



VAMP CHRONICLES
CHRISTIN LOVELL

THE INNOCENCE OF

White

GABI & JACK'S STORY

Vamp Chronicles
THE INNOCENCE OF WHITE
Book Three-point-Five

Christin Lovell

THE INNOCENCE OF WHITE

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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!)

THE INNOCENCE OF WHITE

Gabi is a full-figured vampire whose love life hasn't been horrible, but also hasn't been spectacular. A one-night stand eighty years ago has haunted her with a low-lying desire she was unaware of. One look at Jack again though, and her dead heart is leaping.

Eighty years ago, Jack had a connection with a plus-sized vamp beauty. The moment she discovered his true identity though, he took off, focusing on protecting his elusive reputation. Fate brought them together again though, and Jack was enraptured all over again. He has a bit of explaining to do before Gabi will give herself up to the dark vamp though.

Dive into Gabi and Jack's love story and get a candid view of their wedding day in this Vamp Chronicles short.

NOTE: *This is a Vamp Chronicles (series) short story best understood and enjoyed if read between book 3, Hit the Road Jack, and book 4, Vamp Versus Vamp.*

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The Innocence of White

Preface.

GABI

I've never understood love. Why does it grab your heart tight and never let go? Why does it suffocate you, leaving you no choice but to surrender, regardless of who it's to?

Love is blind, blind to everything the other person has done in the past. Love is stupid, stupid to reason and common sense. Love is deaf, deaf to words that are yelled

in anger. Love is infuriating; it's frustrating to know you have no control over who your heart desires. Love exists without limitations, without stipulations on discriminatory items. Love is overwhelming; it rules your world with an iron fist.

When you're in love, it dominates your life. You're no longer in control; your world revolves around the person who owns your heart. It's an imprisoning situation, yet it's the most exhilarating jail hop one could ever experience.

I thought I'd known true love in the past. I thought my heart had been claimed a time or two, yet Kai and Rafi could never compete with the pitter-patter dance my dead heart does for Jack. Vampires pride themselves on being an emotionless species, yet we're not immune to the power of love. And this is one vampire who is in love.

Love captures you, enraptures you on a whirlwind carpet ride, just like every Disney fairytale depicts. What it doesn't do is brace you for the reality of who you will fall in love with. Not everyone marries a prince, and not everyone lives a happily ever after.

I'd been with Rafi for a lifetime. We met at a vampire soiree. I'd dressed in my best gown: a bright red, figure-hugging number that emphasized my female curves yet diminished all the excess stuffing around those curves. I'd worn a pair of black high heels that showed off my matching red pedicure. For a full-figured vampire who had more bad body days than good, this was one of my best days.

Our eyes connected across the room. He held a wine glass filled halfway with blood. His dark hair was slicked back, his tan, muscular body masked in a classic black suit. His black lashes fell to half mask as he watched me danced around the room with my ex-fiancé Kai's brother, Kalel.

Kalel was being polite, but I didn't want polite that night. I wanted to be embraced for the beautiful woman I was. I wanted a vampire who could hold my attention, not offer me his attention out of pity.

"Would you like an introduction?" Kalel asked, pulling me from my reverie.

I cocked my head. "You know him?"

"Rafique DeSantos. He's one of our top guards at the lake house compound."

"Why haven't I met him before?" I frowned. I'd always pushed for a company meet and mingle; yet I'd never been granted one. I thought it would be nice to know who was working for me and with me.

"He's new. Just out of a ten year contract with the vamp army."

I chuckled. "I take it he had issues with them too?"

"As do many."

Lost in conversation over the man himself, I was surprised by his presence.

He politely placed a hand on Kalel's shoulder, but it was still a brave move considering our cutthroat reputation. "May I cut in?" His voice was deep, his baritone rolled over me; it was his Spanish accent though that sent a shiver down my spine.

"Watch your hands." Kalel stepped back, passing me over to the intriguing vamp.

He firmly gripped one of my hands, his other arm wrapped around my waist. "If I may be so bold, you're stunning." His dark eyes sparkled as he drank me in. He

never missed a step, never lost his timing with the music despite his immediate focus.

“You may be bold whenever you’d like.” I was caught up in the scent of him, all male, all vampire. He made my mouth water.

His lips twisted up in the corners, his eyes revealing a devilish gleam. He slowly licked his lips. Had I still owned a beating heart, it would have pounded in my chest cavity. My breathing became unsteady as he continued to study me, the blood within my veins pulsing at an above average pace.

He chuckled lightly. He bent at the waist placing his lips near my ear, inches from my erotic bloodline. “I would never take advantage of a lady in public. I wish to ravish you in private, *senorita*.”

For the first time in nearly a century, I felt feverish.

Rafi proved his love and adoration of me time over. He was a fierce warrior, a strong leader for the security division of the Bladang vamp guard. He made me laugh. He balanced me in a way no other vamp could. Poor Kai and Kalel, my business partners and shared owners of the Bladang vamp guard, tried to manage me, but no one seemed to tame my inner ferocity like Rafi.

When tragedy struck and he was killed in battle, caught in the crossfire of a battle fought to defend my dear vampire friend, Lexi, and her soul mate, Kellan, I thought my lungs would cease to operate. Rafi had been a staple in my life. It was his face I looked for and looked forward to seeing each morning. Our connection was strong. I thought our connection was the closest thing to love a vampire could achieve. I reveled in my life with him... until he passed.

Then I ran into Jack again.

Eighty years ago, I'd had a one-night fling with the man of mystery. He fled the second I learned of his true identity. Eighty years later, he still caused my gums to ooze, my pulse to triple and my body to ache in unmentionable places. But he's the reason my dear Rafi was murdered. It was because of Jack that I lost a lifetime of memories and happiness in a single shot. And yet, it was because of Jack that I was able to move on.

Like I said, love is blind, blind to everything the other person has done in the past. Love is infuriating; it's frustrating to know you have no control over who your heart desires. And love is overwhelming; it rules your world with an iron fist. I wanted to be angry. I wanted to scream obscenities at the man who'd caused my last lover's death, yet, with one look at the Jack, all my anger dissipated and only enchantment existed. My cold heart yearned for him.

