couldn't fathom carrying on without both of you." I knew my expression held nothing back; my emotions, my fears, were on full display. I trailed my hands down to his chest, planting them over his heart.

His features softened as he adoringly looked down at me. "Babe, your electricity wrapped itself around me, and I didn't feel an ounce of pain." His eyes implored me. "Just let me try." He leaned down and kissed my forehead, my cheeks, my jaw and then my neck.

My pulse intensified. I didn't want to deny him. It wasn't that I didn't want the intimate connection, that sensual exchange with him; I feared what would happen *because* we did it.

His teeth grazed along my neck, sending chills pulsating down my spine. Heat pooled low in my stomach as my desire ignited. My serum began to rise in the back of my throat. My gums began to ache as a fresh thirst settled in.

I swallowed hard as he continued to kiss and caress the sensitive vein on the side of my neck. Slowly, hesitantly, I angled my head to the side, granting him full access to my bloodline.

Gently, he brushed my hair back as he slipped a hand beneath my neck. "*I love you.*" He sank his teeth into my flesh.

Pleasure burst through my body as he drew my blood into his mouth. I felt every pull, every tug, every demand his mouth made for more of me. Tingles fluttered through me; my body became hyperaware of him, of his every move, every touch, and every draw. I knew nothing of pain in this

moment, only of pleasure, the deepest, darkest erotic pleasure between two vamps.

My soul seemed to dance as he claimed me in our world once again, the new Lexi, the one that had been tainted by an ancient vampeen. My heart beat wildly in my chest, expanding, desiring to wrap around Kellan's; my breathing became erratic as sensations wracked my body.

There was no deeper connection for vamps, no greater commitment in our world. He would always be mine, and I would always be his. Our blood would linger within each other, changing our scents, transforming our pheromones to declare our mate.

His tongue washed over my skin as the holes closed. He placed gentle pecks along my flesh. He kissed his way back up to my lips, capturing them once again. I tasted myself on his tongue as he plunged it into my mouth, an urgent strength he couldn't seem to control guided his moves. He was making a carnal statement.

His mind was abuzz with commotion; his soul seemed to radiate outwards, cocooning me as he shared his joy of claiming me.

To my utter delight, he had no negative physical reactions.

He slowly disentangled his lips, leaning back to gaze at me; love shining in his eyes before even speaking a word. "I love you." He placed a humble, final kiss on my lips; a simple kiss with so much emotion behind it tears stung my eyes.

It was the small moments, the tiny details that often had the greatest impact. We didn't have a perfect past. In a way, his re-claiming me was a clean slate, a new declaration for a different beginning.

“Your turn, sweetie.” He suddenly flipped us; his hands cradling my hips, keeping my baby bump from smacking into his hard abs.

I gave him a slight smile, as shyness crept upon me. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“The only way you could hurt me is by leaving me again.”

I pressed my knees into the mattress on either side of his lean hips. I peered down into his emerald eyes, watching the emotions flicker across them. He had strong, manly features; a hard glint could be found in his eyes, at times without even trying, yet there was a consistent softness to them as well. It was always his emotions that determined whether he looked like a male model with plush, full lips or an angry beast capable of demolishing the world one empire at a time. He was intense; we were intense together.

With my bump safely above him, without his support, he grazed his thumb across my lips. “There’s nothing to be afraid of.” His voice was gentle, empathetic to my reservations.

I nodded, puckering my lips and kissing the pad of his thumb.

He tilted his head, giving me full access to his throbbing vein.

I took a moment to study, and admire, his profile. His nearly black hair rakishly fell towards his eyebrows. He had a nearly perfect slope to his nose; it reminded me of a Roman’s nose. His luscious lips were always tempting to me. His jawline was sharp, almost framing his cheeks from below.

Just as he'd done to me, I pressed my lips to his temple, his cheek, his jaw and finally his neck. I slid my teeth seductively along his skin, eliciting a shudder from him.

His hands flew around me, cradling my back and urging me forward.

I paused to listen to his pulse, the rushing of his blood through his veins. So tempting; it was like an alluring song, one you just couldn't stop listening to.

I closed my eyes, opened my mouth and aligned my teeth with his bloodline. I bit into him, immediately tasting his blood. My lips encircled the bite mark, and I began pulling him into me. He tasted like heaven: sweet, with a bit of spice to offer the perfect balance.

