



FIRST NIGHT

By Angela Knight

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Jim Decker woke with an aching head, a throbbing erection, and whisps of erotic, bloody dreams...Amanda, her fangs a white curve in the dim light, nicking one nipple with a long, sharp fingernail. Blood beading in a piercing shade of scarlet against the cool white of her breast. The hot copper tang of it in his mouth as he sucked, feeling her nipple going hard against his teeth...

Decker shook his head sharply, trying to clear away the taunting memory of the dream. Then he realized it was no dream. Amanda had Changed him. Drinking her blood had infected him with the virus that had made her a vampire.

She'd finally asked the question Decker been waiting for since he'd come hunting her, only to be caught himself: "Do you want to become one of us?" And, hopelessly in love with the woman who'd touched his mind and taken his blood, Decker the vampire hunter had said "Yes." Knowing that Amanda was in love with Beau Gabriel, the vampire he'd spent months hunting. Hoping that somehow, the Change would make a difference in the way she felt, promote Decker from the status of victim to equal.

In the hours that had followed, he'd paid a high price for that "yes." The virus wasn't a killer, but it certainly felt like one. Curled on the bathroom floor between bouts of vomiting, he soon began to long for the coma that was the crisis stage of the disease.

"Hang in there," Amanda told him, kneeling to stroke his hair. "Shouldn't be much more than a few hours before you go under. While you're unconscious, the Change will begin, and when you wake up, you'll be one of us."

Now, five days later, Decker had to admit he felt rather inhuman--but not in the way he'd expected. His mouth tasted like the bottom of the monkey cage at the San Diego zoo, and his eyes were stinging and gritty. But that was about it. He wondered if the Change had taken after all.

He scratched his hairy chest and lifted his head from the pillow to peer blearily toward the alarm beside his bed. 10:15 p.m. But that had to be wrong; the room was flooded with the bluing light of early twilight. Stretching out a long arm, Decker scooped up the wristwatch on the nightstand, then held it to his face with a yawn.

10:15 p.m.

"What the hell?" Decker growled, and rolled out of bed to head for the window. Shoving the heavy blue curtain aside, he peered out. The sun hung burning in the sky, but a crescent shadow lay across it, obscuring a full two-thirds of its disc.

That's weird, Decker thought. I didn't hear anything about a solar eclipse...

Then he saw the stars. Blazing brighter than he had ever seen them, piercing like lasers even through Atlanta's ambient city light. Decker jerked his eyes back to the blinding white crescent in the clouds. My God, he thought, squinting against its brilliance. It's the moon...

He HAD Changed.

Warily, Decker probed his teeth with his tongue, but none of them seemed any sharper. "Amanda?" Nothing. He knew, he sensed, that he was alone in his apartment. Where had she gone? She'd promised she'd stay with him through this, help him through the difficult first hours of his new life. Why had she abandoned him?

Realizing he still held his watch, Decker started to toss it on the bed, then paused, staring at it. Amanda had told him he'd recover consciousness on Thursday, but the watch's date read Wednesday. He'd awakened a day earlier than expected. Decker cursed, loudly, monotonously. Amanda was probably out hunting.

All he could do was wait for her return.

He had a terrible feeling he'd made a mistake.

Should have thought of that four days ago, asshole, Decker thought. It's sure as shit too late now.

Well, to hell with it. He was damned if he just going to wait around bouncing off the walls while Amanda was off screwing someplace--he was going to go out. He'd let her call the shots too much as it was. Past time he regained control of his life.

Fifteen minutes later Decker was waiting for the elevator in the hallway, wearing a white linen suit that emphasized his tan and the width of his shoulders. He'd absolutely refused to wear anything black.

"Hello, Jim." The voice of the woman walking up behind him was brightly feminine and instantly familiar. Crystal Jordon, his next door neighbor, a sweet kid who was something of an artist. Decker turned to greet her. And caught his breath.

Crystal hesitated a few feet away, tall and slender and beautiful, her blonde hair knotted loosely on top of her regally held head. She wore a strapless red satin dress that bared neck and shoulders and most of her breasts with equal abandon. The brief skirt showcased long, muscular legs delicately veiled in shimmering red stockings.

How could I have missed noticing how beautiful she is, Decker thought, staring hungrily. Must have been really hung up on Amanda to have missed that... Suddenly a phrase floated through his mind: "Hair of the dog that bit you." If there was an antidote for Amanda, Crystal might well be it.

Decker smiled, his sensuous mouth broadening over white teeth, his brown eyes warming like melting caramel. Crystal swallowed and wondered where the dark woman was, the one he was always with.

She shifted on her uncomfortable red spike heels and checked to make sure the bodice of her dress hadn't crept too low. Her mother had always told her she was too well-endowed for a dress like this. Crystal certainly hoped not. She'd bought the dress because she desperately wanted to attract male attention--but not by having her nipples peek out at the public. She might be lonely, but she wasn't a flasher.