Love is stupid, stupid to reason and common sense. When you're in love, it dominates your life. You're no longer in control; your world revolves around the person who owns your heart. It's an imprisoning situation, and my anger over Rafi's demise was trapped in the imprisonment of an uncontrollable pull in another man's direction. Jack was the last person I wanted to feel for, and the first person to ever truly make me feel.

Chapter One

GABI

“Are you sure you want to do this, Gabi?” Lexi checked, her voice rising in pitch over the phone. She was worried, fearing that I was rushing into things. It was logical, but love was the opposite of rational.

“I don’t know how to explain it so you’ll understand, but I’ve never been more certain of anything in my life.”

“I’m not saying not to marry him, but don’t you want to wait, possibly give your heart a little time to heal from Rafi?” She broached the subject with ease, yet still rubbed me the wrong way.

“Listen, Lex. I know you’re looking out for me, but I’m not a little girl. I’ve been around for well over a century and have learned a thing or two along the way. I was the vampire who thought marriage was an archaic institution. After Kai shredded my self-esteem along with my heart, I vowed never to consider marriage again. The entire time I was with Rafi, I was content to just be with him. I never had that drive to slap a ring on anyone’s finger. But this is different. Jack is different. You have to understand where I’m coming from because look at you and Kellan. You got engaged like two months after you got together.”

“Yes, but I didn’t lose the man I’d been with for decades mere days before deciding to accept his proposal.” I knew she was speaking out of concern; she probably assumed that Jack was a hot rebound.

“I’m doing it.” I put my foot down, literally stomping my foot on the hotel’s plush carpet floor as I spoke.

“There’s nothing you nor Kai or Kalel can say or do to stop me. I’m not doing anything fancy. We’re going to the courthouse in Miami before Jack whisks me off on a fabulous honeymoon. And before you ask, Kalel already drew up a pre-nup, which Jack signed, just in case I’m off my keister.”

“Are you happy?”

“I was until everyone started berating me over who I’m marrying,” I huffed. Arguing my decision to everyone was exhausting.

“I’m sorry, Gab. You know we’re only doing this because we love you. I know Rafi meant a lot to you. We all cared about him in some way. I also know just how hard it is to lose someone you love abruptly. You don’t think straight for a while, or at least I didn’t. I don’t want you to do anything you’ll regret.

“From the sounds of it, you don’t have any doubts about Jack, and that’s a good thing. We want you to be happy, Gabi. Based off what we’ve experience of Jack though, we’re just questioning whether or not he’s the right man for the job. He’s a powerful vamp who doesn’t quite seem to know how to use his powers for good. That’s the impression I got anyways. I’m willing to look past it all if he can make you smile though. I guess I just want the confirmation from you. If he’s who you want, then I’ll support you. But if it turns out you’re merely another game to him, I’ll be the first to sell a vampire’s balls on the black market. After all, I do have access to a gold dagger.” I heard the smile in her voice at the end.

“As much as I appreciate the gesture, I’m confident that it won’t be necessary. I know he’s burned a lot of bridges, but deep down, he’s a great guy. He’s made some

bad decisions, but you can't deny that you didn't learn something from him."

"Don't even argue that card with me," she snorted. "That's a touchy subject still considering I almost lost my life during his charade. I did say I was willing to give him a chance because I love you. We all do, which is why he hasn't been crucified. It's your attraction to him that's keeping him alive right now." Lexi sighed. "I don't want your day to be filled with negativity so let's stop talking about it."

"You don't have to tell me twice."

"I'm happy for you, *amiga*. If this is a vamp who makes you feel like you have a heart that's actually beating, then I'm excited for you. And that's the key. As long as you're content, it doesn't matter what anyone else has to say or what they think. It's your life. Only you can define happiness for yourself, and if Jack's in that definition, then more power to you.

"So stop worrying about having to pacify everyone and just do you. Focus on your wedding day. Focus on the man you're going to marry, and then focus on the wonderful honeymoon you're going to take. Has he told you where he's taking you yet?" She pepped up, as if she was trying to encourage me to do the same.

"No! And it's driving me crazy! God, I wish I could spike blood right about now, but alcohol just doesn't taste the same to a vamp." Nothing tastes the same to a vamp the way it does to a human; it's upsetting to a vampire who loved food as much as she loved air as a human.

"I'm sure it'll be great and you'll have fun. Now go get ready for your big day. Call me when you get a chance."

"I will. Thanks, Lex."

“That’s what friends are for. I wish you would have let me be there, but I understand your reasons for going off alone.” I knew she was a tad disappointed. It was hard not to feel guilty, but she was right, I had to do what was best for me.

Who wants non-supporters at their big day? I knew not everyone was accepting of my union to Jack, and I didn’t want their opinions to dampen my big day. After all, a girl only gets married once... Okay, twice, or three times... or more for some, but I wanted this to be my one and only.

“I’m glad someone does. I swear, when I get back to South Carolina, I’m going to ring those Hawaiian vampires’ necks! Kalel at least wished me all the best, but Kai was a straight ‘insert any expletive you want here.’ He really irked me the wrong way.”

“Egh. They’ll come around. You guys are always at each other’s throats for something. I told you before that y’all shouldn’t live together. That would probably go a long way in lessening the tension.”

“Lex, if I moved out, that house would be a pigsty. Dishes would be piled to the ceiling, clothes would never get washed, and justice wouldn’t be served for half our prisoners.”

“You’ve got to let go of the reigns at some point, Gab. You won’t be around forever. Plus, they can hire a housekeeper, and you know I don’t mind stepping in for you from time to time at the lake house,” she said.

“I know.” I took a deep breath, checking the clock on the nightstand. “I better let you go, Lex. I’m still sitting in my pajamas, and Jack agreed to meet me at the courthouse in two hours.”

“Ooh! You actually followed the tradition of not letting the groom see you the night before?”

I felt myself blush. “Yes. I may not be getting married in a church, but I at least want a tad bit of tradition.”

She chuckled. “I love it. Now go get all glamorous and sexy so when he sees you his jaw hits the floor. Send me a pic before you walk out the door, and make sure someone at the courthouse takes at least a couple pics of you two together.”

“Yes, mother,” I droned.

I heard her cover the phone; mumbled voices slipped through the receiver of her phone though. She came back a couple seconds later. “Kellan says he’s happy for you and good luck.”