His hands curled around my hips, digging into my skin as I continued to drink from him.

I felt him flowing through me, rooting our connection even deeper...becoming even stronger. My body instinctively pressed into him, wanting to be closer, craving more.

Afraid of taking too much, I lightened my suction, waiting for my serum to surge. I slathered it over his bite wound. I gave it a few seconds to heal before I gently licked away any excess.

I'd barely passed my tongue over the spot before he reversed our positions, carefully laying me on my back.

He penetrated me with a look, so intense I froze in place. All I could do was stare into him, becoming lost in his powerful command of me. I was his. He held all the control in that moment. I had inadvertently given him my full surrender by allowing him to pierce straight to my soul. He

held me captive for several minutes; my thoughts blanketed by his dominant gaze.

I was clothed, yet I had never felt more naked and exposed. Despite feeling as if I'd been cracked open and was on full display, I'd also never felt more safe, more loved, or more aware of what marriage was truly about.

Marriage is an eternal commitment to protect someone at their weakest and lift them higher at their strongest. Marriage is being able to love someone more than you love yourself, confident in knowing they will reciprocate. Marriage is a commitment to a team, not an individual. Marriage allows you both to go to a new high in life, a place you'd never see or experience without each other.

Marriage for a vamp, though, is so much more than that even, because eternity is more than a single human lifetime for us. Marriage is the ultimate show of emotion for a vampire, the only human tradition they hold dear.

Marriage is defined differently by each couple who enters into it, regardless of their gender, age or race. Marriage for me was peace. As long as I have Kellan, I can face tomorrow knowing I will always have back up. He is my support, my comfort...*my everything*. This is reflected in every tender moment I spent with him. It was being reflected now, as I peeked into his soul and was able to see that all my future would be with him, regardless of who remained beside or behind us.

"I love you." I delicately, reverently brushed my lips against his.

His eyes sparkled, locking with mine as he moved down my body. He lifted my shirt and kissed my bare belly. Kyler responded instantly, kicking about as if he felt his

father's lips against his bare, delicate infant skin. Kellan smiled up at me, pressing a hand over my stomach where Kyler was moving.

He waited until the excitement died down before sliding back up over me. "I'll always love you. You're my forever girl, even if I don't last forever with you."

Tears stung my eyes, blurring my vision red for a split second, as I batted away the flashes of all that could have happened had Kai not intervened. I couldn't fathom a future without Kellan. It was hard enough now without Kai. "Promise you'll never leave me. Promise you won't do anything reckless to jeopardize your existence." I felt desperate. My heart felt like it was being choked, constricted by unspoken fears.

He wiped away my tears, colored by his blood. "I promise." He dropped down beside me, cradling me in his arms. "I won't put you through what he did."

His words opened the vortex of sadness still sucking the life from my core little by little. I didn't know if there would ever come a day that I didn't mourn Kai, but I do know that I will always be grateful that I wasn't mourning the loss of Kellan instead.

It's only in these reflections, in a backwards glance at life after a tragedy, that we can truly, optimally evaluate ourselves. Mortal or immortal, death will surely come. Express love while you can; enjoy love while you can. Be happy in the small moments, the tiny milestones that come more often than the bigger ones. Few people have any influence on the date which death claims them, but we all have a choice every day of how we receive and respond to life.

*I'd rather live with regret than wonder.
I'll always choose an apology over permission;
guts over glory and passion over ponder.*

“Rest for now. I’m taking you out on the water tomorrow so you can see the city from a new perspective.” The back of his hand softly glided down my cheek. “It was my favorite place to go to think.”

“Then I can’t wait to experience it with you.” I placed my palms against his chest, snuggling closer to him; my husband, the vamp who owns my past, present and future.

—

REFLECTIONS

*Whether we want to face it or run,
regardless, tomorrow will always come.
Whether we fight or flail, face or bail,
death is still sure to come.*

*Rather than wail and cower,
raise your swords, fight harder, stronger.
Rather than crumble and sour,
lift your spirits, smile and love longer.*

*For life is a choice, a counter, a claim;
death is a wish, a fear, a shame.
Choose your path wisely, not in vain,
for all is final, regardless of disdain.*

—

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And now a sneak peek at the next book in the Vamp Chronicles series, Vigilante.

VIGILANTE

When tragedy strikes, Mel, best friend to Vamp Chronicles lead, Lexi, leaves her entire life behind, including her heart.

