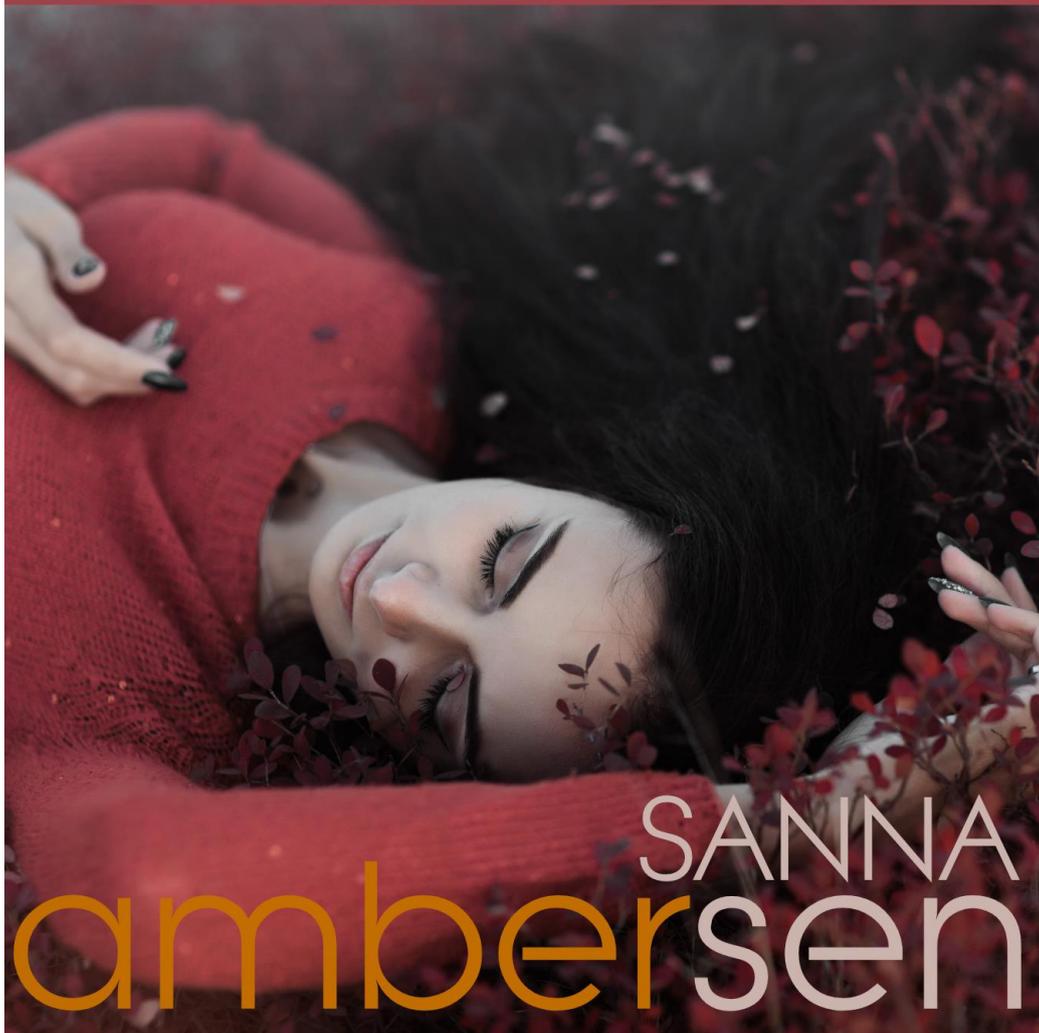


How much of her  
humanity  
can a new  
Vampire  
save?

# AWAKENING

a Vampire romance



SANNA  
ambersen

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## **Preface**

“You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,  
You make me happy, when skies are grey.”

Emily was singing and Evie was angry.

The dull pain threatened to swamp her as the high pitched voice droned on.

Evie remembered it was a conscious decision to slow down her actions, to give her daughter time to reflect. She remembered stretching Emily’s hand towards the iron,

# One

White out of black, black out of white, swirling worms of neon white, circling, prowling; waiting for her to wake.

\*\*\*\*\*

Pain.

Someone was squeezing her throat; she tried to brush away the pain with her palm. There was no hand; no fingers burning her flesh, yet it hurt so. Coughing, pain seared through her body. It was inside her; the pain was inside her mouth and throat.

Evie's fingers fumbled, her lips were forced apart, folded back on themselves. Hooking her fingers around the tube in her mouth, she pulled up and felt it bite into the soft roof of her mouth.

Retching as pain filled her brain; she rested for a second whilst it retreated, then she pulled again. Her ears recognised the grating sound as the tube clipping her teeth on exit; she felt the warm viscous fluid gush onto her tongue and slide down her chin as she pushed it away.

She coughed out the liquid as her brain shut out the pain; she sank down allowing the swirling void to embrace her once more.

Joseph heard the alarm at the same time he heard Jess blaspheme. His legs stretched out as he ran along the corridor; her haste meant she slammed into the wall as she slid in behind him.