“Tell him I said thanks.”

She quickly relayed the message. “Okay. I’m really going to let you go this time so you can get ready. I love you. Have fun, and don’t worry about anyone but yourself and Jack today.”

“I’ll try, thanks. Take care. Love you like a sis.”

She grunted. “A sister you bar from your own wedding,” she sarcastically huffed. “But we’ll discuss that when you get back. I’ll talk to you later. Bye.”

I smiled. “Bye.”

I hung up the phone and tossed it haphazardly onto the bed. I’d only known Lexi for a short bit of time, but she was the sister I’d missed having. Being turned meant you abruptly lost your human family. I had a cousin who worked for me, but we weren’t close. He was all brains and no fun. I was all fun, all fashion and no size two. While Kai and

Kalel had taken a brotherly role in my life, we didn't have the emotional heart to hearts every sister has at some point. Lexi filled that void. Ironically, she reminded me of my blood sister from my human years. She had the same demeanor and the same firm yet loving way of handling me.

I pushed the past down, willing myself to focus on my present. I grabbed my suitcase off the floor and began pulling out the necessities to get ready for my wedding.

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Chapter Two

JACK

“I can’t believe you endangered the couple meant to save the vamp races,” my mother, Imara, fumed, her eyes locking me in place the way every mother could.

“Nothing happened to them.” I squared off with her. I knew my actions would never be justifiable in her eyes. Truth was, I knew they weren’t justifiable at all. It was every vampire’s impulse to act on instinct, whether the action was rational or irrational.

“Alexa almost died! I didn’t birth you so you could destroy the hope of our kind. I didn’t raise you to toy with the lives of others as if they were dispensable rats. I didn’t bring you into this world so you could shame me.” Her eyes blazed, the irises shifting to an orange-red hue. My mother was intuitive, powerful. She was connected to other worlds in ways I still didn’t comprehend. Above all though, she was honorable.

I watched as she adjusted her sarong, the bright orange and gold hues playing off the color of her eyes at the moment. It took a lot for my mother to lose her temper. She prided herself on her control. Given the hours she spent meditating each day, patience was engrained in her.

“I apologized. Perhaps I’m not the vampire prodigy you wanted me to be, but I have learned.”

She gave me a small smile. “Yes. Alexa did teach you a valuable lesson on your targets. They’re as unpredictable as you. You are lucky you’re still alive considering the level

of electricity she shot at you, and had Gabi not whisked you from her path, you would be dead.”

She walked around the glass coffee table and sat beside me on the white leather sofa. She grabbed my hand, her copper skin nearly white in comparison to my coffee color. “It is only for the sake of love that I allowed you to continue. I knew this was the only chance for you to meet your soul mate again in this lifetime. I shall warn you though. Gabriella will not put up with child’s play. For existing as long as you have, Jacques, you have embellished your life with immaturity far too long. Every boy must take the step into manhood at some point. Lexi gave you the push you needed, and Gabi is the one who shall keep your maturity in check.”

She dipped her head for a moment before connecting with me again. “I approve of this union between the two of you. I believe she will offer you the balance you need so long as you bear no secrets. You are not a perfect man, but the two of you are a perfect match. I’ve seen the alignment of your souls in the stars.”

I’d known she was the one the moment I laid eyes on her. The fierce connection I felt eight decades ago hadn’t diminished over time. Gravity pulled us together. Even if I wanted, I couldn’t keep away from her. I’d inadvertently gambled her heart in my games, but I swore never to dare fate again.

“Gabi is the reason I’ve embraced a new life. She is the only reason why I’m withdrawing my contracts with the school in Japan. I’ll be losing a good chunk of my income, but she’s convinced me that putting human and vamp lives at risk for a bit of ninja training isn’t worth it.”

Imara closed her eyes, gripping my hand tightly. The picture projected into my mind before I could get my

bearings.

A small white room came into focus. White floors reflected the light back on the white walls and ceiling. One by one, a bloody body collapsed onto the floor, seemingly falling from thin air; the blood from their battered figures splashed the pure room with sin's consequences.

The lone hanging lamp dangling from the center of the ceiling flickered as the body count continued to rise. Thirty-three, thirty-four... Humans and vamps alike were squashed together, the rancid scent of their death overwhelming my senses, even through my mind. The white of the room was now smeared with blood, smeared with the dirt on their tattered clothes, proof of their struggle until the end.

Soon, the room could no longer contain the beings; limbs began punching through the drywall of the walls, the floor began to buckle under the weight of the pile and the ceiling began to crack as the bodies pressed against every surface of the space.

Abruptly, water burst through a wall, washing away the bodies, but leaving behind it a black stain that tarnished the shell of a room. What was once crisp white innocence was now a molded black abyss.

My mother faced me, her eyes awash in white. "You allowed your innocence to be soaked in sin, and your sins are grave, my son. You have killed far more than you've saved. Your repentance is owed for all of eternity to erase the karma of your past. You shall never achieve enlightenment without first achieving humility and grace."

She blinked several times, her irises reappearing. She cocked her head, staring into the distance. "We must be going. Gabi is ready." She patted my hand before standing.

My pulse quickened at the thought of Gabi. She was my saving grace. Mother hadn't said it, but I felt it. Before, I lived only to indulge in myself. I was selfish. But now, I wished to live for her; to be all she needed me to do.

To most men, love at first sight is a myth we don't believe in. It took experience for me to change my view. It took Gabi for me to reconsider what I was doing with myself. She grabbed hold of my heart in less than two seconds and has held it tight ever since. In merely three days, she turned my world upside down. She challenged every action I'd taken, yet didn't judge me for it. She forced me to face myself, yet loved me in spite of who I was. Despite her unconditional love, I found myself wanting to change for her, and for myself for the first time ever. *Oh, the things one does for love.*

I stood, adjusting my button up white shirt, ensuring it was perfectly situated. I grabbed my black suit jacket and headed for the door. I stopped and turned back, waiting for my mother to come. The blue of the ocean outside the glass walls of my corner condo caught my attention. The sun was bright, illuminating Earth's brilliant palette. Today was going to be a good day. I could feel it.