Fate delivers her in New Orleans, a city with a big vamp problem. Teaming up with the local authorities was the last thing she expected to do. She ran so she could be free of all ties, not to form new ones.

Everything happens for a reason though, and the more time she spends helping others, the more she realizes she needs to help herself. After all, a new city doesn't mean a new life, and absence doesn't erase the memories, good and bad.

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Vigilante: *Mel's Story*

Preface.

KYLE

You don't wake up at ten years old thinking today is going to be your last day on Earth. You're thinking about the newest video game, that new movie you want to see, maybe a test at school or how your gym teacher actually smells like a dirty gym sock. My point is, I didn't think it'd be my last day. No one ever does I don't think.

The biggest tragedy wasn't that I never transformed into an awesome creature of the night; it's that I had to lose my life over someone else's cruelty. Had the kid never been picked on for being a little overweight, had he not been tortured for being an unpopular outcast or teased for not having the money to buy the coolest new gadgets, he never would have taken the one thing his dad did have money for: a gun.

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MEL

My heart thundered in my chest. Terror squeezed my lungs. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't see. Everything was a blur before my tear stained eyes.

My pulse rushed, it thumped loudly, echoing in my head, drowning out the report from the local news anchor. It couldn't be true. They had to be mistaken. It just- I couldn't fathom another loss.

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"Hey pip-squeak." I ruffled Kyle's hair.

"Leave me alone!" He swatted at my stomach.

I held him away at arm's length. I had just enough height over him to avoid his retaliation. I leapt away from him at a delicate human sprawl. "You totally missed me, bro." I tossed over my shoulder as I walked away.

"Melly?" His voice was small, weak. He was no longer my annoying little brother in that moment. His vulnerability had me spinning around, ready to protect him from the world.

"What's up, little man?"

He fidgeted, unsure of himself. "Do you ever think about Mom?"

I studied him, watching as his brown eyes looked anxiously at me. He was nearly as tall as me already. His mopy brown hair hung down over his forehead.

"Sometimes. Why?"

"I miss her sometimes." He shrugged his shoulders, trying to be coy. He considered me for a minute. "Would you miss me if I died?"

My heart stopped beating for a moment, the unfathomable idea wrenching me. I wanted to dismiss his question, but his voice was too earnest; he was truly concerned that I could somehow forget he ever existed. "I'd miss you more than Mom."

Needing a reprieve from the weight of the subject, particularly with my mother's death still fresh, I pushed forward. "You're so going to outlive me, bro. So you need to remember, I want a pink glitter casket lined with purple roses and I want like a gazillion Hello Kitty stuffed animals thrown in for good measure."

He rolled his eyes. "Yeah, like I'm gonna pay for all that."

"Oh ye of little faith. I was planning to leave you a cool mil." I smirked.

He rolled his eyes again. "By doing what? Dressing up Barbie dolls?" He scoffed.

"Something like that." I winked. I ruffled his hair again. This time he didn't fuss. Rather, he surprised me by pulling me into a hug. A hug that had us both entwined, hearts beating in unison as if we were connected by more than blood for that single moment.

How could I let all that go? How could I ever forget that? How could I ever forget my brother, my little man, the boy I spent half my childhood raising.

I couldn't. I wouldn't. Ever.

—

I stared blankly at the TV. Panic surged within me. It couldn't be true. It just...

The female anchor was so professional, so factual...so removed. She clearly didn't have any children at the school. She was stoic, cold, as if this was just another news bulletin to read without inflection, without emotion, because God forbid if the press proved to be more than robots spewing facts.

"So far, authorities have confirmed one teacher and ten students injured with one teacher and two students reported dead on the scene at Ft. Sumter Elementary. The shooter was allegedly an eleven-year-old male student in one of the fifth grade classrooms of the local school. Authorities have yet to release a name although the student is apparently in custody. Low Country police officers have..."

"Mel? Love?" I heard Craig's voice in the distance, but nothing registered.

I opened and closed my mouth several times, fighting the tremble in my chin. I knew I needed to sprint into action. I knew I couldn't stand there helplessly. I had to do something. I had to see him. I had to... "I...We...Fuck! Go, go, go!" I screamed, pulling myself to the present, to the possibility that my brother, my innocent little brother, may be injured...or worse-

I frantically searched for keys.

