



Excerpt from: *The Vampire...In My Dreams*

MARISSA

“Watch well, witch,” the woman called back to me as she squeezed Dominic’s throat. Dressed in a black spandex shirt, matching jeans and a pair of high-heeled, thigh-high boots, she looked like a regular teen.

My heart lodged in my throat while my blood turned to ice, but I wouldn’t run and hide.

“See what I will do to you next!” She turned her attention to Dominic. “Do you think a scrawny thing like her can kill me? Do you? She’s trembling in her sneakers as we speak. Well, as *I* speak.”

I froze to the concrete sidewalk, unsure what to do next to save Dominic from the vampire. I wanted to pound her into the ground, but the way she held Dominic tightly in her grasp, I knew I couldn’t physically best her. I suspected none of my spells would work against an ancient vampire, and though the woman looked only to be my age, seventeen, she seemed older than time in her actions and speech.

She leaned over and licked Dominic’s cheek, and his expression turned from concern for me to hatred for her.

None of Dominic’s own words had emotionally stirred me to save him like the unbridled actions of the vampire at his throat. Lynetta bared her wickedly sharp pointed canines and hissed. Her long black hair hung wildly to her hips, tangled and teased by the breeze. She was petite like me, but as strong as a male bodybuilder, her grip on Dominic remaining iron tight. Her soulless black eyes, vacant and without a care, really ate away at my heart.

I surveyed the yard for any kind of a weapon I could use against the vampire. My heart surged when I spied a colorful whirligig attached to a wooden stake embedded in my mother's pampered pansy garden nearby. Without a second's hesitation, I dashed for it and yanked it out.

Running at the vampire, I screamed at the top of my lungs, "Death to the bloodsucking vampire!" Which gave me some courage. It wasn't every day I had to beat one vampire off of another, when they didn't even really exist. Who'd ever thought I'd have to tell Kate she was so right?

All I could think of was aiming the stake at the vampire's heart—at least that's what the books said would work on them—except Lynetta used Dominic to shield her. I ground my teeth, dancing around them, taking aim at the vamp anywhere that I could strike, praying I wouldn't hit Dominic by accident.

With great relief, I thwarted her enough that she was unable to bite him, and I imagined she thought me a pesky, insignificant gnat, just as hard to strike down while she was trying to maintain her grip on Dominic. She snarled in anger, baring her fangs at me. My heart raced, sending the blood coursing through my system while I concentrated on striking the vampire again and again.

But the distressing notion kept running through my mind, *I am a failure*. I had messed up tons of potions and spells at school, caused an explosion in the lab, and turned a teacher into a baboon. How could someone as inept as me save Dominic from this fiend? Why didn't he find another witch who had top honors, like Kate, to help him? By choosing me, he'd sealed his fate.

Yet, for now, he had no one else to aid him and I had to squash the sense of hopelessness that ate away at my confidence. I would save him...somehow.

Dominic struggled to get free, and I assumed Lynetta's grip on him had loosened while I distracted her. Gritting my teeth, I struck the stake at her shoulder as hard as I could, all the while chanting ancient words, "*Malachon, revelist, baraths, chalmeon!*"

She screamed out in pain, but the stake wasn't sharp enough to cut her. Now on me, I'd have bruises the size of Texas, but I wondered if a vampire would bruise that easily.

"Witch's spells won't work on me, you little...little witch!" she yelled at me.

I couldn't help smiling the way she called me a witch in such a derogatory way, which meant she was losing her cool and I was winning some of the game. In our dancing back and forth, my attempts to strike the vampire and Dominic's struggles to get free, I moved us closer to the edge of my front porch. If we could reach my house, I'd invite him in. The vampire couldn't get to him then, at least for the time being, I didn't think.

Suddenly, Dominic broke loose, grabbed my arm, and shoved me to the door. "Do it!" he shouted, as if he thought I knew all of the rules about being a vampire. Maybe the books were right.

I screamed back, "Come in, Dominic!"

I fumbled with the key in the lock, then jerked the door open. Dominic wrenched himself free and dove in, carrying me with him.

Both of us fell on the tiled entryway, but Dominic managed to break my fall with heroic effort. Lynetta hissed at the doorway, baring her fangs. The look she gave us was like she was the Medusa herself—minus the writhing snakes shooting out of her head, but able to turn a body to stone anyway.

Dominic jumped to his feet and slammed the door in her face. “Your parents?” he whispered, and helped me to my feet.

His touch was warm and caring and instantly heated my cold, clammy hands. “Away on a trip to Mexico, celebrating their eighteenth wedding anniversary. A witch at seventeen is considered responsible enough to leave alone. Besides, my Aunt Betsy lives two houses down if I have any trouble.”

His dark brows furrowed, and he wiped away some of his long hair dangling at his cheek that had broken loose from the leather strap binding it. “Trouble like me.”

Taking a deep settling breath, I touched the bruises already discoloring his throat in shades of black and blue. “I’m sure no one in my family would have expected me to have *this* kind of trouble, but for your own safety, you can stay here until Friday. How is your throat? Can I—”

“One of the advantages of being...” His words trailed off for a second, then he cleared his gravelly throat. “We heal at accelerated rates.”

“Oh.” I tried to keep my reaction neutral when it came to discussing his—differences, but I’m sure my eyes widened a little.

He kept his distance, though we only stood an arm’s length away, yet he seemed to want to draw closer. Finally he said, “I want to thank you for your help, Marissa. Only my lifemate would have been able to rescue me.”

Although gladdened he felt I was so useful, I really didn’t feel that way about my capabilities. I’d been lucky, that’s all. “I couldn’t let her hurt you, Dominic.” “Because we’re connect—”

Silencing him with a shake of my head, I did not want to hear anything more about our fate being written in the stars. I didn’t believe it for one instant. Witches married warlocks and that was that. Any that made the mistake of marrying a human diluted the magical abilities in their gene pool, and their mixed children suffered. Though, my magic wasn’t all that great, and both my parents were magic users—guess it went to show there’s a dud in every bunch. Still, the idea of marrying a vampiric human was scandalous. What kind of children would that spawn? Or would it even be possible? And why was I even thinking about such a thing?

He gently rubbed his wrists where Lynetta had savagely gripped him. “Where can I sleep?”

“Do you have to sleep with your dirt? Or a coffin?”

At the notion, he grimaced. "A room without rays of sunlight filtering in will do. And no, I don't sleep with a pile of dirt." He shook his head. "Old wives' tales." "You can sleep in the guestroom next to mine. It's all frilly and purple, but the only other bedroom is my parents' and—"

The phone rang, jangling my already frayed nerves. I grabbed the phone and read the Caller ID. "My Aunt Betsy," I whispered as if she could hear me. I punched the on button. "Hello?"

"Marissa. I've been worried sick about you."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Aunt Betsy. You know Kate. She led me on a wild goose chase searching for vampires." I winked at Dominic, and he smiled back at me. He had the most gorgeous smile, but not a tooth too big or wicked at all, making me wonder where he kept his fangs tucked away.

Silence met my ear and I knew at once something was wrong. My aunt had never been a worrywart, in fact I was lucky that none of my family had that dysfunction. "Aunt Betsy?"

"Something killed five humans and drained the blood from them. The police are trying to keep everyone from panicking. They're saying it's some sicko pretending to be a vampire."