She crossed the room, the white décor allowing her lively ensemble to shine as she approached me. She adjusted my grey tie before patting my cheek. "Let's go." She smiled up at me.

I held the door open for her, waiting for her to walk out into the hall. I followed her, knowing she was leading me to my future.

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Chapter Three

GABI

I fluffed my dark brown hair, full of body, falling in big curls over my shoulders. I ran my fingers, perfectly manicured with a pale pink polish to match my toes, down the front of my dress. I'd picked a style I didn't typically wear. I was stepping out today, and wanted to take Jack's breath away in the process.

The bodice of my white dress was a simple silk fabric, pure and lush against my skin. It hugged my upper body tightly; the v-neck of the top combined with the fit enhanced the best of me. The color showcased the soft tan of my skin, and would offer a stark contrast of me and Jack's meshing ethnicities. The skirt of the dress began just above my belly button, and a two-inch wide, white taffeta ribbon created the waistline of the dress lined just above that point, pulling eyes to the thinner parts of my fuller-figure.

The bottom half of the dress flowed out in pillowing layers of taffeta, netting and more silk and fell to my knees. It was an upscale designer piece with some over-the-top elements in the skirt to balance the simplicity of the top. I loved it for the way it drew attention to my best parts and masked the frumpier, plumper parts of me, such as my stomach and thighs. A pair of nude, peep toe pumps helped elongate my body. I'd accessorized with merely a simple silver necklace with a single 1-carat diamond pendant, and the engagement ring Jack had given me.

I smiled as I stared down at the simple stone. A three-carat round cut diamond was mounted on a platinum band.

I'd never pictured myself being an old-fashioned girl. I enjoyed all things glitz and glamour from runway fashions to Texas sized hair, yet I loved that Jack didn't play into my outward appearance. Rather, he offered me a piece from within. Deep down, I was a simple girl who wanted simple things, such as a happily ever after. My exterior was much more rough than my interior. I fought hard for what I believed in, but it didn't mean my beliefs were overwrought with fluff.

"You are breathtaking."

I gasped, his presence catching me off guard. I felt my cheeks warm as I smiled at him. He was equally mesmerizing. His dreadlocks were neatly secured in a low ponytail, allowing the features of his face to stand out. His coffee colored skin was smooth, his lips a silken dark rose, but everything else about his body was hard. He exuded strength with a well-muscled physique, eyes the color of night that went of forever, and a well-defined jawline that somehow seemed to frame the large, pulsing vein in his neck.

My pulse quickened as I studied his black suit. He'd dressed in a classic design of black slacks and a black jacket over a white shirt with a charcoal tie. It looked as though the entire ensemble had been tailored to his body the way he was tailored for me.

He smiled, his full lips lifting to highlight his cheekbones. He bent his arm and extended his elbow towards me in old-fashioned courtesy. "Shall we?"

"Definitely." My cheeks were sore from the permanent grin on my face.

We applied for our marriage license and then cuddled in the waiting room with all the other bright-eyed couples

for it to be issued for immediate use since we weren't from the state. An hour later, we made our way to the tiny chapel for a judge to permanently unite us. Imara met us at the door.

"You are beautiful, Gabi." She hugged me. As she pulled back, she pressed a kiss to each of my cheeks. "I offered to be your witness along with the clerk."

"Thank you." Imara wasn't my mother, but I appreciated her neutral approach to our relationship. Most mother-in-laws sided with their son regardless of his sins; I could tell she would be a unbiased though.

"Hello again, Mother." Jack kissed his mother's cheek, escorting both of us to a chair to wait until our names were called. He leaned into me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders. "Are you ready to run yet?"

I chuckled. "No. Surprisingly, I'm calm. I think this is the first time I haven't experienced anxiety in my entire life." I faced him, raising a brow. "Are you?"

His smile lit up his face. He laughed. "Definitely not. I'm afraid I never plan to let you go, my dear."

"I like the sound of that."

He nipped the vein in my neck, sending a shockwave through me. Every hair on my body stood on end as heat ensconced me. "I like the sound of Mrs. Gabriella Ambroise." His breath tickled my skin.

"Jack, not here," I whispered, mindful for our audience.

He smirked, his eyes lighting up with promise. "I can't wait for later."

The clerk called us at that moment. We stood together, heading towards the door, heading towards the room that I would become Mrs. Jacques Lenore Ambroise in.

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Chapter Four

JACK

I stood, facing the woman of my dreams, as we exchanged vows. Her eyes sparkled, blood red tears gathering in their basins. Her voice was thick, muddled with emotions most vampires avoided, as she spoke of all she promised to me. I, in return, allowed my vulnerability to be visible for this one period in time, knowing she longed for the softer side of me right now. She needed to know she wasn't alone in her weakness of love. These vows in the vampire world were the kiss of permanent weakness. A vampire would always give in for the sparing of their mate's life. Reversely, the united front of two vampires in love could be an unbreakable force few would challenge.

"Mr. Ambrose, you may now kiss your bride," the older male judge stated.

Gabi smiled wide, waiting for me to make my move. I hauled her to me; my fingers threaded her hair as my thumbs caressed her cheeks. I captured her lips with a soft eagerness. Her lush curves felt amazing nestled against me. Her mouth fit perfectly against mine as I tasted the essence of her. I inhaled her scent, grazing my tongue along hers as if I could imbibe her. She surrounded me. The steady pulse of the blood in her veins and the rhythm of her breaths soothed me, lulled my soul into a deeper connection with hers. We weren't in bed, but there was no deeper connection for us in this moment.

I pressed my lips to hers one last time. I watched as her eyes remained closed for a few seconds after I pulled

back, as if she was savoring what we'd just shared. Her eyelids fluttered open, glossed with a new shine.

"I love you." Her voice was barely above a whisper.

"I love you."

—

GABI

I'd heard the saying, "*Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the number of moments that take our breath away.*" Jack stole my breath. I didn't know how I lost myself in him so easily, so readily. The moment we connected, it was as if we were connecting on another planet, another level of existence. For days I'd battled my conscience over being with him so quickly after Rafi, for being with him period after Rafi, but then I shared moments like this with him and all my worries seemed to disappear. My conscience was silent in those minutes, finally allowing my heart to speak and my soul to sing.