Craig seized my arms, steadying me in front of him. His sun kissed locks were in spiked disarray; his reflective eyes revealed my harrowing expression. His brows furrowed, concern etching his forehead as he studied me.

Tears stung my eyes as I gazed at him; my chest constricted as the unknown snaked through me, draining

me of warmth. For the first time, I truly felt out of control. My body was disconnected from my mind; I was running as a true vampire: on instinct.

My heart was barely working; my pulse rocketed, raging with a thunderous pulsation, banging against my sensitive flesh from its liquid filled lines.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted the keys on the side table. Without a second thought, I lunged for them before speeding out the door. I didn't care what my neighbors thought of me. I didn't care if they discovered my secret identity in that moment. I had one goal.

"Melanie!" Craig whisked after me, leaping into the passenger seat as I put his car in reverse and peeled out of the driveway. "You don't even have a license! What the fiddle is going on, love?"

I heard the fear in his voice, but I had my own to deal with.

Oh, God. Please, please, please. I'm begging you; I'm praying to you for the first time in forever because I'm desperate and I don't know what else to do. Please, let him be okay. Please, don't let me lose anyone else. I don't know if I can handle it. I don't know if-

Craig gripped my hand and squeezed. "Mel, love, you're scaring the boggles out of me. Please, tell me what's going on so I can help you."

I swallowed hard, but my serum continued to rise. "Pull out your phone and Google Fort Sumter Elementary School."

"Kyle's school?" I didn't have to look to know his features were scrunched in confusion, yet, perhaps, a tiny bit of knowledge was seeping in. He had to know I wouldn't

ask him to search unless something was wrong, unless something had happened.

I merely nodded my head, unable to speak, unable to voice the possible truth, that my brother, the only sibling I would ever have could be-

“Fudgeballs.” The word fell breathlessly from him.

The drive to the school was a blur. I couldn't recall any portion of the course if my life depended on it.

Crowds gathered around the perimeter of the property. Throngs of parents, of neighbors, pooled together in groups; nothing united communities like tragedy. It disgusted me. It shouldn't take misfortune to bring people together like this.

I gazed around helplessly. My short stature made it difficult to see through the masses. Before I knew what I was doing, I was using my brute strength to push my way through. A man went flying sideways; women fell to the ground. I didn't care though. In the back of my mind, I knew they had to be suffering on some level. I knew we were all going through this together; hence the unity. But I only cared about one person on that campus: Kyle.

When I reached the front line, I found barricades set up by the local police force. Officers, firemen and EMTs occupied the schoolyard; the lights from their vehicles flashed in the background. Students hugged their parents as county workers escorted them from the school. As the scene unfolded before me, as I got my first glimpse of the situation, tears sprung; it felt like an anaconda was squeezing my entire body, crushing me. Worse, it felt like my soul was being flattened, diminished to a black speck.

It was a scene out of a movie. It wasn't happening. This was somehow a dream. This wasn't reality. This didn't

happen in my community. This didn't happen here. It happened in other states, other places, but not here.

It couldn't happen to my baby and me.

I gaped forward, lost in their actions, consumed by my own emotional reaction...until he appeared.

I lurched forward, flying over the barricade. I was by his side in a split second.

A swift once-over proved something was wrong though. Why was he struggling to breath? What was all this blood spilling from him?

"Ma'am! Ma'am! I need you to step back." Someone was spewing these words at me in the distance because he could, because it wasn't his child, his sibling, on this stretcher.

"Melanie!" I felt Craig's arms circling my waist, trying to detain me, but I'd be damned if anyone pulled me from his side.

My entire body began to shake as I studied his lifeless form. *How? Why?* With shaking hands and tears streaming down my face, I swept my fingertips against his pale cheek. He felt cooler than normal. Not quite cold, but cooler than normal. He used to feel warm to me. He used to be my blanket when I got cold. He used to be my baby; I didn't give birth to him, but he was mine.

His lips were changing, loosing their rosy red color. His complexion seemed to be fading as more blood seeped from his chest, soaking his shirt and the blanket the paramedics had draped over him.

"Ma'am!" It wasn't until the paramedic yelled at me that I realized that my other hand was clinging to the

stretcher, preventing them from moving forward, preventing them from taking him from me.

I felt detached in a way. This was happening, but I couldn't seem to wrap my mind around it. My eyes saw and my heart reacted, but my psyche, my soul refused to accept it. Idly, I realized, if I let him go, he would be gone.

