



WANTED

LYNN VIEHL

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By Lynn Viehl

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For Sasha White,
who owns the three P's of writers:
Promising, passionate, and powerful.

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“South Florida artist Juliana Jones, whose charred remains were recovered yesterday, was the prime suspect in the murder of billionaire philanthropist Eric Locke. The CEO of Locke Industries, whose decision to leave his entire estate to the Catholic church stunned the pharmaceutical industry, was shot to death last year at the age of thirty-three . . . “

With my good, uncharred arm I groped for the television remote, shut off the set and pulled a pillow over my head. I never watched the news, but I had gotten into the habit of listening to infomercials until dawn, hoping they'd put me to sleep. I must have drifted off during the gushing testimonials for Bare Essentials.

I amused myself by rearranging the testimonials: *Whisk beige-colored mica and dirt powder on your face, and you'll glow!*

The door to the bedroom opened and closed, and footsteps crossed the floor. “I bring you some dinner, Mees Juli.” Dishes clinked as something heavy landed on the surface of my bedside table. “You gonna smother yourself like that, you know.”

“Didn't you hear the news?” I lifted one side of the pillow to look at Esmeralda Maria Garcia y Caldaran, the housekeeper and my unofficial warden. “I'm already dead.”

“You not dead, you just depressed.” Esme removed the silver cover from my dinner. “This my chicken and rice soup. Take all day to make it.” She put

her hands on her slim hips and turned to eye me. “You flush *this* down the toilet, / kill you for real.”

She knew what I’d been doing with the food I never felt like eating.

“Promise?”

“Don’t tempt me or God. You been in this bed too long.” Esme tugged back my covers. “You get up today. Eat, take hot bath. I brush out your hair.”

A mass of snarls covered my head, I smelled like old socks, and I couldn’t remember the last time I’d bathed. Or ate, for that matter. But what was the point in living? I was dead, or as good as.

“You want them see you like this?” Esme asked.

Them were Neal Gregory, a veterinarian who was gorgeous and human, and Marco Shamaras, an immortal illegal immigrant who was gorgeous and lived on human blood. When these two weren’t saving my life – or ruining it – they were my friends. Sort of. I had emotional and physical issues with both of them. Unfortunately, they slept together in a big room at the end of the hall.

That was the other reason I didn’t get much sleep: because I was deeply, intensely, insanely attracted to both of *them*. That’s right. I had the hots for not one but *two* gay men.

Which is why I mostly wished I really was dead.

“They,” I said, reaching for the pillow again, “aren’t going to see me.” Even if I danced naked up and down the hallway.

“They are when I go visit my sister in New York.” She nodded when I stared up at her. “Oh, yeah. I get vacation, just like regular job.”

“Take me with you.” When she chuckled, I grabbed her arm. “I’m serious. I love New York. Or I will, I know I will. You can’t leave me alone here with them.”

“The master, he not hurt you, you know that.” She patted my cheek. “Dr. Neal, he miss you. He ask me about you every day you don’t come out of the room.”

That had been every day since Neal Gregory had told me that Shamaras had arranged to fake my death. I sat up, ready to beg Esme about the New York trip, but the room decided to tilt and whirl. “He’s only being polite.”

She hmped. “Dr. Neal say to me when I take him the mail, ‘She don’t come out today, I drag her out of there.’”

The vertigo stopped almost as soon as it started. “All right. I’ll get up.” I really didn’t want to see either of my housemates, together or apart, but if I had to it would not be like this. I’d get cleaned up, dressed and go and demand what I’d been promised: a new identity, a new house, and a new life.

If I didn’t get that, I’d settle for a bus ticket to Seattle.

Every time I went into the bathroom I felt like I’d walked into a very expensive, exclusive bordello for people with a water fetish. Everything had been made from white and gold marble with bronze accents and fixtures. Most of the floor was a sunken roman-style tub, with whirlpool jets, benched recesses and console of buttons that I discovered controlled the lighting, played soft music and dispensed scented oils, bubbles and aromatic salts directly into the water. Two walls were mirrored, as was the interior of the shower stall, which could

comfortably fit six or seven naked people in prone positions. A long slab of polished sienna, crystal and poppy agate had been made into a counter with three sinks. Between the sinks sat huge wicker baskets packed with cosmetics, skin and body products. Ferns and flowering orchids spilled out of gold and white marble cornices and floor vases.

It didn't scream money. It whispered it, like the Debussy that came through the speakers I had yet to find.

I stripped down, stepped into the shower and turned on the water. It came out of the taps at the exact temperature I liked, and never cooled no matter how long I took. Shamaras must have installed a hot water tower somewhere on the property.

As I scrubbed and buffed and rinsed, I rehearsed different speeches. "I appreciate you wrecking my life, faking my death and keeping me here like a mutt you don't have the heart to put down, but I think it's time to release me back into the wild." Neal wouldn't like the animal analogy. Maybe a sweeter, more formal approach. "I appreciate all you've done but I can't impose on you any longer." And if that didn't work, I'd go for broke. "Let me out of here or I'll call the National Inquisitor and tell them I'm having a threesome with a vampire and a vet."