"Mr. and Mrs. Ambroise, I just need your signature on the marriage license and you two are free to leave," the judge stated.

Jack squeezed my hands, bringing the rest of my mind back to reality. We approached the desk in the back corner of the room. I watched as Jack signed his name. His wedding band was a plain platinum band with a single half-carat diamond flush in the center. The color was gorgeous against his dark skin.

I glanced down at my ring. He'd surprised me with two rings, adorned with half-carat diamonds wrapping halfway around each one. He'd placed my engagement ring between the pair as he slid them into place on my finger. "For our present and our future," he'd said. My useless

heart somehow seemed to pitter-patter at his words infused with promise.

“You’re turn, my dear.” He gently kissed my forehead as he handed me the pen.

I scribbled my name on the appropriate line and passed the pen to Imara. She winked at me, a twinkle in her eyes.

Once she’d signed the paper, she threw her arms open and dragged us both into her. “Congratulations, my loves. I want you both to stand in front of the room and smile for a photo. If you refuse to cooperate, I shall rain on your honeymoon.”

Jack scowled. “And I will fill your store with locusts.”

She chuckled, patting her son’s cheek. “Indulge me.”

“I promised Lexi I would have someone take a couple pictures on my phone.” I grabbed my phone from my silver clutch. “Do you mind, Imara?”

She smiled. “Of course not. This will be for both of us.”

Jack wrapped his arms around me. I couldn’t stop beaming. I felt loved and protected in his embrace. I knew as long as he was breathing, he would fight for me and with me. The knowledge that you had a permanent support system in your partner was invaluable.

We posed for a few photos. I planned to print them and frame them in whatever home we settled in. I hadn’t taken many photos since becoming a vamp. Since we don’t age, most vamps don’t bother capturing a moment in their timeline. Not much changes for us outside of fashion, decor and technology. There are some moments worth capturing though, and this was one of them.

“Wonderful. I want copies of each one in the largest print available,” Imara said, returning my iPhone to me.

“I plan to make copies of all of them for myself too,” I stated.

“Well, you best be on your way. A storm is heading towards your honeymoon destination, and it will delay your ability to land should you procrastinate,” she advised.

“I don’t think I’ll ever get used to a built in psychic advisor.” I chuckled.

“I promise not to divulge unless it has impact,” she promised. “Be careful though, my son doesn’t have the same filter as me.” She escorted us to the lobby of the courthouse before giving us each another hug and kiss on the cheek. She practically thrust us out the front doors afterwards though.

“Woah! That must be some storm coming. Now just where are you taking me to, Mr. Ambroise?”

“If I told you, I’d have to kill you, and I’m not ready to lose my wife just yet.” He kissed the tip of my nose, ushering me towards an awaiting black town car. He opened the back door and I slid into and across the seat, the leather upholstery brushing against my calves along the way. He got in behind me and closed the door.

There was an older Hispanic male in the driver’s seat, decked out in a chauffeur’s uniform complete with the hat. “Where to, *senor*?” he asked.

“The airport,” Jack stated.

“What about my clothes and stuff?” I frowned, thinking of all the items in my hotel room.

Jack cuddled up to me. "I have a whole new wardrobe for you in a suitcase in the trunk."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "They better be nice clothes or somebody's not consummating their marriage tonight."

He tossed his head back in a boisterous laugh. "I hired a stylist. You have nothing to worry about, my dear."

"Good." I snuggled into his chest as we navigated the busy streets of Miami.

"Mother was right though. It seems we will be stuck inside for the first part of our honeymoon. I don't mind though." He wagged his brows, his insinuation not lost on me.

"We'll see. Some things in life must be earned." I smirked, loving the way his eyes narrowed in a challenge. Sparks flew as we sized each other up in a mock pre-brawl.

He harrumphed, his eyes never losing their amused glow. "We'll see, my dear. We shall see."

—

Chapter Five

JACK

The look on my wife's face as she gazed at the private jet I'd chartered to take us to our honeymoon destination was worth every penny I paid for it. Her eyes widened, her mouth falling into a perfect 'O' as she gasped brought a smile to my face. Stepping aboard, she slid her fingers along every surface of the plane from the white leather seats trimmed in gold to the marble minibar and opulent bathroom.

"You're already spoiling me, Jack." She giggled as she peeked in the fridge and found it stocked with only blood bottles.

"I plan to spoil you for the rest of your eternity, my dear." I pressed my lips to hers, stifling her enthusiastic squeal. "Let's settle in so we can take off."

"Okay." She was practically bouncing in my arms.

The four-and-a-half hour flight to St. Thomas flew by. I stole kisses from Gabi between sips of blood and hurls of laughter. She was blunt; she always spoke her mind, and I loved her boldness.

"Thank God we've landed. I don't mind flying, but after a while, I was ready to jump and swim the rest of the way."

"Sorry, love. I promise it's worth it though." I nuzzled her neck, luring a smile from her in place of her frown.

"I'll be the judge of that." She jutted her chin, tilting her nose up before strutting off the plane onto the landing

strip. Her hips hypnotized me, the way they swung from side to side with sass.

“Thanks, Peter.” I waved to the pilot on my way out, both oversized suitcases in tow. He nodded in acknowledgement.

By the time I reached the pavement, Gabi was looking around. Her lips were pursed, her eyes focused as she took in the scenery.

“Based off the temperature, we’re on a tropical island. I’m guessing from the time it took us to get here, it’s the Virgin Islands.”

I felt joy all the way to my toes as I watched her study her surroundings. She reminded me of a child solving a difficult math problem. She was perplexed, yet eager. She was clever; I knew she would notice the airport sign eventually.

“St. Thomas!” she yelled the second she saw the sign. She laughed. “I’ve always wanted to come for a visit.”

“Yes, well, we aren’t staying here. It’s merely a necessary stop along the way,” I stated.

“What is this, Twilight? Are you taking me to Isle Esme?”

I chuckled. “All in good time, my dear.” I walked over to the car off to the side. The trunk promptly opened and I put our luggage inside. “Let’s go.” I held out an arm, waiting for her to slide into my clasp.

“What have you got up your sleeve, Jack?” She eyed me suspiciously.

“A surprise, if you would stop trying to guess it.”