No. I wouldn't let them take him. They couldn't take him. It- They- "No!"

"Mel, love, baby." Craig held me tight. His tone was soft, his thick accent soothing, yet his goal grated me. He was trying to appease me, but no one could make this right.

Children didn't deserve to die this way. My brother didn't deserve this! Where the hell was God? Why wasn't He protecting these kids? Where were the school superintendents? Why weren't precautions in place to *prevent* this? I didn't care what they did after. It should have been prevented. Why did this world progress only in reaction rather than forward thinking actions?

Why?

I gathered Kyle's hand in mine. I studied the shape of his fingers, of his nails. I smiled wistfully, fresh tears falling, at the dirt smeared on them. He always was an outdoor kid. He enjoyed getting dirty.

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"Give me a hug, sis," Kyle teased as he walked in the front door. Grass stains and dirt covered his soccer uniform. Mud was slicked to his sweaty flesh. He was a ruffled mess, but he wore the biggest smile. It lit up his eyes.

"I don't think so." I shook my head, crossing my arms over my chest.

“Come on. You afraid I’ll give you cooties?” he taunted.

“Heck yeah. I don’t know what you and those other rugrats did in that dirt.”

He snickered. “Wimp.”

I pursed my lips, narrowing my eyes on him. “Catch me if you can,” I challenged.

He beamed, his boyish need to torture girls with things we despise being met.

I took off for the backyard, slowing my pace to a decent human speed. After a good ten minutes of running him ragged, I let him catch me. I knew it would be the end of my white shirt, but his happiness was worth the sacrifice.

He threw his arms around my waist, immediately rubbing his grimy face into my shirt.

“Ew! Cooties! Germs! Yucko!” I feigned disdain.

He squeezed me tighter. “Shut up! You love me so you have to love my germs too.”

I laughed, returning his embrace. “I guess.”

Pulling back, I roughed up his hair.

“Hey!” He jumped away from me. He turned for the house. “Think Dad’ll let us have pizza again for dinner?”

I smiled, my heart warming. “I think we can talk him into it.”

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“Kyle.” I shook his hand, jiggling his arm in turn.

“Ma’am! You have to let go or I will have to take you in.”

“Mel, love, listen to the officer, doll.”

I shook my head negatively, trapped in the impossible. Darkness clouded my judgment; desperation licked my conscience. “He’s mine. You...you...you can’t take him.” I ground my teeth as hysteria crushed my chest. Tears welled quicker; fell faster. My lungs refused to expand. “Nnnnn...ooo. No!” My lips curled.

I squished Kyle’s hand, but he just lay there. He didn’t move. He didn’t hug me back. He would never hug me back again...

“Love, sweetie, darling, doll, please, baby. We can dolly with them to the hospital, but you have to let him go for now.”

“But...” My knees gave out. For the first time as a vampire, I felt weak and helpless. My soul shrouded in blackness as they all fought me, as they attempted to force me into surrender, into acceptance. “I can’t lose him. They can’t take him, Craigy. Don’t let them take him from me. Please.” My voice grew in volume, in octave, in panic. “Please,” I cried.

He pried my fingers from the stretcher; from around Kyle’s limp hand.

I shook violently, my entire body reacting to being ripped from him, from being required to let go of yet another person.

The paramedics surged forward, immediately taking him.

I collapsed into Craig. He held me fiercely to him, his muscles ensconcing me with the strength I didn’t have.

I sobbed, unable to contain my pain. I was losing him. I was losing everything. I was losing my whole world. Lexi went off and married Kellan. She was having a baby. She was a different person. She wasn't the same best friend who was always there like before. Craig was always there, but he couldn't be there the way I wanted him to be, the way I needed him to be. My dad was in and out with the Vamp Army, lost beneath a mountain of responsibilities that had never before included his kids. That left Kyle. He was the one I could count on to be all I needed and more. He was mine. He was my everything. He was the one who'd gotten me through. And now, he was...gone.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Christin Lovell was born and raised in Charleston, SC, but now lives in the hottest place on earth: Orlando, FL. She has three beautiful children who keep her running non-stop, but would love to adopt a few more. When she's not juggling life and kids, you'll find her huddled away somewhere writing her next book or happily reading someone else's. Like most authors she's come across, she's a coffee addict, owns far too many books than she can fit on her shelves, and she goes to work in her pajamas a lot.

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