"That's a beautiful dress," Decker said.

"Uh...Thanks." God, he was gorgeous. He had the kind of face she loved to draw; all sharp, clean angles and deep-set eyes. And his body was every bit as fine; she'd often seen him in nothing but nylon running shorts, headed out for his evening five-mile jog. And every time she saw it, that muscle-knit torso made her itch for a sketchpad.

"He must be something," Decker said. His eyes had warmed from caramel to amber.

"Who?" she asked, thinking, Brilliant conversation, Crystal. Maybe I can try for complete sentences next. With verbs and everything.

"The man you bought that dress for. I envy him."

Crystal managed to keep her jaw from dropping. Decker had never even seemed to notice her before. "I'm just going out. Alone."

"Really?" There was that 100 watt smile again. "So am I. Maybe we should go together. Carpool. Save gas.."

"I don't..."

"Come on, Crystal, think of the environment."

She giggled. "Well, when you put it that way..."

Well, she WAS looking for somebody. She'd been desperate enough to have been content with a nebbish, but she certainly wasn't going to turn down Prince Charming.

Decker first caught the scent in the elevator. It was rich, musky, deliciously erotic. "That's a lovely perfume."

Crystal turned to look at him, hazel eyes widening. "I'm not wearing perfume. I'm allergic to almost everything."

Decker decided the taunting aroma must be another product of his enhanced senses; earlier, mint toothpaste had tasted like salsa. He took a deep breath, unable to resist savoring her scent. Smells like

sex, he thought, feeling himself harden. He looked down at Crystal's curving, satin-clad hips and imagined pulling her skirt up, reaching between those long thighs. Finding her wet. Decker swallowed.

To distract himself, he asked, "Where do you want to go?"

She considered it. He eyed the tantalizing pale skin of her shoulders, the intriguing lines of bone and tendon. "Well," Crystal said, "I was planning on going to that little place up the block. Frank's. They've got a dance floor..."

"Sounds good." The elevator slid open, and he guided her through its double doors with a hand on the small of her back.

The satin felt warm and slick. Decker looked down at the bulge of her breasts swelling over the strapless bodice. Pictured tugging the fabric downward. Freeing her nipples. With her coloring, they'd be pale, a virginal pink...

Licking suddenly dry lips, Decker guided her through the lobby.

Half an hour later, they were swaying on the dance floor, and Decker's self control was fraying by the second. He was glad he was wearing a suit jacket; it helped camouflage his erection. Though he suspected Crystal was well aware of it anyway. His shaft had rubbed against her flat belly each time they'd danced close.

And to make matters worse, he'd developed one hell of a toothache.

Crystal fought the urge to grind her hips against the intriguing hardness under Decker's coat. God, she was hot. She couldn't remember the last time a man had affected her this way. He kept touching her, his fingers brushing her shoulders, the tops of her breasts, her arms. And looking at her, his eyes promising all sorts of things, things she would have slapped another man for even thinking. Crystal didn't know how much longer she could take it.

"I'm really pretty tired," she heard herself say. "Think we could go back to the building?"

She had an instant to be mortified at her own boldness before he said, "Why not?" The smile on his sensuous mouth made her wobble on her high heels.

The painting was one of those abstract affairs, swirls of red paint studded with toothpicks. "Nice," said Decker dutifully, as Crystal handed him a drink. He sipped it carefully, cautious of its chill; his teeth were killing him.

"Thanks. It's just something I was fooling around with." Crystal leaned into him, and the side of her breast rubbed gently against his arm. After an evening of torment, that was the straw that broke him.

Decker sat his glass down on the nearby table with a clink.

She was opening her lovely red mouth to say something else when he turned and swooped in for a kiss, lips fusing over hers, tongue penetrating between her teeth. Crystal gasped. Gasped again as he roughly pulled down the bodice of her dress. Her hands came up to push at him, but Decker ignored them, wrapping an arm around her waist, lifting her, bending her back, arching her full, white breasts for his mouth. His lips fastened on a nipple. It was as pale and pink as she'd imagined. Hungrily, he began to suck.

"Jim..." It was less protest than moan. Crystal arched her hips into his, began slowly rocking against him. He brought up a hand to capture the delicious breast he sucked. His long blunt fingers squeezed, traced its curve, weighed its sweet fullness. Found her nipple and pulled it with delicate ferocity. She whimpered. The scent of her, that strange, hot, sexual smell, washed over him with such power that he moaned in lust. Decker switched his attention to her other nipple and began to feast on it.

Suddenly, as he sucked at her, he felt something shift in his mouth. He ignored it and sucked harder. But suddenly his mouth was full of pebbles, and he choked. Off balance, embarrassed, he coughed and released her.