"You'd have to send pictures before they'd print it, and you don't have a camera," Neal said from outside the shower stall.

I yelped, turned and saw the back of a dark blond head, a ponytail hanging down the back of a white shirt with the sleeves rolled halfway up, and

the perfectly-fitted seat of Neal Gregory's faded jeans. And yes, God, he had a gorgeous ass. "What are you doing in here?"

"Esme said you felt dizzy." He didn't turn around. "You've been in here thirty minutes with the water running, so I thought I'd see if you were bathing or drowning."

I had no reason to shriek with outrage; Neal had already seen all my goodies the first time we'd met. I'd been staggering around in a drugged, bruised, and bleeding state of semi-consciousness and wearing only a leather jacket. He had found me and fixed me up.

He was a good doctor, too, even if most of his patients had fur and four legs.

"I'm fine." Prior knowledge of what *my* bare ass looked like didn't give him the right to come barging in my bathroom now, though. "Go wait in the bedroom."

"Marco won't go for the sarcasm or the sweetness," Neal advised me. "But the threesome expose threat might work."

Out he went.

#

Shamaras had provided an entire wardrobe of new clothes for me, as my own had burned up alone with all my other worldly possessions and my house. My post-arson trousseau consisted of dozens of gowns, dresses, skirts, and blouses, all hand-tailored with exquisite fabrics in all the colors that suited me perfectly.

They were beautiful, tasteful and expensive, and I flatly refused to wear any of them.

Since being brought to the villa, I slept in my bra and panties and wore the one set of clothes that Neal bought for me after my house was torched. At first Esme had tried to get rid of the jeans and T-shirt Neal gave me, but when I refused to dress in anything else she washed and returned them.

They hung on me now, almost too loose to stay put, but I wasn't going in my underwear to see the boys. I had an atom of pride left, somewhere.

After I dried my hair and brushed my teeth, I went out into the bedroom. Neal was sitting on the bed and watching the entertainment portion of the evening news.

"Britney's pregnant again," he said as he stood. "I swear, that girl is part rabbit." He gave me the once over. "Is that all you're going to wear?"

"My patent-leather cat suit burned up with the cottage." I used the remote to shut off the TV and walked out into the hall. There I waited until Neal caught up with me. "Why does the Count want to see me?"

"He's worried about you." A hand rested on my shoulder. "So am I."

I moved to break the contact between us. "He in the drawing room or the library?"

"The library. Jules—"

I didn't want to talk to him, so I turned and headed for the library.

My prison, a sixteenth-century Italian villa that Esme told me had been brought over from Tuscany brick by brick, did not whisper money. Money couldn't buy this kind of place.

Esme told me the house was called Volare, and had been built four hundred years ago. She claimed it had thirty-five rooms, but I'd not yet opted for a tour. Italian antiques and art furnished the first floor and the third, with the service, storage and staff rooms occupying the second. Shamaras did not keep live-in servants, according to the housekeeper, but if he ever changed his mind the villa could house twenty of them with no problem.

I could admit it was a beautiful place without compromising my morals. The villa had been designed around a central, open courtyard that allowed the breeze from the bay to flow freely through the corridors. On cool evenings like this one, Esme left the house open to the chirps of crickets and birds settling down for the night. In Italy it must have been fabulous, but in south Florida summer turned it into a sweat box. Or would have, without the glass panels that silently slid out on hot days, enclosing the open spaces to keep the air conditioning in while not spoiling the view.

The library lay around the corner from my bedroom, and took up more space than my entire cottage had. I had gone into it once by myself, looking for a novel to read, but all the books were printed in Italian or Greek. I'd never seen bookcases with beveled glass doors, and I tried not to gape at the four paintings of angels signed by Raphael. The latter appeared real, and yet I'd never seen one of them in an art history book.

I stood in the doorway until the man sitting by the fireplace looked up. Always polite, Shamaras rose to his feet. “Good evening, Juliana. Please, come in.”

There were no flowers in the room, but it still smelled of blue hyacinth, thanks to the vampire. Shamaras gave off the scent naturally, I’d been told, and could use it to control Neal and most other humans.

Except me, as I had some sort of immunity to it.

I felt Neal behind me and went to the only chair I liked, a tapestry-covered little number on the other side of the fireplace. Why the vampire insisted on reading by the fire every night – even on the sweltering ones – made no sense to me, but I never complained. With Shamaras, you had to let a lot of things pass.

Firelight loved the man, though. It caressed his bare scalp with tinctures of hot apricot and horded gold, and brought out the rainbow flashes in his dark opal eyes. It measured his broad shoulders with uneven shadow markers, as if to say *this is where you put your hands, your cheek, your mouth*.

Shamaras didn’t want my hands, cheek or mouth touching him. He had Neal for that.

I sat on the edge of the seat and waited for them to arrange themselves around me. Shamaras stowed his book behind glass doors first while Neal made a drink at the bar.

“I don’t want anything, thanks,” I said before anyone asked. “Marco, I need to go now.”

Shamaras took off his jacket and draped it over the back of his chair before sitting down. “Neal will of course take you wherever you wish.”