"I just left her for a minute; I just went to get..."

Joseph didn't turn to see the bag of blood Jess waved.

Joseph had to reach Evie before anyone else, it was imperative she see him first. He was aware it was an irrational fear; there was no such thing as imprinting. Evie wasn't a chick; she wouldn't just latch on to the first person she saw.

He was also aware that at this stage he couldn't think logically, he never could. The theory about imprinting was just a silly urban myth. Joseph had sired her. His blood had been taken inside her body; it had been absorbed through her stomach, transported through her veins, squeezing like an advancing army into every cell in her body.

But it wasn't just a noun, a physical thing, it wasn't just 'blood', it was more than that, it was his very essence. No one knew exactly how it worked, but his immortal blood, had given her life, such as it was. Now he was part of her just as she was part of him, they were joined now forever.

The metallic smell of the blood leaked through the closed door. Joseph rested his right palm on the panel waiting; he tried to imagine what the scene would be like behind the wooden door. Jess looked up at his serene expression, exasperated by his inability to act.

"Open the door Joe."

He turned slowly and glared at her, his pale grey eyes searing into hers. She hoped this one wasn't damaged, he would be so furious with her; this one had appeared physically perfect.

Jess reached for the bronze door handle, the metal was cold in her trembling hand. As the door swung open, they waited on the threshold and tried to understand the tableaux.

Evie was unconscious, her arm hung over the bed and blood covered her right arm and shoulder, a small pool had gathered in her cupped palm. The feeding pipe lay on the floor, surrounded now by a soft red slick; the machine had automatically stopped forcing the blood into her stomach when the tube had been removed and that event had triggered the alarm.

"Evie?" Joseph whispered from the door.

He leant into the room not daring to enter. Darkness. No light was apparent beyond that which bled around the now partially closed door. Joseph and Jess could see everything clearly, their eyes had adapted over millennia to see in no light situations.

Evie fidgeted slightly. They listened to the sound of her feet slowly sliding against each other as it echoed in the silence. Joseph was aware that it was the soft whisper of her heel bone against the bottom of her foot; this was her usual prelude to consciousness.

That was a good sign. That was a recognisable Evie sound. None of the others had resembled her or had her mannerisms, somehow during transition they had lost their 'Evieness', but this sound was promising.

Jess stared angrily into the room. Why had he chosen a white nightdress? It was ruined. The deep stain covering most of her breast and right arm would never be removed; she had learnt through decades of laundry care that blood just never came out of white cotton.

It had soaked into the pretty lace nightdress highlighting the delicately patterned edges and it was now beginning to get sticky. It would dry soon and become crisp and uncomfortable. Joseph hesitated at the door, watching her.

"You can't let her wake wearing that nightdress. It will stick to her skin and we know how repulsive that feels."

Joseph inspected Evie's pale olive skin; it looked so beautiful next to the white of the nightdress. He nodded once without speaking.

"Should I remove it?" She enquired. They stood shoulder to shoulder blocking the door. Jess stepped forward and felt the pressure of his palm across her stomach. She looked up at his expression, his yearning stared back at her; she looked at the lifeless body and felt a kinship built on chromosomes.

"It's better if I deal with her...until she's awake." She kept her voice deliberately soft and gentle. He shook his head slowly.

"Joseph, I could order you to leave this place, to return to your room."

She watched his eyes widen with fear and hopelessness. She hated being his Sire, somehow if she bullied him using even the threat of her absolute power over him she was made weaker not stronger.

Joseph's obsession with Evie made it difficult for him to be reasonable but it was exactly that emotion that had led to her lying in front of them now. Jess stared at the body as Evie turned over.

"Don't do anything you'll regret, be careful..."

She couldn't voice her fear to Joseph. Jess knew she had to trust him; to trust his good heart and leave such a vulnerable creature in his care. Vulnerable, a strange word to describe a vampire, but she was a new-born, unknowing of both her powers and limitations. Jess watched him step into the room. His hand reached back and as she stepped back into the hall he slowly closed the door, shutting her out of the room and his life.

Joseph moved to her side, the harsh coldness of the scissors in his hand. He leapt animal like onto the bed and lifted the edge of her nightdress. Crouching on his haunches he considered her body.

The hem hung softly between the blades, he closed his fingers and the material sighed in pain, then again and again. Evie slipped onto her back. He waited until she had settled herself into the pillow. She puckered her lips slightly and relaxed.

The only sound disturbing the silence was the scissors slicing through cotton. Joseph peeled back the whiteness and stared at the dark hair. He reached out to move the material; his fingertips touched the soft curls as he rolled his eyes in anticipation. He steadied his nerves and sliced through the nightdress higher and higher.

The deep pit of the circular button in her abdomen to the smooth slope of her rib cage, it was so perfect. He remembered the feel of the tip of his tongue pushing into it and the sound of her giggles. Joseph smiled, soon if God was good, he would hear her laughter again.

It didn't seem incongruous for him to call upon God, why would it? Even the dead need hope, in fact maybe they need it more than those that live.