"You all right?" she asked, staggering a little as she watched him cough again.

Unable to reply, he nodded and turned abruptly toward the bathroom, meaning to get rid of whatever it was. He stalked to the small sink, dragged out a Kleenex from the box beside it, and spat into it. Looked down into the wad of tissue distastefully.

And saw four teeth.

"Shit!" Decker jerked his eyes toward the bathroom mirror and opened his mouth. His lost canines had been replaced by four fangs, a long set in his upper jaw and a shorter pair on the bottom. Sharp and white and damning.

Until that moment, he hadn't really believed he was a vampire.

"Jesus," he whispered, stunned. Then came a second realization, even more damning: What the hell am I doing here?

In an instant, what had seemed a delightful evening of pleasure became something much darker. He wasn't making love to Crystal, he was preying on her. And it was wrong.

And he knew that to stay in this apartment meant endangering an innocent who had no idea of the risk she was running. Decker slipped out of the bathroom and headed for the door just short of a run.

"Jim?" Crystal sounded bewildered.

Decker, like Lot's wife, looked over his shoulder.

While he'd been having his moral crisis, Crystal had been changing into a black silk teddy. Now she stood in the apartment's short hall, her beautiful legs bare and curving, her nipples clearly visible through the teddy's lace bodice.

Decker froze.

"Where are you going?" She moved toward him, her breasts swaying gently.

"I..." Decker began, scrambling hopelessly for an explanation.

That scent came to him again as she drew closer. Distilled sex, making him harden. Musky and salty and...something else.

An undertone he hadn't noticed before, familiar, but also strange. Metallic, like copper...Copper. Or iron.

Blood.

The thought horrified him, and yet at the same time there was a wild hunger rising under it. Suddenly he remembered the things Amanda had done to him. Things she'd loved. Things he could do to Crystal.

"Don't leave," she said, coming against him, sliding one arm up around his neck. Her eyes were dark, glazed just slightly with passion, and her pulse was beating hard in her throat, a tempting flutter under her silken white skin. At the sight of that delicate, hypnotic beat, his lips parted.

A thin frown line appeared between Crystal's brows. She drew back slightly. Decker lowered his head toward the taunting vein, but she stepped away before he could put his mouth to it.

"Jim, is there something..."

"Come here." He reached for her, blind with the hunger that had come out of nowhere, singeing his self-control to ash.

Crystal backed up, feeling something icy creep along her spine. He'd gone very strange suddenly, the look in his eyes almost feral. And she'd thought, when his lips had parted, she'd seen... "I think you'd better go home now."

He looked amazed for a moment, then his dark eyes narrowed. Suddenly she became nervously aware of his height, his thickly muscled body.

"No," Decker growled, stepping closer. "I was going. You're the one who called me back. You made your choice."

"If you don't leave, I'm going to call the police."

"Call them." He bared his teeth, and she saw the fangs.

Crystal turned and ran, but she didn't get more than a pace before he scooped her right off the ground. Without breaking stride, he started toward the bedroom. Crystal began to scream. He tossed her on the bed and straightened. "Stop it!"

It seemed something reached out, caught her, closed tight. She gasped and stopped. "What...?" A force, something almost physical, radiating from him as he stood looking at her. "I'm not going to hurt you," he said.

"Get the hell out." But it was a whisper.

"You didn't want me to leave a minute ago." He sat down on the bed beside her. Crystal wanted to scramble away, but she couldn't move. Without touching her, he held her. "What are you?"

"Can't you guess?" He smiled, and she flinched at the white evidence of just how inhuman he was.

"Don't hurt me!"

"I won't. Relax." Decker reached out a long brown hand, smoothed it against her face. A strange kind of warmth seemed to emanate from him, as if the field that held her was changing. Becoming soothing. As if

she was safe. She knew she wasn't, knew it, and yet... She relaxed.

Decker could feel her terror fading, and wondered how the hell he was doing it. Somehow, when Crystal had started to scream, he'd ... touched her. Felt her fear. Wrapped his will around her until she began to quiet. Amanda had done the same thing to him at other times, stoking his desire or guilt or pleasure, but he'd always thought it took some psychic technique she'd learned from Beau Gabriel. Yet apparently the whole thing was instinct, as much a part of a vampire as his fangs.

Her scent was calling him again. For a moment he tried to fight it, but the hunger was too strong. Decker reached out, caught a hand in the bodice of her teddy, and ripped it down the front with delicate brutality. Eagerly, he rose over her, moved between her thighs. Lowered his head to seek the soft blonde curls at the delta of her thighs. The scent of her arousal, still present after the long evening of temptation, rolled over him and drowned him in pure lust.