“I mean, I have to *move* out of here.” I forced a smile. “Start a new life. Someplace else. Away from all this.”

He sat back. “You wish to leave tonight?”

“No reason to wait. I’m dead, so the cops and the Brethren won’t come after me. My arm’s healed.” When he didn’t say anything, I added, “Look, I appreciate the hospitality, but it’s time I moved on.” This next part that was going to kill me, but I plowed ahead. “If I could borrow some money from you until I find a place and a job. . . .” Neal came and sat on the floor in front of Shamaras’s chair, distracting me for a moment. “I don’t need much. A couple of thousand should do it. I’ll pay you back as soon as I can.”

“No.”

I blinked. “You don’t believe I’ll pay you back?”

“I think a couple of thousand will not do it.” Shamaras took the glass of wine Neal handed him and sipped from it. “You need a home, Juliana, and a family. People who care about you and for you. You also need employment and protection. You can have all of that here, with us.”

“Before you argue with him,” Neal added, “think about what sort of life you’d have out there. Juliana Jones is dead. You’ll have to use a new name, establish a new identity, start over from scratch. You’d have to seriously alter your appearance as well, or you’d risk exposure every time you went to an art show or tried to sell a painting.”

“I’m not that well-known,” I snapped.

Shamaras inclined his head. “Eric Locke was.”

“So I stay here and work for you.” I looked at Neal. “As what? I can’t cook. I could help Esme look after the priceless *objets d’art*, I suppose, but really, how often do they need dusting?”

“You can serve as my *tresora*,” the vampire said. “It is the most logical solution. You already wear my mark.”

By mark he meant the black cameo I’d had tattooed on my shoulder blade, which at the time I had no idea would destroy my life. Humans who served the Darkyn – Shamaras’s people, who were immortal and like vampires, depended on human blood to live – wore the mark. It had convinced Eric Locke that I might be worthy enough to sell to Shamaras in exchange for some of his blood. It had kept me from being charged with Eric’s murder, but then it had gotten me shot a second time when I’d posed as Shamaras’s *tresora*. As soon as I had enough cash, I was having the damn thing lasered off me.

“No, thanks.” I looked at Neal and suddenly knew I couldn’t take any more of this. Not for another day. “Actually, all I need is a ride to the bus station, and enough money to buy a ticket to Seattle. I can do the rest myself.”

He frowned. “What’s in Seattle?”

“It’s as far away from you and him as I can get without having to apply for Canadian citizenship.” I stood and waited, but neither of them moved. “What?”

Shamaras folded his hands. “We have not been entirely honest with you, Juliana. We were . . . waiting. Hoping.”

“For?”

Neal put aside his drink and stood up. “The injuries Eric inflicted on you were more severe than we led you to believe. When we found you that night, you were almost dead.”

“Okay. So I’m really, really lucky.” And a great liar, too.

“It wasn’t luck.” He looked at the Persian carpet under our feet. “It was Marco’s blood. We used it to heal your injuries.”

“I appreciate your honesty,” I said, trying not to shudder, “but you could have kept details like that to yourself.”

“It’s why you can’t leave.” His brown eyes shifted up. “Your weight loss and lack of appetite indicates that we may have used too much.”

I thought about it for a minute. “Are you HIV-positive or something, Marco?”

“No, I cannot be stricken by human diseases,” Shamaras said as Neal came to me. “But large amounts of my blood is poisonous to humans.”

He had saved my life by poisoning me?

Neal read my expression and took hold of my hand. “We don’t know for sure yet. Marco’s blood should have killed you months ago, but you’ve only begun showing symptoms now.”

Great. I was dying slower than the other victims. Hooray for me.

“There’s a Kyn doctor coming here to see you tomorrow,” Neal said, putting his arm around my waist. “She’s going to test your blood and see if it’s

causing your illness, and if there is anything that can be done to reverse the process.”

“I could go to a hospital right now,” I suggested, and then shot down the idea before they could. “But they might recognize me.”

Shamaras came to stand on my other side and took my other hand. “The human doctors will not know what to do. They are not aware of my kind or the curse upon us.”

“It’s not a curse,” Neal said. “Your blood is different, that’s all.”

I felt suspended between them, so paralyzed inside that I was unable to move or think straight. It might have been the mind-controlling hyacinth, or the contrast between Neal’s warm arm and Marco’s cool fingers. Finding out they might have accidentally poisoned me definitely played a part.

“Please stop holding me,” I said, and when they stepped back, I could breathe again. “I’ll be in my room.”

#

I stayed in my room, and I expected Neal to check on me, which he did. If he had said anything to me, I probably would have beaten him unconscious with my bare fists, but he only looked in and left again.

I sat by the window and stared out at the night for a long time, putting together and taking apart everything that had happened to me since I’d met Eric Locke. It actually went back further than him, back to my childhood, when an old man had saved me from drowning and died in the process. The old man had been Lencho, Shamaras’s *tresora*, tattooed with a black cameo on his chest.

The tattoo I'd copied onto my own shoulder years later. The tattoo Eric must have noticed when we'd made love, I realized, which explained his subsequent psycho behavior.