Higher and higher the scissors whispered, soon the nightdress had disappeared; it was just a dirty cloth covering a lifeless body, a corpse. As he sliced through the edge at her neck the shroud dissolved into nothing more than a bundle of rags, he had wanted her to wake wearing something beautiful but it didn't matter now. She moved and he saw her nipple peeking from behind the blood stains.

He closed his eyes letting his head fall forward as if in supplication, Jess was right to be concerned, this was almost impossible. He had known her body for so long, he had worshipped it in every way possible and there it lay in front of him, waiting for him, tempting him. Joseph focused on his knees. If only he was sure it was her.

Experience has proved that no matter how she appeared, inside she may not be viable and even then it might not be his Evie. Nothing mattered if it wasn't his Evie, if it didn't have her personality, her fire, her passion, her love for him. He had to wait, to keep control, he let his eyes slip towards her and she stared back at him.

Joseph maintained his position and watched her heavy eyelids droop down. As she gasped for breath her lungs woke. Glancing furtively around for guidance, he frowned, he didn't understand.

She was dead; she had died and they had kept her brain fresh with a machine. It was the ventilator that had controlled her breathing keeping her fragile human body

alive whilst they made their plans. The gentle thud and hiss of the machine as it forced the air into her lungs had structured his days.

Neither he nor the rest of his family needed to breathe, they had given that up at their death and yet here she was breathing unaided. The slow rise and fall of her chest mesmerised him, unconsciously his body followed its strange rhythm. As she shuffled the nightdress slipped further away from her body revealing more of her skin and now allowing the escape of a whole breast.

Joseph's lust rose. Just to touch her skin, nothing else, he lied even to himself. Evie coughed and her eyes flicked open slightly. His shirt hissed softly as it fell onto the floor, as he raised himself high on his knees, the sound of the button moving through his trousers and its fabric caressing his underwear signalled his desire.

Her smell rose from her body, Evie. His eyes would be red, a sign of his need for her. Blinking and thinking calm thoughts sometimes helped to reduce the blood flow. It really hadn't caused much of a problem over the decades, not until he had found Evie, not until he had found The One.

There were numerous myths about vampires; most had been disproved over time. The view that there was one person in the world destined to be your soul mate had always been dismissed as romantic nonsense dreamt up by adolescent girls.

The morning of the day she had been born he had been in such a foul temper, which was unusual, Joseph tended to melancholy rather than anger, but as the labour wore on his humour slipped into frustration.

The family had been concerned, but as she took her first gasps of air he felt her existence begin. Joseph only confessed to one person that sensation, the others would have ridiculed him, thought him crazy but from that moment he knew that somewhere on the planet his soul mate had been born.

As the world turned and the years moved on he had grown increasingly anxious and frustrated. How would he find her? The human world was full of people; trillions of warm, fresh bodies inhabited its space. How would he find her amongst the throng?

As each year passed his mate was growing older, she was a teenager developing human yearnings and he had no idea how to find her. In the midst of his frustration he had relied on his friend, someone who helped stem the despair and kept him focussed; who gave him hope.

Without him he would have struggled to survive the long nights and endless days mentally unscarred. It had taken a long time to locate his true love, though not as long as he had lived before her birth; alone and without love.

Joseph moved lower aligning his body to hers but not touching, he leant close to her neck feeling her blood pulse through her body. If he focused on her pulse he could feel the blood surging then retreating on its way through her cold dead heart.

It was just one of those incomprehensible things that they all learned to live with, the lack of a heartbeat and the absence of the rasp of their lungs. But here she was, breathing; taking in air and expelling it back out in a pointless cycle. He swallowed; the repetitive gasping made her seem so human, the rhythmic moving of her chest made her seem so alive.

The tip of his tongue gathered the blood collected in the depression on her neck, as he drew it into his mouth he shivered in delight, it tasted of her, of her

essence. It pulled him closer, his tongue began searching the hollow of her collar bone, her chest, along the inside of her arm and the palm of her hand; gathering the surplus blood and leaving behind a silver wet trail of saliva.

His eyes flickered in ecstasy; he stared blankly at her shoulder trying to control the desires that flamed inside him. Pools of brown chocolate stared blankly back at him.

He closed his eyes and forced the blood that had gathered there back into his body, opening them again slowly and deliberately; she stared back into his face. The eyes flicked up and to the left, searching her memory, considering his face. A crease formed on her forehead as she analysed him.

Joseph felt himself blush; he was naked, leaning so close to her, it was so obvious what he had wanted; what he still wanted. Evie's eyes flicked across his body slipping down onto his erection, he closed his eyes in embarrassment opening them to see her wide smile.

"Evie?"

Whilst the sound of his voice was uncertain, it was still thick and warm and it created the gentle rumble through her body that she recognised.

"Evie?" He repeated, worried now why there had been no response. Joseph yearned for her arms; to remember the sensation of total peace and he waited as the trembling reverberated through his body.

"Joseph?"