—
GABI

The car drove us out to a marina with boats lining the docks. Lights gleamed off their shiny exteriors. White and chrome seemed to be the popular palette among them, regardless of their design or value. Jack led us to a small boat with merely a few plush leather seats and a dashboard. The captain greeted us upon arrival, tilting his head as an accompanied welcome. Jack hopped aboard with the suitcases before lending me a gentlemanly hand, as if I was human and ungraceful and perhaps might fall into the ocean.

I snuggled into his side as the driver put the boat into gear. “Minus the captain, this is a bit *Breaking Dawn*-esk.” I chuckled.

“I’m not sure what that means, but if it’s good, then I’ll accept it.”

“Considering Edward is the most romantic fictional vampire and he planned a honeymoon for Bella reminiscent of this one, I would say you’re doing excellent.”

“Ah. Well, thank you.”

I stared out at the ocean, cuddled close to Jack as we sped along its surface. Despite the cover of darkness, I could make out the vivid blue hue of the ocean. In the daytime, I knew its shade would be a brilliant clear version dancing beneath the sun’s rays.

Twenty minutes later, we pulled up to a wooden dock.

“We’re here, my dear,” Jack announced.

Jack didn’t bother to hide his speed as he grabbed the suitcases and dashed inside the house with them before

quickly returning for me. I gazed out at the island, which appeared to be private. Trees of varying classes covered the horizon, all following the ascent of a mountain. A single large home sat at the base, snuggled up to the ocean's shore. White sand welcomed us the moment we stepped off the dock. Jack escorted me towards the house whose outer walls appeared to me entirely made up of windows. The lights inside showcased a modern interior decked out with elegant Caribbean boutique furniture.

"Definitely a Breaking Dawn remake," I mumbled. I wasn't oblivious to the fact that I was living every Twilight fan's dream.

As we got closer to the home, a narrow path appeared, guided by solar lights along its sides.

Jack hefted me into his arms. "I'm preparing to carry you over the threshold," he stated before I could protest.

He'd left the sliding glass door open, ready for our entrance. He stepped over the threshold, swinging me so we were chest to chest the moment we were inside the space. He stole my lips and my breath in a split second. He kissed me deeply yet softly. Every touch of his lips held some sort of emotion that he was sharing with me. He was never rough, always careful and reverent. Certainly not like any man I'd kissed before.

I pulled back, gazing into his dark eyes as he lowered me to the tiled floor. The moment my feet reached the ground, lightning lit up the sky behind him.

"Looks like we got here just in time," I said.

Thunder clamored in the distance.

"It does." He looked at me like I was a bowl of ripe fruit, ready to be eaten. He licked his lips. "What do you

want to do first?”

I broke into laughter. “What I want to do and what you want to do are two totally different things.”

“This will be my first compromise of our marriage then. What would you like to do, Mrs. Ambroise?”

—

Chapter Six

JACK

I watched as Gabi grew pensive. She fidgeted in place, avoiding eye contact.

“I know this is really bad timing, but something has been nibbling away at me. And, well, I just need to know. Whatever answer you give me won’t change the way I feel about you, nor will it change us. I... I need closure.”

My gut tightened. Instinct had me wanting to run from her, but love weighed my feet down. I could tell this was something that she’d thought long and hard over, which scared me all the more. “Anything.”

All air ceased to expand in my lungs as she hesitated. “Why did you lead us on a wild goose chase?”

I stared down at her. Her forehead wrinkled, her brows pulled inwards as she bit her lower lip, anticipating my response. My chest constricted as reality hit me. I couldn’t lie to her. She was my wife, my eternal partner. There could be no more secrets between us.

“At the core, I am a man of business. Cecilia Romanov paid me to gain access to Lexi and Kellan. She requested that they be lead away from Charleston. She didn’t specify why, but I assume it was so she could send a few men in to inspect their space for attack value. Many vamps are not

pleased with the peace contracts she's negotiated between you and the vamp army. If too many powers ally together, then her chase for dominance will collapse."

She frowned. "Then my cousin, Rachevik, is working for her?"

"Yes. He gave me a username and password to access the tracking device's maps. I was upfront with Cecilia about the ninjas I was contracted with. She thought it was a brilliant move to merge the two. Romanov has had a hidden control in your unit for decades. It wasn't my place to meddle in your business affairs though."

She drew back. "Even if they directly influence my safety?"

I sighed. This wasn't how I pictured my honeymoon. "Of course not."

"So you didn't think a spy in my secret quarters, the home that I reside in most of days of the year, was potentially harmful? You don't think Cecilia wouldn't use the tactical layout of my compound to attack us, especially since she's so upset over our most recent contract? Are you off your rocker, mister?" She crossed her arms over her chest, glaring at me; a scowl firmly in place.

I threw my hands up. "Perhaps I didn't care before. Perhaps I played the ignorance card because I was suppressing my feelings from one night eighty years ago. I'm not a perfect man and I'm far from a devout vampire, but one thing I know for certain is that I love you, Gabriella. I love you, and, like the air I breathe, I couldn't exist without you. Not now. Not since I've connected with you on an undeniable level. Not since you took my name mere hours ago, securing the chain. And I swear on my mother's life that I will always protect you. I couldn't

picture a future without your smile. I couldn't picture a future without your hissy fits." She tried not to smile at that one. "You make me laugh. You've cracked the ice around my broken heart and somehow made it seem like it was human again. I'm going to make mistakes. I'm not perfect. But rest assured, from here on, my loyalty will always be to you first."

—

GABI

"How the hell is a woman supposed to respond to an outpour like that?" I sighed. "I really wanted to be mad at you, but you just took the fight right now out me. I'm not upset about what you did in the past; I'm upset to learn the truth behind it. We didn't know for sure that someone else was behind you. Now I do, and I have to tell them."

"I expected you would share this information." His brows dipped in the center. I could tell he was concerned.

I cupped his face. "None of this changes the way I feel about you, Jack. I may get angry and yell and scream and be really bitchy sometimes, but that will never erase the fact that I love you."