I got up and walked out into the hall, following it to a staircase. Esme had told me that the kitchen was on the second floor of the villa, and after a few wrong turns I found it. It looked like the sort of place a big, smiling Italian woman would happily spend her life in, cooking up army-size meals in the big aluminum pots to feed to her family of forty. I spotted a couple of knife blocks in one corner of the white tiled counter, and helped myself to the longest and sharpest blade. The light of dawn made it flash as I took it out of the slot.

"Put down the knife, my dear."

"You're supposed to be in your coffin, aren't you?" I tested the edge of the blade, hissed and pulled back a sliced fingertip. "That's sharp. Why do you have sharp knives? You don't eat."

"I do not sleep in a coffin, either." His hands came around me and took the knife out of mine. "I will not allow you to hurt yourself."

I turned and looked up into the beautiful immortal face. "But you're fine with poisoning me."

"Juliana." He felt my legs buckling before I did and swung me up into his arms. From there he carried me out, up the stairs and down to his end of the hallway.

Neal opened the bedroom doors. "Should I call the suzerain?"

“Not yet.” Shamaras put me on his bed, which was much larger and nicer than mine. The sunlight hurt my eyes, and I made a wimpy sound. “Close the curtains, Neal.”

I didn’t remember much of the next eighteen hours. I felt Neal and Shamaras on either side of me, lying next to me in the bed, but they were speaking in Italian, and my head hurt so much I couldn’t open my eyes. The sun came in and settled on my brow, burning a nice big hole through it. Time dragged out the torture but sped through the day. At one point Neal carried me to a bathroom and stood with me under a lukewarm shower that made me feel as if I might shake myself to pieces. Gentle hands stripped me out of my freezing-wet clothes and dried me with a warm, sinfully soft towel.

Everything went away and left me in the dark.

Her hand on my forehead stirred me, but the needle in my arm brought me fully awake. I looked up into a curtain of curly chestnut hair hanging around a pretty, frowning face.

“Welcome back,” she said. “Are you feeling all right?”

“No,” I said honestly. “You the vampire doctor?”

She grinned. “That’s me. I’m Alex Keller.” She used her stethoscope to check my heart and then took my temperature from my ear. “How long have you been dodging sleep and food?”

I shrugged and winced as the motion jugged my aching head. “Couple of months.”

She straightened and wrote something on a pad. Another woman, one I knew because she was a vampire and she had once arrested me for killing Eric, appeared beside Dr. Keller.

“Is she changing?” Detective Samantha Brown asked. “Or dying?”

“I have to run some tests, but I’d pick door number one.”

“Changing into what?” I wanted to know.

“Lucan has been calling me every five minutes.” Samantha scowled as her cell phone played the perky theme to *The Entertainer*. “And if he changes my ring tone one more time, I’m kicking his ass up *and* down A1A.”

“I want to watch,” the doctor said.

“Changing into what?” I shouted the first two words and whimpered the third.

Both women looked down at me, surprised.

“One of us,” Dr. Keller said. “I’m sorry, didn’t Marco explain the situation to you?”

Marco was going to, as soon as I hauled myself out of his bed. I got as far as my feet over the side before Alex grabbed me.

“You don’t want to do that right now, sweetie. You’re really weak.” She tucked me back in like a fussy mother and sent Samantha to get Shamaras. “Marco infected you with his blood, and it looks like you’re making the physical change from human to Darkyn. I guess you know enough about us to be upset by the prospect. I went through the same thing myself. But as disgusting as it

seems, it's better than dying. You'll get used to the fangs and the lousy diet. You and Marco will bond, and fall in love, and have a great relationship, and—"

"No, we won't," I said. "Marco is gay. Neal is his lover."

Alex stared at me for a minute. "Oh, hell."

"Yeah. Pretty much." I closed my eyes.

Alex Keller finished examining me by prodding my stomach and asking me a lot of questions about what I ate, how often I threw up, that sort of thing. After I recounted my lousy eating habits since killing Eric, she checked the roof of my mouth with a pen light and then the tip of her finger. It felt sore, but she seemed puzzled by my lack of 'apertures,' whatever they were. Finally she finished making her notes and tucked the pad into her jacket pocket.

"I'll run a blood test to be sure, Ms. Jones, but it appears that you're in the very early stages of transition," Dr. Keller said. "It usually takes three to seven days, but your change isn't progressing properly. It seems to be stalling."

Shamaras and Neal came to the edge of the bed. "What will happen to her if she does not improve, Lady Alexandra?"

"She's caught between two very different physical states," the doctor said. "The changes in her gastric system are making it impossible for her to eat human food. At the same time, the lack of progress with the change makes her incapable of feeding like us. I'll try a transfusion, see if that helps, but Marco, she has to finish the process or it will kill her."

I finally understood what she meant. I wasn't poisoned.

I was starving to death.

#

Alex Keller hooked me up to a unit of whole blood and sat with me until it was gone. She told me more about the Kyn and their way of bonding to the humans they changed. Some humans like Alex herself became the vampire's *sygkenis*, or life companion. It sounded bizarre, especially the idea of never being able to break up or leave the vampire who bonded emotionally and physically with you, but since it wasn't happening to me I wasn't worried.