She licked her lips, they were sore and numb. "What is this place?"

A simple dry sob escaped, he turned trying not to admit it came from him. It was clear in the manner in which she moved to sitting that she wasn't human; it was obvious now. The interrelationship between her muscles and her senses, the speed of her reaction, the smoothness of her movement.

Joseph felt terror unlike anything he had felt before, if she was wrong; he swallowed down the doubt, if she was wrong again, and yet she looked so perfect, they would believe it impossible. This would be the last chance. Her legs tucked neatly under her bottom as she rose to kneeling; pulling off her filthy nightdress and discarding it with vague disdain.

"I missed you."

Joseph started at the sound of his own voice. He had loved her and missed her so very much, was it wrong to tell her, to admit that to her, to give her that power over him. She tilted her head and smiled.

"I missed you so much," he finished the sentence, almost absentmindedly.

"Where did you go?" She asked quietly reaching out to stroke his face.

"I didn't..."

They leant into each other simultaneously, their foreheads touching.

"Where did I go?" She enquired gently.

"Away." He paused. "Just away."

"What did you do Joe, because it must have been your fault?"

Joseph watched her head tilt and the smile slide across her face as she teased him. Tears rose into his eyes; this was his Evie, always teasing him, always loving him.

“You may feel I’m being slightly forward in my advances but, isn’t it time we made up? I mean you obviously missed me, surely explanations can wait?”

Evie teased the stilted way he often spoke, his nakedness, his erection, this was her, really her. Joseph knew that whatever happened he would keep this one, this was Evie. He tilted his head and they kissed, as her tongue pushed into his mouth he felt everything else disappear.

“Me first.” He whispered as he lay her down gently and pushed open her legs. She felt him enter her and she squeaked in surprise. Trailing her fingers across his back she luxuriated in the feel of his skin. Oh, how she remembered this body and what it did to her. They kissed and she pulled away for air.

“You don’t need to breathe anymore angel.” Joseph whispered in her ear, but she ignored him and gasped as she pushed her tongue deeper. He had slender hips that fitted perfectly between her thighs. Evie’s fingers gathered his flesh as he moved into her; she could feel his skin in between her fingers, strong scented, masculine flesh; part of her now.

As he built up a regular rhythm she continued to suck on his tongue, stopping only when she remembered to breathe, Joseph also forgot it was unnecessary and listened to the regularity of her breath, and watched for her big gasp in preparation for the stars to explode.

As he stroked her jugular with his nose she wriggled and when he opened his mouth and bit down onto her neck she shuddered and fought wildly for a second until her body melted into the bed and her head exploded in a blast of stars. He gulped down her blood, savouring its taste, its warmth and what it did to his body.

His erection stayed firm, with her blood inside him he would never need to stop, he would continue forever; he would never be alone.

## Two

Samuel sat motionless, his eyes closed, his mind blank, his heart dead. Jess stared at the door and waited. Anthony stood as Lewis exploded through the door. His body completely filled the frame; his shoulders were tilted forward exacerbating his angry stride. "Well?"

Jess stood. "She is awake; she pulled out the food line. Joseph is dealing with her now, you know changing her clothes, they got a little messy, with the blood, from the feeding tube."

Jess hooked her slick dark curtain of hair on her finger and tucked it behind her ear, her garbled explanation echoing in them. She dropped her eyes and tugged on her fitted skirt removing the slight creases. The slash neck jumper hung from her painfully thin shoulders.

In that moment she wished that she had worn the thick blue jumper with the horizontal stripes, that would have made her feel more substantial, giving her opinions more weight.

Lewis was her physical opposite; he was solid, wide at the shoulders tapering slightly to his hips. His tailored shirt and immaculate casual trousers accentuated his size. His soft blonde curls framed his wide open face, he looked cherubic. Simply being so close in this room with him was intimidating. She glanced sideways at Samuel for support.

"Jess, please don't take this the wrong way."

Jessamy tried to imagine puppies, she adored them, thinking of something pleasant would help with the verbal attack he was about to inflict.

"But I really don't want your description of her morning routine, we need facts, is she Evie?"

Jess stared at him surprised by his politeness. The constant stress of failed attempts at reproducing Evie had stretched everyone's patience.

"Look the real question is will she do? I mean this one certainly looks like her, but I liked number three she was nice. I would have settled for her." Anthony replied addressing the room.

Anthony was fat, his flesh dripped over his trousers like a melted candle. This excess weight was hidden by a rather expensive Armani shirt and contained with a co-ordinating belt.

Anthony had never been comfortable with this excess baggage. As a human working with wealthy vampires the financial gains outweighed the obvious risks but, after much consideration, he had come up with the perfect plan to ensure he was never turned; he would become fat.

Being immortal vampires liked to surround themselves with beautiful things; cars, houses and also people. Who wants to spend eternity surrounded by mediocrity? His logic was simple; no one would sire a fat man and when he had earned enough money to retire, he could lose the weight.

As each pound of money collected in his bank so each pound of fat gathered around his waist and with it his confidence grew. The more unsightly he became the safer he felt.