Decker nuzzled her as he spread her legs even farther apart. Flicked out his tongue to sample her wetness. Salt. Musk. Sex. With a groan, he tightened his grip on her hips and dragged her hard against his mouth. His tongue drove deeply between her slick soft petals, and he felt her legs jerk convulsively in pleasure. Hungrily licking, Decker reached up along her sides to capture her breasts. He found her nipples and began to tug them as he delved for the tiny nubbin that centered her pleasure. Savoring its taut wetness between his lips, he raked it gently with his teeth. Crystal's back arched, and she groaned.

Releasing his hold on one breast, Decker moved to stab a finger into her wetness. Tight, so tight. His manhood throbbed with hunger, and his teeth ached in sympathy. Decker jerked upright, and startled fumbling at the buttons on his shirt.

Crystal watched him, as she sprawled across the bed, her eyes glazed, her long hair tumbling halfway to the floor.

Despite the passion in her eyes, there was a certain resignation in them, too. As if she knew that what she wanted didn't matter; her pleasure or pain was incidental to him. And somehow, despite his hunger, that resignation reached him with a stab of guilt.

Decker stopped, his hands frozen on his shirt. "Do you want me to leave?"

Crystal stared at him, at the fangs visible through his parted lips. To her amazement, she saw guilt in his eyes.

"Would you?"

"Yes. I'd try, anyway." He took a deep breath. "I shouldn't have jumped you. I'm...new at this." Decker smiled wryly, the expression sorting oddly with his lethal teeth.

Somehow, looking at him, Crystal believed he would leave. But she was wet, so wet, and his hands and tongue had been so tender, not like a rapist's at all. And for a reason she didn't really understand, she believed he wouldn't hurt her.

Suddenly, looking at his muscular body, the guilt and hunger mixed on his face, his sharp fangs...she felt a wild excitement. A desire for the danger he represented. She'd always been such a good girl before, never taking chances, never risking anything.

Safe. And boring.

"Stay," Crystal said.

Just for a moment he didn't move, as if he couldn't believe that she hadn't thrown him out. Then he was ripping off his own shirt, eager to come to her, to bury himself in her heat and scent and sweet, warm skin. Crystal rose onto her knees and reached for his fly, unzipping it, grabbing his pants to pull them down. In a moment, they had him naked, and he was coming down on top of her.

The strength of his entry made her gasp. She wrapped her legs around his taut waist. Decker's arms corded as he braced on his palms and began to stroke. His shaft felt thick and long and hot, as if it filled her halfway to her heart. Crystal twisted with the unspeakable pleasure of it, whimpering as he thrust and thrust and thrust, each quick advance and retreat driving pleasure further and further into her. Straight to her head.

Decker watched her writhe under him as he breathed in the rich smell of sex and woman and blood. The pulse in her throat was banging away, hypnotizing him even as he gasped at her grip on his organ. He lowered his head, touching his lips to her neck, feeling the flutter. A bead of her sweat rolled into his mouth, flavored with the blood scent of the vein.

Goaded, he struck like a snake.

Biting into her soft skin, feeling the electrifying well of blood. His spine arched with the pleasure of it, driving him to her depths. Crystal screamed as her first orgasm began. Decker shuddered and began to drink, throat working as he pumped against her, lunging hard. The raw pleasure of taking her hit his mind, splintered him.

Suddenly it was as if a wall crashed down, and he was one with her. He could feel Crystal's jolting orgasm, just as she tasted her own blood flooding her mouth, her tightness around him. They peaked in a mutual climax deeper and more violent than either had ever felt before.

A long time passed before they could move again.

"Beau, I think Jim's first time ought to be with somebody who knows the ropes," said Amanda as they stepped out of the elevator.

Beau Gabriel eyed her under the rim of his Stetson, smiling slightly. "And you think I ought to lend him one of my girls."

Beau maintained a large circle of female friends who were more than happy to cater to his rather exotic needs.

"Well, it WOULD minimize the trauma all the way around..."

"You're absolutely right, Amanda. I'd be happy to--on one condition."

Amanda paused in the act of unlocking Decker's door. "I might have known. What?"

"I get to watch when he takes her. I wanna see the sanctimonious bastard deal with real hunger for the first time in his life. Bet he wouldn't be so holier-than-thou THEN." "Beau..." Amanda began, exasperated, as she swung open the door.

Andheard a giggle.

Startled, the two vampires looked through the living room and into the kitchen of Decker's apartment. There, at the dinner table, sat a lushblonde wearing a filmy negligee. In front of her sat a plate holding a very large steak. Behind her stood Decker, who was bending to nuzzle herneck. His eyes snapped up at the sound of the opening door.

Decker bared his fangs. "Do you MIND?"

Hastily, Amanda backed out, reaching to drag Beau after her; he seemed inclined to stay and stare at the blonde . She slammed the door.

Beau stared at it,then turned to meet Amanda's wide eyes.

He tilted the brim of his Stetson up with a thumb. "Man sure works fast,don't he?"