My body seemed to suck up the blood in record time, but as soon as she removed the needle I felt sick. She helped me to the bathroom and stood by while I puked myself into the dry heaves.

"Giving me transfusions won't work," I said after I washed my face and brushed my teeth. "Right?"

"I wish I knew. Your body seems to be rejecting everything." She pressed a hand to my head. "At least your fever's gone down a bit. Although with all that blood, you should be glowing and bouncing around here like a pink neon bunny on crack."

I braced myself against the counter as I expected the dizziness to return, but it didn't. "Can you give me something I can take to make it quick?"

It took a minute for her to understand. "Sorry, I never went to the Dr. Kevorkian school of medicine."

She helped me back to bed, and I argued with her every step of the way.

"I've caused enough trouble for Marco and Neal," I said. "They don't want me here, and they really don't need me puking all over the villa." When that

didn't seem to sway her, I added, "It isn't Marco's fault. He was only trying to heal my wounds. I sure as hell don't want them to watch me die."

"Marco shouldn't have been playing doctor with you." Alex stopped and drew away from me. "Wait a minute. You were wounded? Marco didn't drink your blood, or make you drink his?"

"You're gonna make me puke again," I warned.

"I'm serious, Jules."

I sat down on the edge of the bed and sighed before I launched into the confusing tale of how I'd met Shamaras. Once I'd finished filling her in, I added, "He never bit me, and I never bit him. Neal used some of his blood to close my open wounds. From the way he described it, like liquid vampire bandage or something. That was it."

"You've never kissed or had sex with Marco, right?" When I nodded, she peered at me. "But the rest of us did."

My jaw dropped into my lap. "You went to bed with Marco?"

"No, not with Marco. With our guys. Jema, Sam, Nick – they're all modern human women who were sexually involved with their vampires before they made the change. So was I. Well, technically I was sort of in a coma at the time, but Michael and I almost did it. Maybe that's why I didn't change right away." She paced around the room. "I can't believe it. It's not just exchanging blood. It's got to be the body fluids, too. So if you have sex with Marco—"

"Only one problem with that," I said, "Marco is gay, remember?"

“To save your life?” She made a breezy gesture. “Honey, he can make the sacrifice for once.”

“No.” Before she could reply, I stood up. “From what you’ve told me, this bonding thing is for life, and you guys don’t die. I’m not hanging myself around Marco’s neck for all eternity.” However much I wanted to. “I can’t do that to him or Neal.”

“You’re more forgiving than I am,” Alex said. “All right, listen. There aren’t many female Kyn out there, and Marco’s not the only game in town. Most of the male Kyn would eviscerate whole armies for the chance to have a *sygkenis*. How do you feel about meeting some new guys?”

I wanted Marco and Neal, but I’d have to settle for someone else. I thought of all the armed men I’d been introduced to at Lucan’s nightclub, the one time I’d pretended to be Shamaras’s *tresora*. Many of them had been scary-looking, but I remembered some nice faces. I didn’t want to pick out the guy I had to live with forever, but it beat the slow, painful death option.

I squelched all my doubts and asked, “Will you and Detective Brown help me?”

“Are you kidding?” Alex grinned. “I’m already making a list of prospective hunks in my head. Let’s get you dressed and head over to Lucan’s place.”

#

Alex and Samantha told Shamaras that they were taking me to *Infusion* in order to get better treatment for my condition. Alex was nice enough not to offer

too many details. Neal offered to accompany us, but I squashed that idea mercilessly.

"You can't be in a room filled with Kyn without turning into a babbling idiot, remember?" I smiled to soften the sting and stood on my toes to kiss his cheek. "Don't worry. Alex knows what she's doing." I hoped.

Shamaras escorted us out to the black limo that had brought Alex and Samantha to the villa, and directed Lucan's driver to take us downtown. Before I climbed in, he put his hands on my cheeks and kissed my forehead. "You are certain that you do not wish me to come with you?"

Oh, the replies I could have made to that question. "I'm positive."

"I will see you soon," he promised.

The midnight hour arrived at *Infusion* along with us. Unlike the last time I'd visited, the club was open to the public, although a good portion of them were standing outside waiting for admission. Some of them protested loudly when Alex, Sam and I were welcomed like visiting royalty, until the bouncer turned his stern face toward them and glowered.

"Why does she get in?" one girl with spiked burgundy hair and glow-in-the-dark fangs at front of the line demanded. She pointed at the plain white blouse and blue silk skirt Alex had convinced me to wear. "She's not even goth."

"Give me a few more days," I said to her.

Suzerain Lucan appeared an instant after we stepped inside and grabbed Samantha, kissing her before she could get a word out. He lifted his head only

after she slapped his arm. He grinned at Alex. "My lady." The smile vanished when he caught sight of me. "Aren't you dead?"

I decided he wasn't quite as scary as I'd thought. "Not yet."

"We need to talk." Samantha steered him away from us, while Alex guided me toward the private elevator.