Until the day the logic of his great plan was found wanting. His biggest client had eventually wondered why he was so much in demand; there must be some reason that explained his popularity. His business acumen must be considerable to offset his lack of attractiveness. When that thought had been conceived she had sired him. Wasn't it better to have the best accountant tied to you forever?

The problem was now Anthony was stuck for eternity as the fat vampire.

Every vampire who had ever seen him had been puzzled, why would you sire such an ugly man? If he hadn't been changed for his attractiveness then it must be because of his superior financial skills and they held that thought as they welcomed him. That incorrect insight had become a self-fulfilling prophecy and Anthony had been sensible enough to use it to his advantage, especially as he now had the whole of eternity to live up to his image and become the very best accountant in the country.

His greatest sadness was that every time he stared in the mirror or even glanced down, the sight of his waistline poignantly reminded him of how little he understood people.

Lewis shuffled onto the balls of his feet ready to start moving again.

"He would never accept anyone other than Evie, it wouldn't matter how 'nice' she was. You liked her because she was placid, docile, easily trained, anyway her insides were wrong so she wasn't viable." Lewis spat out the words in frustration as he continued.

"This whole thing wasn't to produce a replacement; it was to bring his Evie back. Joseph wants the real thing, that's the problem." He concluded suddenly weary. Lewis ran his thick fingers through his loose curls. His head gently throbbed; the constant waiting was affecting him more than he would ever admit.

"Well I liked her." Anthony said defiantly, slumping awkwardly in his chair.

"Is it Evie?" Lewis asked softly to no one in particular. "Is it over now?"

Jess stared at him; he had always appeared so unconcerned. She hadn't ever really considered how the constant tension affected him; she had thought it was just Joseph who had been torn apart by the tentative hope and crashing disappointment.

Everyone thought the near misses were the hardest, that number three who had at least resembled a human, a very attractive amiable human, would have been the most disappointing and to some extent she was, but the others the bundles of useless obscene cells were stomach turning and distressing.

These mistakes made each new trial so much harder to continue. Each failure brought new concerns; perhaps this time the Council would refuse their support, perhaps this time they would force them to discontinue his research. Jess had never thought it affected Lewis as much as it obviously had.

Lewis tugged his hair, refocusing his thoughts on the pain he was inflicting on his scalp. He needed to steady his nerves.

"He hasn't left the room, and the noises...I think the noises suggest they are both very much awake. I would think, knowing Joseph, that this would be considered

a ...'good' sign. He wouldn't...with someone else, you know that, he just wouldn't. So, I think this may mean he's succeeded, or he's become so desperate..?"

Lewis suddenly glanced up.

"Maybe someone should intervene, someone detached, someone with no direct connection should provide a fair assessment." Making an obvious turn to face Samuel; Lewis waited for a comment.

Samuel stared blankly back.

It was like staring a photograph. Lewis hated the way Samuel looked at him; his piercing black eyes were empty shells devoid of any visible sign of emotion.

Lewis blinked and let his blue eyes assess the overall form of Samuel's body. No one looked deader than Samuel, his pale skin, almost translucent around his face made him look so much like an archetypal vampire it was uncanny. His finely tailored suit was designed to make him fade into the background and it worked, he was anonymous.

"It always amazes me that even when you are eminently correct in your assessment of the situation, that you somehow, and I feel it is somewhat of an art form for you, that you make the solution feel sordid.

You want me to agree that Joseph is too close to make a unbiased assessment, you are of course right, and you are putting yourself forward as independent I believe, as the person to make the assessment. Are you really so independent Lewis?"

Samuel did not wait for an answer, he continued as if he were part way through a monologue. "I believe that for it to be truly fair we should all evaluate her and with regards a timescale for this, I am sure Joseph will introduce Evie when he thinks it's an acceptable time. He will want to be sure that she is," Samuel paused searching slowly for the correct words, "ready for making her debut."

Lewis nodded sadly. He had pressed his ear hard to the door, straining to hear if she was awake. He could remember the sounds of their bodies, but the clearest memory was the sound of her high pitched gasps as Joseph pounded into her. It had to be her, he would only do that to her, Lewis swallowed even thinking the words made his body tremble. Joseph would only make love to her.

Jessamy waited for further comments, her eyes flitting from face to face erratically. Everyone remained stubbornly silent. This was usual for Samuel who rarely considered speaking necessary.

Anthony was more sociable but his limited social skills often caused misunderstandings, even after a century of living with them he still had a lot to learn about people, especially his family.

Lewis hid his loneliness in bravado and joviality. Being large meant smaller groups were too revealing, he could only really hide in a crowd and that was where he tried to disappear, deep in their centre shielded by others. The death of version three had affected him most though he refused to acknowledge it; it was not just the loss of a sweet gentle person, but of hope. That had been the very worst thing, the loss of hope.

Lewis left the room first, unlike Samuel he needed to move, the momentum kept his mind busy away from the dark thoughts that gathered there. Jess followed

soon after, then Anthony. Each went to their quiet space and filled their time until they would be introduced to the new Evie.