I dropped my hands, wrapping them around his waist. I peered up at him thoughtfully. "It's crazy because at the base, love is white. It's pure and innocent. But life layers other things, other colors and elements, on top of it and that's what cracks its foundation. I don't want the recent events to taint what we have already. I don't want the past muddling what is currently white and beautiful. Love is what you make it, so lets make our love fresh and clean. Let's allow it to represent a new beginning for both of us, together. What do you say?"

He captured my lips. His full lips swarmed mine, their smooth surface caressing my own. I opened to him, angling my neck to deepen our connection. His arms wrapped around my waist, his hands spread across my back. He dipped me backwards, intensifying our kiss before breaking away with little pecks.

His eyes sparkled as he gazed down at me. "I say let's go draw a relaxing bubble bath for us to soak in together."

I nipped his lower lip. "Why don't you go draw that bath while I slip out of my dress?"

He growled, nuzzling my neck. "Don't take too long, Mrs. Ambroise."

"I didn't plan to, *mi esposo*."

"I love when you speak Spanish."

"Oh, you do?"

"*Oui*."

"I love it when you speak French."

"Then hustle out of that dress and we can have an international conversation, my dear." His voice dipped lower, the bass of his tone warming me. His hands slid down my dress, gripping my lower back as he returned me to a vertical position. He squeezed my rear, pulling me into his hard wall of muscles.

I swallowed hard. "I'll, uh, be right there."

He leaned into me. I gasped as he ran his tongue along the large, pulsing vein in my neck. "I'll be waiting," he whispered.

Breathing became a chore as he walked away, his exquisite physique disappearing into the master bedroom.

He left me standing there with rich thoughts about and an aching desire for what was to come with him.

I expelled a deep breath. “Okay. Maybe this isn’t so Twilight after all.”

—

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

VAMP VERSUS VAMP

Vamps don't get a day of rest. Or so it seems to Lexi Jackson, especially when a new predator comes at her, and this time, he's hitting close to home. With her best friend Mel's transformation approaching quickly, Lexi must gather those she trusts to face the enemy from her own bloodline.

But when there's a kink in your front line, when your relationships are rocked to the core, how do you face the threat with confidence? Lexi can't, which forces new protectors to step forward, and old insecurities to eat away at Kellan.

Kellan's fought hard for his fiancé in the past, but with others continually intruding on his territory, his anger is brewing. With a lot to prove and more to work through, he unites forces with several power players in the vamp world creating his own attack unit. It's his place to protect his fiancé, not anyone else's.

With the enemy closing in on them, will Lexi and her friends be able to put aside their differences in time to

defeat the newest legion of discontented vamps together?

Will Kellan and Lexi's personal struggles chip away at the foundation of their relationship, causing all to crumble, including the prophecy?

—

Vamp Versus Vamp

Preface.

“Wow. I can’t believe it’s been two whole months with no vampy woo-woo going on,” Mel said as we made our way to fourth period. We all had the same schedule; Kellan made sure of that.

“Really, Mel? Now you just went and totally jinxed us.” I sighed. “Ugh. Kellan, find me some wood so I can force her to knock on it.”

Kellan laughed. “You don’t really believe in that crap, do you?”

I shrugged. His brow shot up. “Please.” I gave him a small smile.

“Very superstitious; writing’s on the wall. Very superstitious; ladder’s ’bout to fall,” he sang, grinning before he sped out of sight around a corner.

“So I take it things are going good between the two of you,” Mel chuckled.

“Yeah. These last couple months have been great between us. We’re stronger than ever as a couple.”

“But?” She pinned me with a knowing stare.

“But I can’t help feeling like... I don’t know. Like something is off or maybe what we have isn’t strong

enough or..." I heaved a heavy sigh. "I don't know. Something just feels wrong despite how right Kellan feels to me."

"Hmm. Maybe you two need to go on a romantic weekend getaway or something. I mean, you're rarely alone. Every time I stop by someone's always there."

"Yeah, well, since you've been practically shacking up with Craig, you haven't exactly been by often," I teased. We laughed together, before silence fell between us, replaced by a more serious atmosphere.

"Oh, God, Lex, I can't believe I'm going to be a vampire in three days. I'm finally going to be in on everything. I'll no longer be the outcast human hanging with a bunch of vamps," she stated, her eyes a porthole to the excitement and vulnerability she felt.

"I know." I smiled. "It's been a long time coming. Who would have thought all those years ago when we met that we would be here today?"

"I'm excited, but nervous. I can already tell you're going to have to talk me off the ledge Thursday." She shuffled her feet beside the classroom door, clutching the strap of her book bag tightly.

"I'll be there. I promise I'll be there every step of the way."

We stared at each other, the years passing between us. She understood in that moment that this would be merely a pinprick of a memory in the timeline of her life, but it was one that we would look back on together.

—

Chapter One

“I wonder what the guys are planning on doing,” Mel asked as we walked into my house.

“Who knows with those two? My guess is they’ll head to the beach.” I raced towards the alarm box, prepared to shut it off, but stopped short when I didn’t hear the beeps, signaling it was on.

I flew to Mel’s side, standing protectively in front of her. I looked around the house, straining my ears to listen for any subtle noises that indicated the intruder was still here. When all I heard was silence, I signaled for Mel to remain where she was so I could check things out. She nodded her head, her eyes full of fear and worry. She knew I would protect her, but as I’d found out through experience, we were a lot more vulnerable than we liked to boast.

I took one step forward and froze when he walked around the corner into the family room. His predatory glare sent chills racing down my spine as serum flooded my mouth.

“Hello, ladies.” His rose-colored lips lifted slightly at the corners, the only indication of his amusement.

There was a distinct European flair about this man. His shaggy black hair contrasted against his tan skin. He didn’t have much muscle tone to him, or so it appeared through his suit. *A suit is an odd thing to be doing dirty vamp business in.* He was medium height, and while he was thin, he wasn’t etched muscle thin. It was his green eyes, similar in shade to my mother’s, that cast a familiar glow about him, though.

“Who are you, and what are you doing in my house?” I demanded, pulling Mel against my back.

“God, why couldn’t the myths about invitations be true?” Mel groaned behind me. I bumped her with my butt to get her to shut up. I didn’t know who the heck this guy was or if there was more of them.

“Who the hell are you, and what the hell are you doing in my house?” My voice was louder this time; my tone took on a harsh quality as my anxiety began to skyrocket.