"Are you sure about this?" I asked the doctor.

"No, but it beats sitting around the villa and waiting for you to die of starvation."

She didn't take me to the penthouse, where I had gone with Lucan's human servant on my last visit. We stopped instead at the third floor.

"Most of the *jardin* in service live or work here," Alex said as we walked down toward a big open work out room. "I don't know many of their names, but they're a friendly bunch."

The friendly bunch were clustered around two unfriendly-looking, half-naked Kyn males dancing around a big circle and swiping swords at each other. No one spoke a word or made a sound, which made it seem even more unreal.

One of the men noticed us and said something quiet in Spanish. The two men stopped fighting and put down their swords. The entire group then turned and bowed.

"Cut it out," Alex said to them. "We just stopped in to say hello. This is Juliana."

Every man looked at me, breathed in, and smiled. The air slowly filled with the scent of flowers, fruit, and green things growing in the sunlight.

"She's not food," Alex continued. "She's in transition."

The hungry smiles changed to expressions of surprise, shock, and intense curiosity.

"May we inquire as to who her lord is, my lady?" one of the men asked.

"She doesn't have a lord yet," Alex said. "We're hoping to find one for her."

The men looked at each other and at me, and the scents they were shedding deepened and made the air hotter.

"That cannot be, my lady," another man said, his tone apologetic but firm. "No female could be changed without a lord to attend to her."

"Lady Alexandra is correct," Lucan said as he came into the room with Samantha. "The change was forced upon this human by a healing gone wrong. She has not yet bonded to a Kyn lord."

Some of the men took a step or two toward me.

"No one will lay a finger on her," Lucan continued, making a show of his velvet-gloved hands, "unless they wish to discover the mercy to be had at my hands."

All the men took a step back.

I felt humiliated. "I don't think I can do this, Alex. I can't just pick someone like this. I need to . . ." *get back home to Marco and Neal*, was what I wanted to say. Only that was just as ridiculous.

"I can still smell Marco on her," Lucan said. "Are you quite certain she has not bonded with him, Alexandra?"

"All I know is that if she doesn't bond with someone, and soon," the doctor said, "she's not going to make it."

I don't know why I ran to the elevator, but I did. And the reason I escaped the nightclub? I had no clue. I just had to get out of there, away from the vampires and the way they were looking at me.

I ended up sitting on a bench on the boardwalk and watching the waves break on the sand. Like my heart, like my heart.

"You are so lovely that I would take you and complete your change myself," Lucan said as he sat down beside me, "but I have to rest some time, and my *sygkenis* is a homicide detective. If anyone knows the most creative and painful ways to kill a straying lover, it is my Samantha."

I glanced sideways. "I don't want to insult you, Suzerain, but I think I have enough problems already, thanks."

"You know, Marco is not precisely the cockroach I made him out to be when last we met," he continued. "He survived his imprisonment among the Saracens by catering to his master's desires, no matter how perverted they were. His self-imposed exile was largely to preserve the finer sentiments of the Kyn." He looked down at his gloves. "At least he never killed anyone, even when he wore the white."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I know."

We both watched the ocean for a while.

"The women will be worried if we don't return soon," Lucan said at last. "I will help you choose someone suitable if you like, Juliana. But I would rather see you return to Marco. His blood runs through your veins now. You must have some feelings for him."

I had all the feelings. "He doesn't want me."

"He's not gone blind, has he?"

"I'm a woman." I realized I'd said too much. "I mean, I'm not his type of woman."

"Marco has bedded so many women I doubt he has a type." Lucan saw my face. "He didn't tell you that he was a brothel slave for two hundred years, I take it?"

I tried to imagine Shamaras being forced to prostitute himself for two centuries, and couldn't. "Is that why he doesn't like women?"

Lucan laughed. "Of course not. He loves them. As he will doubtless adore you."

Now I was getting mad. "This is really none of your business, Suzerain."

"Marco's living arrangements may require a certain amount of discretion, but I assure you, Juliana, your lord Shamaras has known more women than any Kyn alive. It was his profession." He gave me a shrewd look. "Ah, now I see that the rumors are true. He has a human male living in his household, does he not? And you have feelings for that one as well."

I wasn't going to spill the beans about Neal. "I can't talk about this with you."

"You don't have to. I am sending you back to the villa." Lucan stood.

"You will tell Marco everything."

I could have screamed with frustration. "He doesn't want me."

"As you are almost Kyn, I am your ruling lord. You have no choice but to obey my command." He offered me one of his gloved hands. "Tell Marco of your true feelings for him and this human male. If he refuses to bond with you, direct my driver to bring you back. I will personally see to it that you have your pick of the jardin."

I took his hand and stood up. "This is crazy."

"Trust me, love." He flicked a velvet-covered finger over the tip of my nose. "Only be sure to tell him the truth."

#

I walked into the dark, quiet villa and dragged my feet as I climbed the stairs. I was tired, defeated and wanted nothing more than to sleep for a week. Lucan's command still rang in my ears, however, and he was right: I needed to tell Marco and Neal how I felt. Once I'd done that, I could make a clean break without any false expectations on either side.