## Three

Evie couldn't understand the ceiling, it was stone vaulted like a church, but the walls were very practical, this mismatch bothered her. She let her eyes drop to his hair, the way his hair was always just perfectly untidy excited her. That was enough encouragement for his hands to start the long meander across her body again. The soft caress of her sigh into his neck made him shiver.

Long masculine fingers stroked her face; she caught them and traced them with her tongue pulling them into her mouth. She pursed her lips as she sucked them. Sniggering at his loud moan, she responded just as loudly as his fingers disappeared inside her.

"Bite me!" he whispered.

The pulse in his neck fascinated her, she pressed it with her fingertip, he hooked his fingers hard into her and lifted her higher up the bed and she bit down in appreciation. The sound of guzzling mingled with the sound of her gasps and Joseph let his eyes roll back into his skull in response, he felt weak and powerful simultaneously. This wasn't Evie, this was a souped up, running on high octane fuel Evie, a totally edible Evie, he giggled as his brain leapt randomly. He was intoxicated by her.

Evie could feel the edge of his flesh jagged and raw; she ran her tongue along it and felt it heal itself. She pulled back and ran her finger over the silver line.

"My turn," she purred and climbed onto him. Joseph held her tight and flipped her, slamming her into the bed. She bared her teeth in frustration.

"No, not like that, no. Stop being grumpy you know I don't like that, please let me kiss you." Her chin tilted back and she waited, she would take him soon, and he would allow her the control over his body she craved.

He pushed her knees apart sharply and disappeared between her thighs. She arched her back and groaned outrageously. He would always win if this was the choice, how could she refuse such unbridled pleasure? The serrations on his teeth were almost painful as they tugged at her sensitive flesh.

He smiled as she pulled him into her further, as her hips rocked in the rising pleasure, it was impossible not to know when she reached an orgasm, her skin screamed in the agony of bliss.

Other times she made no sound, just the smallest squeak as her body exploded into a million tiny pieces of exquisite pain. As he let his tongue slide between her engorged labia he felt her shiver, she was always hypersensitive post orgasm and she would be at her most obliging.

Joseph's spine dissolved with joy when she squealed in mock horror. Rubbing his face across hers encouraged another bout of giggling. Everything about her was petite, her tongue no exception, it narrowed to a thin point which he had learnt could wriggle into the tiniest of openings causing such immense pleasure.

He had to use his advantage.

"I need to introduce you to my family." Joseph waited for a response. His erection was becoming painful; his testicles were swollen, maybe just once more.

“I didn’t know your family were still alive.”

As he swallowed he watched her eyes flick again to his neck, focusing firstly on the movement of his oesophagus, then resting longingly on the pulse close to his jaw.

“This is an adoptive family; they supported me to get you back. I want them to meet you, see how beautiful, how amazing you are.”

Evie’s eyes rolled, she hated meeting new people. She let her head fall and gazed at the metallic cupboards lining the walls. The skin on her forehead creased, that was weird, having metallic shelving, like a place of business, a lab, but with a vaulted ceiling?

It was automatic for her to question, she turned and as his hips pushed into her again, she felt the tenderness and the sliver of pain attached to that and, forgetting the question, just concentrated on reaching for the stars.

## Four

Samuel felt nothing.

Most of the time he simply existed, he sat, he walked, he drank, enough to live but no more.

He had relished the early years as a vampire, everyone does; the freshness of everything, like being reborn. Colours are brighter, smells are stronger; everything more exhilarating.

Vampires are exemplar predators; they are better adapted to every environment than humans, they are stronger, faster, impervious to disease, and they can reproduce indefinitely. It was natural selection in its purest form.

Vampires on a hunt could reduce a village, a town, even a city to a pile of bodies in hours. There was just one problem; no more humans, no more food.

Like all vampires Samuel enjoyed the thrill of the chase and the prize of adrenalin rich blood. After all what could you expect with humans parading around tempting you; the smell of their blood and the sound of it driving through their veins coupled with their rampant stupidity, they were simply on a lower level of the food chain.

Humans exist to provide food for higher more superior species. After all wasn't that the basis of their own philosophy? They treated domestic animals as if they existed for their use. Where was the difference? But humans refused to accept the vampires' superiority and tried to fight back.

As the centuries passed vampires had developed a more symbiotic way of living with humans; Samuel understood its practicalities but he preferred the excitement and honesty of the earlier years.

Capitalism, the perfect economic excuse to make feeding easier and less hazardous; by paying for their services vampires had found a way of encouraging humanities dependence. Humans now clamoured to become service providers. Samuel appreciated that irony and he chose this large house to settle in so his food and that of his family would be close at hand.

Samuel was old; knowledge gave him power and strength but after several centuries he had grown deeply bored. All the older vampires were the same; they retained some interest through playing their puerile war games, they made strategic alliances, trying desperately to rekindle the good old days when they were feared. The groupings they developed were called families, liked the Italian gangsters he had hung around with during Prohibition in America; that had been a fun time.