He started to walk past the sectional towards us, undoing the top button of his jacket casually. I backed Mel up towards the back door to the garage, ready to shove her out so she could run at a moment’s notice. He stopped three feet in front of us.

“Now, is that any way to greet your grandfather?”

I shook my head. “Guh...grandfather?” I stuttered. I knew he was vamp, but without my nose, I couldn’t tell if he was a vampeen or a vampire.

“Yes. Didn’t your mother tell you about me?”

I studied him up and down before cautiously shaking my head ‘no.’

“Such a disappointment that woman was. I swear, she and Claire were the worst of the lot.” The hairs on my body stood at attention. Something was majorly wrong with him.

“How old are you?” I was surprised I had found my voice and that it didn’t shake.

He chuckled. “Old. I’m the second vampeen ever born.”

“I thought Cristianna was the second vampeen,” I countered, finally feeling like my feet were landing on solid ground.

“Given how my father was, you are truly to believe that he remained in one woman’s bed when he was looking to create an army?”

I stared at him, unsure whether to trust him or not. “What’s your real name?”

“Very good, granddaughter. It’s certainly not Charles Maxwell.” He laughed; it reminded me of chalk scraping along a blackboard. I cringed as if he had.

Abruptly he was in my face. I leaned back, covering Mel. “Cesar! My name is Cesar Euskadi.”

I closed my eyes, trying to calm my reaction. Over the past couple months Kellan and I had practiced controlling my new surge of electricity; it was still a work in progress though.

I heard him walk away from us. When he opened the fridge, I opened my eyes, my gaze locked on him. “What do you want?”

“I’m merely here to protect the girl.” He flicked his hand beyond me to Mel.

“Why would you want to protect her?”

He slammed the refrigerator door and was a few feet away again within the blink of an eye. Suddenly, I was very grateful for Sir Staten’s blood. By the looks of things I would need to activate my gift just to have a chance at survival against my own flesh and blood. “You need my protection,” he bit out.

“Why would you want to protect me? And where were you five months ago when I needed protection?” I leaned forward, aiming myself in his direction.

He calmed down in a flash; it was as if someone had turned off his internal switch. "Because she's one of us." He locked eyes with me. "And they aren't. But she is, so I'm offering you my protection. Do you want it or not?"

I looked at Mel. She was scared, starting to curl into herself; her arms couldn't wrap any tighter around her ultra-slim waist. "It's going to be okay, Mel. I'm not going to let anything happen to you. They'll get you over my dead body." That was a promise I intended to keep.

"I would reconsider that if I were you, Alexa," Cesar casually stated, the slightest hint of repercussions imminent.

"Why? What is it that you want from me?"

"I want you."

"Why me? Why now?"

"Because, without Kellan, with the two of you separated, I can do exactly what I want and get away with it. No political power plays to hold off."

"You're the reason I'm taking a stand. Blood or not, I don't take kindly to racists."

"You are naïve."

"Maybe I am, but I know for certain that your prejudice will be your greatest downfall, Cesar." His features began to scrunch before he replaced his frown with a tranquil façade.

"Boys! Get them!" Cesar stood back, his hands folded in front of him, watching the scene unfold with pleasure.

Three vampeens, faster than most of the vamps I came across, raced towards us. Two came directly at me; the last

one went straight for Mel.

“Let me go!” she screamed, pulling on her arm to no avail. The vamp laughed in her face and had her pinned to the ground in half a second.

“No! No, no, no!” I yelled, illuminating like a Christmas tree. Within seconds I snapped the necks of the two who attacked me. I grabbed the third by the back of his shirt and threw him across the room, slamming him into the cupboards, effectively wrecking my mother’s beautiful kitchen.

“What the hell, Lex?” Mel gasped, slowly inching away from me towards the corner. She was visibly shaking.

“It’s alright, Mel. I promise I’m still me.” She swallowed hard. I threw my arm out, knocking the vamp into the wall again as he launched himself at me. She glanced at the vamp; averting her eyes from me, she nodded.

“Well done, Alexa.” Cesar clapped his hands dramatically. He was already grating on me. I gathered that he was theatrical about everything despite knowing him less than an hour. “So what’s it going to be, granddaughter?”

“Go to hell.” I scowled, disdain clear in my tone.

He laughed, as if I’d merely made a joke. “I’ll give you some time. Clearly you don’t understand the stakes here.”

A chill ran up my spine; foreboding twisted my gut. “What stakes?”

“This.” He held out a smart phone showing a live video stream.

The lighting was ample despite the dark environment. Stacked cement blocks created the wall behind where Kellan and Craig were in chains. It appeared to be a cellar, though where I couldn't ascertain.

Kellan was the worse for wear. He'd been stripped down to his boxers. Cuts and bruises covered his body; he wasn't healing quickly, as blood pooled near his feet. Abruptly someone poked Kellan, electricity running through the metal chains and over his body. He grunted in pain, still trying to be brave; abruptly he collapsed to the ground. Craig yanked and pulled with all his might on his own restraints, but they were soldered tight.

"Craig's a vampire. He's one of us," I said. My voice was flat, devoid of all emotion. I'd almost turned off what I saw, and would have gotten away with it had that one traitorous tear not escaped.

"The moment you protect a vampire, you become one of them. You become our enemy."

And just as quickly as he'd appeared, he was gone, leaving me with no clues as to what city, let alone what neighborhood, the basement cellar where my fiancé was being tortured was located.

Rage burst through me. My body shook with tension. My heart was breaking, slowly blackening at the thought of a life without Kellan. My palms flew open, facing the heavens as wind slapped my face, swirling throughout the space. My veins illuminated, taking on a red light, finally the color of blood. My vision blurred at the edges as a heavy power sprouted from my core.

"Ahhh!" I bellowed my cry over the suffering of my love right as electricity began to crackle around my skin. I threw my hands up, electricity shooting out from my palms.

The ceiling cracked along its surface above me, spiderwebbing outwards, with my harsh blow. My breathing became labored and my balance tilted as I fought to remain conscious. I had to control this. It was a power, but it used my energy, my emotions, as fuel. If I hit empty, so did my body.

I stumbled, catching and ripping the back of the sofa with my enhanced strength right as my world was covered in darkness.

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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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