They were both sitting and reading in the library, and Neal jumped up as soon as I came in the room.

"Jules, you're back." He hurried over to hug me and look me over. "Did it work? Was Lady Alexandra able to help?"

"Sort of." I looked past him at Shamaras. "Neal, I need to talk to you."

"I will leave you alone," Marco said, closing his book and rising.

“I need to talk to you, too,” I told him. “Alex didn’t take me to get any kind of medical treatment. She wanted me to pick out one of Lucan’s men so that I could bond with him.”

“What?” Neal gaped.

“You are making the change,” Shamaras said slowly. “I knew it. But why would she take you from me at such a time?”

“Alex told me what can happen with the whole life companion thing, and I didn’t want to complicate your lives any more than I already have.” I almost lost my nerve right there, but forced myself to tell him the rest. “I have very strong feelings for you, Marco. I can’t define what they are, because I’ve never felt anything like them. Sometimes, when you touch me? It’s all I can do not to jump on you.” I turned to Neal. “Neal, I know I’m in love with you. I have been ever since you kissed me. I’m sorry. I know it’s inappropriate and ludicrous and probably offensive to both of you, but it’s how I feel.”

“Why,” Shamaras asked, “would you think we would be offended by your love?”

Neal smiled a little. “She knows that we’re lovers.”

“But it’s not a fatal attraction, okay?” I didn’t want their pity or their sympathy. “Lucan said he would find a normal, I mean, a straight Kyn guy for me, to help me get through this, and then I’ll be out of your hair forever—”

“Jules, we’re not gay.”

“—and everything will be fine . . . what?” I frowned.

“Do you know what a *tre vie* is, Juliana?” Marco asked.

“Doesn’t everyone?” I hadn’t the slightest idea.

“Literally it means three-way,” Neal told me. “Or, as you put it, a threesome.”

“Get out of town.” I waited for them to laugh, but they didn’t. “You mean to tell me that you and he . . . you share women?”

“Not in the way you think.” Neal ran a hand through his hair. “It’s not about the sex. We like the sex, don’t get me wrong, but it’s more than that. Marco and I are together, but we’re unhappy. We’re incomplete. We love each other, but we want more. We want a woman we can love together.”

I had always thought of *ménage a trois* as something kinky people did for kicks, not a structure for a relationship. What had Lucan said? *Marco’s living arrangements may require a certain amount of discretion . . .*

“It’s very difficult to find a woman willing to love two men, and be loved by them, and to accept their love for each other,” Marco said. “We had hoped you would be the one. It seems that you are.”

All this time and angst, and they had both wanted me. I didn’t know whether to kiss them or kick their asses. “You never thought to mention this to me before now?”

“It’s a very delicate subject,” Neal admitted. “We didn’t want to scare you off before you got to know us. Marco knew from the moment you shot Eric that you were the one for us. He could feel it. I didn’t believe him until I kissed you.”

I wasn’t so easily convinced. “Have you ever really done this? This threesome thing? Made it work?”

Neal nodded. "Our wife died after a long battle with breast cancer five years ago, in Tuscany. We were together for ten years. There hasn't been anyone else, until you came into our lives."

I thought of Lencho, the old man who had saved my life. Marco and Neal would have been with their wife back then; maybe they'd even known about her cancer. I didn't believe in fate, but it was almost as if the *tresora* had known they would need me someday.

And maybe that I would need them.

"We will wait for you to become accustomed to the idea, Juliana," Shamaras promised. "All we ask is that you give us a chance to show you how it can be for us."

"Alex says I don't have a lot of time left," I told him. "I have to choose now. What if I only wanted Neal, or just you?"

"Then Neal and I would have to send you to Lucan to find another to help you through the change." Shamaras glanced at Neal, who nodded.

"It's like I told you after I kissed you, Jules," Neal sounded a little sad, as if he expected me to refuse on the spot. "You can't have just me. You get him, too."

I could see the desire and longing in their faces, smelled it in the blue hyacinth Marco was shedding. Their eyes never left my face. I had never imagined being with two men, and this seemed more important a step than even making the change from human to Darkyn. If I chose them, it would be forever for me and Marco, but only a human lifetime for Neal.

That didn't seem fair, or right.

"I know what you're thinking," Neal said, "but it doesn't matter. As long as we have each other, I'll be happy. Maybe I'll make the change, too. If not, then I know someday you two will walk through this minefield for someone else you believe that you can both love."

"Okay." I held out my hands, and when they took them, I kissed Neal and then Shamaras. "You're sure about this? About me?"

"Oh, yes," Marco said. "You are the one."

Neal's eyes gleamed. "Why don't we show you?"

I admit, I was nervous, and I didn't know what to expect from the physical side of this *a tre vie* outside of some pre-conceived notions of tangled bodies and unlikely acrobatics. But Marco and Neal didn't jump me, or try to rush me. They hugged and kissed me, taking turns like affectionate brothers. Then affection flared into heat, and hands began unfastening buttons and tugging aside fabric.

For me, everything doubled. The hands touching me, the mouths gliding against my skin. Everywhere I was accustomed to feeling a lover press, a mirror of the sensation occurred on the other side. It made me feel giddy, almost drunk with the power of it.