The families were overseen by the Council, these were the oldest vampires of their kind and they adored the power and attention that being part of that exalted group brought. Samuel had a seat at this table though he rarely attended. Their obvious posturing irritated him, they now spent most of their time pretending to be affronted by ridiculous breaches of respect, attempting to vindicate the subsequent actions of violence they yearned for. Samuel did his best to ignore these minor spats.

This situation with Joseph had been of minor interest, at least it was unusual but it was still difficult to stir up any real enthusiasm. Samuel turned to watch the trees

move gently in the breeze; he vaguely liked the garden, he liked the colour green. That ridiculous thought made a pale smile flitter across his face.

His oldest friend now preferred gardening to massacring, preferring to be reclusive rather than associate with the rest of the family, he understood and respected that. He didn't feel he had that luxury; his family were naïve and despite their potential would be unable to manage alone.

He knew that all of the family, even those who spent most of their time on other continents or travelling, thought of him as out of touch, as weak. That made him wistful, their stupidity knew no bounds. If only they were more capable, then he could be like his friend, maybe he too would take up gardening.

Samuel tried to refocus his thoughts as he became aware Joseph was approaching. He could hear Joseph's blood flow faster through his body, yet he seemed relaxed.

The rest of the family were now making their way to the meeting area. They gathered in the centre of the house; this octagonal room linked the numerous corridors from one end of the house to the other. In this space vampires would come to associate with others, this was their meeting area, part library part common room.

Samuel sighed; this could be vaguely interesting; if Joseph was sated then Evie was back. The door opened and Samuel strained to open his eyes, everything was such a sheer effort of will. Samuel pulled his eyes up to meet Joseph's. They seemed different, the grey of his eyes sparkled, his pupils were dilated and his eyes were wider than normal showing a real interest in his surroundings. Samuel's eyes refocused and he waited whilst the others gathered around.

Joseph coughed slightly, then blushed. "She appears to be in perfect condition, she looks the same, every external detail seems perfect."

"Is she crazy?" Anthony asked immediately. Samuel turned his head slowly to face him, he would have hoped for a little more delicacy.

"It's a fair question, Samuel." Lewis joined in, moving closer to them both. "Does she seem stable?"

Joseph turned to him and laughed. Jess and Anthony simultaneously stepped back.

"She's just as wild and funny as ever, there is no sign of her illness, I left her getting dressed, she's in a bad temper already, she hates meeting new people and the clothes are too 'slutty', so you will meet her at her glorious best." Joseph was smiling, his head turned calmly as he spoke to each person in turn. They remained quiet but the relief was palpable, they sighed in unison.

Jess almost leapt into his arms. "It's so wonderful Joseph, have you told the Doctor yet?"

Joseph turned to Samuel. "I can't tell him that it's been successful. He can't know the truth." Jess looked between them confused. Lewis moved closer, he didn't understand what was happening.

"They were desperate times, I had to do something, my world was falling apart, I had to act." Joseph swallowed. "Do you remember what she was like when she was turned? I couldn't let all that beauty all that fire die. I couldn't let that happen."

“How altruistic you are Joseph.” Lewis replied without any shred of humour, his eyes now ringed with black.

“The Doctor, if he even is a medical doctor, didn’t help out of kindness, this type of research is not sponsored by charitable organisations but by governments. He used existing research he was already part of, with a few tweaks for me, no one else knew about it, no one would be that interested in another failure, but a success, now that would be of interest.”

Lewis’s body tensed. “So what do you intend to do.”

“I need to deliver the message personally.”

Jess translated the comment. “Kill him? Joseph we don’t kill anymore, that’s ridiculous. Samuel.”

Samuel stood quietly. This was an interesting turn of events.

“It’s too late for that Jess.” Joseph turned and stroked her hair. “Why do you think he helped us? You’re the one who helped me understand the power of the Sire, he couldn’t say no to me, not if I had ‘owned’ him.”

Jess stepped back, the skin of her face stretched over her skull in a mask of disgust. “How could you not share this with me?”

He smiled gently. “You created me and I owe a debt of allegiance but that’s all. I don’t have to ‘share’ things with you, you can order me and I have to obey. I could force him not to tell anyone about Evie, but he receives funding and support from dangerous ruthless people, there will be records, they would find out about this success, I have no choice, he must be eliminated. We have what we need; we must step back into the shadows.”

“I should have made you tell me, I relied on our friendship, which was obviously a mistake.” Jess turned sharply away.

Samuel sighed with disinterest.

“It’s just tying up the loose ends of the project. Then it’s over.” Samuel commented. The nothingness pulled him closer; at this moment he longed for the absence of feeling, for the void.

Everyone waited whilst Samuel shook his head in annoyance, this conversation was taking longer than he would like; it was such an irritation.

“It’s not just humans who can’t have access to the knowledge, think about what an amoral group like us would do with this knowledge.”

Samuel almost smiled as the true enormity of what had happened became apparent. “Remember the initial objective. All we wanted was approval to turn Joseph’s lover. Do you remember the indignation about him having a human lover without prior consent? The other families thought we might not have shared this fact with them at all if she hadn’t ‘died’.”

Lewis was angry but his eyes flicked automatically to Joseph. Those were dark times. The family knew he had a human lover, her smell permeated the house, but they remained silent, pleased he was eventually content, but that time of happiness didn’t last. Things change in the human world; the human body is frail and people get sick.

“In this era we had the modern technology to keep her body alive until we obtained authorisation to get her turned.”

No one spoke; they remembered the intensity of the weeks that followed the birth of the new Evie and the realisation that even as a vampire she wasn't cured.

"The other families only agreed to allow the research because it was impossible, they were humouring us, humouring me. From being the strongest vampire grouping we are now considered the weakest, the most pathetic. I fail to control you; I let you act in a less than appropriate manner." Samuel turned and stared at each set of eyes individually and his power pulsed through them.

"I feel no need to prove myself to them, in fact I like that they consider me an ineffectual leader, they ignore me in their power struggles and that is acceptable to me. Discrediting me was the main reason to allow this pathetic wandering into the world of human science. They knew it could never succeed because it required Joseph to be something they believe him incapable of, ruthless.

With that sort of personality there is always someone willing to execute the most outrageous plan and achieve the impossible. No one believed that Joseph had the capacity to annex his true nature to get what he wanted, they considered him weak, that's how they see us all, but they were wrong, they didn't appreciate how powerful his love for Evie was. Still is."

It had been a long time since anyone had dared to act without direct approval from the Council. Suddenly the vampires were lost in thought, as if for the first time becoming aware of the consequences of their group actions.

On consideration Samuel was impressed that Joseph had been able to do what was required, to murder and with a coldness and dispassion he would never have believed possible. And to hide this little act of defiance from the group, from his Sire. He felt a tingle on his scalp, this was promising. He felt his wildness tug at its constraint but the pull of the emptiness was stronger.

Jess fidgeted with frustration, she was Joseph's Sire, why didn't she know about this. For everyone else being a Sire enhanced their power. This was her fault she hated confrontation and allowed him too much freedom. How was all this fair? Despite being an equal member of the family for as long as Joseph she felt side-lined and ignored, she was a Sire and deserved respect for that. Her head fell slightly. In the end it was always a boys club and she was never allowed to truly belong.

Lewis seethed with jealousy; he had spent years holding back his urges, being tamed, being constantly told he should obey the rules. And now it appears Joseph had secretly been free to act on his impulses. And there appeared to be no punishment, just admiration. Inside his wildness snarled in frustration.

They each withdrew into their thoughts to consider their own positions.

Samuel moved to the window, he needed to end this meeting, but he needed to sum up their position then he could retreat again into the safety of the void.

"If the others had ever thought it was possible to clone someone they would have considered acting themselves. I think I vaguely remember someone trying but so long ago, before all the new developments in medical science. It was obviously not the right time; we needed the right conditions, the right test case.

New medical techniques allowed us to keep the body alive, before this time waiting would have caused at least some decomposition. Modern medicine and all its machinery gave us the luxury of time. With that time we could harvest all the fresh blood we needed.

It was disappointing that the disease had taken such a hold before she was changed, we all know how unusual it is for the disease not to have been removed with her humanity." He shrugged slightly. The world was weighing heavy on him now. The very air was suffocating him.

Samuel had studied her vampire body before waking; so serene, so ethereal, so deadly.

"She was a stunning vampire, without a single rational thought, acting only on her urges."

Everyone could see her now. Their own memories of her flooded their brains. If only she could have been allowed to exist but she wasn't Evie, not Joseph's lover, she was something very different. The thought she may have been the next stage of vampire evolution had compounded the decision to remove her and begin again.

"Imagine if the Council had found her. Imagine if they had learned about Joseph's new plan to clone the dead Evie, to try to fix her before making her a vampire."

His words hung in the silence.

"How long before they would have tried to clone the original vampire to create an army of sociopaths? Not so ridiculous a thought if we consider their stupidity and childish rivalries. Would they have considered the consequences until it was too late? The vampires and human worlds have been in balance for too long and they would have upset all that to score points.

At least we had taken enough blood before the transformation to continue with experimenting with a cure. It's difficult to remember all the dark days that passed but it was all to achieve a specific objective, not to start a franchise, if the objective is achieved then this needs to end now."

Lewis rested a hand on Jess's shoulder in support. She stared up in surprise; she had found an ally in the strangest place.

"How very convenient that Joseph is allowed to kill when it suits him? I don't remember the discussion about siring the doctor and now we have an execution; this is less like a voting chamber and more like the press room. Anything else you want to announce?" Lewis replied.

"I don't have time for your jealousies Lewis, we need to..." Joseph stopped suddenly; he could feel her wandering along the corridor. All eyes turned to him; her breathing was so loud to their sensitive ears.

"She's coming." He whispered.....