However the choreography was supposed to happen, I didn't know. It just did. We were standing and stripping each other in the middle of the bedroom one minute and fitting our bare bodies together on the bed the next.

I expected to feel a surge of jealousy when I saw Neal kiss Marco, or Marco caressing Neal, but that never happened. They were as passionate and

tender with each other as they were with me, no one left out, no one dominating the other. We all received equal attention from each other in a kind of dance that had a rhythm and movement unlike anything I'd ever known.

It was not all perfect. I didn't have a vast amount of experience anyway, and I felt constantly, almost painfully awkward when it came to the physical mechanics of trying to make love to two men at the same time. After tangling us all up, I dissolved into giggles, laughing at myself and them. They joined in, evidently delighted as much by my lack of experience as my earnest attempts to please them both. The joy seemed to snap the last of the restraints between us, taking with it my clumsiness. As they cradled me between them I felt beautiful and sexy and so loved that a tear cruised down my cheek.

"We love you, Juliana," Marco said, curling his hand around my thigh as Neal kissed away the tear. "Come with us now."

I went with them, and they took me together, merging and blending and tightening until we weren't two men and one woman but a single thunderous heart, beating in time to the cadence of our bodies, moving in unison, in a triangle dance of pleasure and satisfaction and love.

A tre vie.

#

Alex Keller came to Volare a week later to examine me. Once she checked my fangs and took a vial of blood, she informed me that I'd made it through the final stage of transition and was now a full-fledged Darkyn female.

“I’m glad you decided to stay with Marco,” she said as she packed up her medical case. “I was worried that he had already established something of a bond, and anyone else might have caused a conflict with it. I’ve been torn between bonds with two guys, and what it does to you is not pretty.”

I thought of the coming night, my two lovers, and all the hours of pleasure we would share. “Unless you stop fighting it.”

I brought her to the courtyard to share a bottle of bloodwine with me while we watched the lights from the boats sailing across the bay. “Are you going to see Lucan again before you leave town?”

“I can’t avoid it,” she grumbled. “He wants to know all the details of how you made out.”

I considered giving her some of the details, and chuckled. “You can tell him that he was right, and I’m very grateful for his advice.”

“That’s a first.” Alex looked up as Neal joined us. “Hi, there.”

“Good evening, Lady Alexandra.” Neal took off his lab coat before bending over to kiss me. “How’s my girl?”

“On a scale of one to ten, a fourteen,” I advised him. We both looked over as Marco came into the courtyard from the opposite direction. “Someone else overslept, though, and missed seeing the yacht parade at sunset.”

“I am six hundred years older than you. I need more rest.” Marco bowed to Alex before he kissed me and then Neal. “I hope your stay in south Florida was an interesting one, Lady Alexandra.”

Alex grinned. “Never a dull moment around here.”

About the Author



Since 2000, Lynn Viehl has published thirty-eight novels in five genres. On the internet, she hosts [Paperback Writer](#), a popular publishing industry weblog which she updates daily. Lynn's StarDoc science fiction series has been a genre bestseller for seven consecutive years. Lynn's first three novels of the Darkyn, *If Angels Burn*, *Private Demon* and *Dark Need* all made the USA Today bestseller list, and her fourth Darkyn novel, *Night Lost*, debuted in May 2007 at #21 on the New York Times extended bestseller list.

Readers are always welcome to send feedback on this free e-story by e-mail to LynnViehl@aol.com.

Note to Readers

If you've enjoyed this free e-story, please let other people know about it, as word of mouth is the best advertising a writer *can't* buy. Also, if you're interested in reading other books I've written, here's my public bibliography:

Science Fiction (*writing as S.L. Viehl*)

StarDoc SF series:

StarDoc January 2000 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451457730
Beyond Varallan July 2000 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451457935
Endurance January 2001 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451458141
Shockball August 2001 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451458559
Eternity Row September 2002 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451458915
Rebel Ice January 2006 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451460626
Plague of Memory January 2007 Roc SF/F ISBN#9780451461230
Omega Games to be published August 2008 Roc SF/F
Crystal Healer to be published in mid-2009 Roc SF/F

Other SF novels:

Blade Dancer August 2003 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451459261
Ring of Fire (Anthology; short story: A Matter of Consultation)
 January 2004 BAEN ISBN# 074347175X
Bio Rescue August 2004 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451459784
Afterburn August 5, 2005 Roc SF/F ISBN# 0451460294

Romance (*writing as Gena Hale*)

Paradise Island April 2001 ONYX ISBN# 0451409825
Dream Mountain August 2001 ONYX ISBN# 0451410033
Sun Valley June 2002 ONYX ISBN# 0451410394

Romance (*writing as Jessica Hall*)

The Deepest Edge February 2003 ONYX ISBN# 0451207963
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Twilight Fall to be published in Fall 2008 Signet Eclipse

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And the other stories of Juliana, Neal and Shamaras:

[Worthy](#) (first story, online; .pdf format version also available by clicking [here](#))

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Lynn Viehl