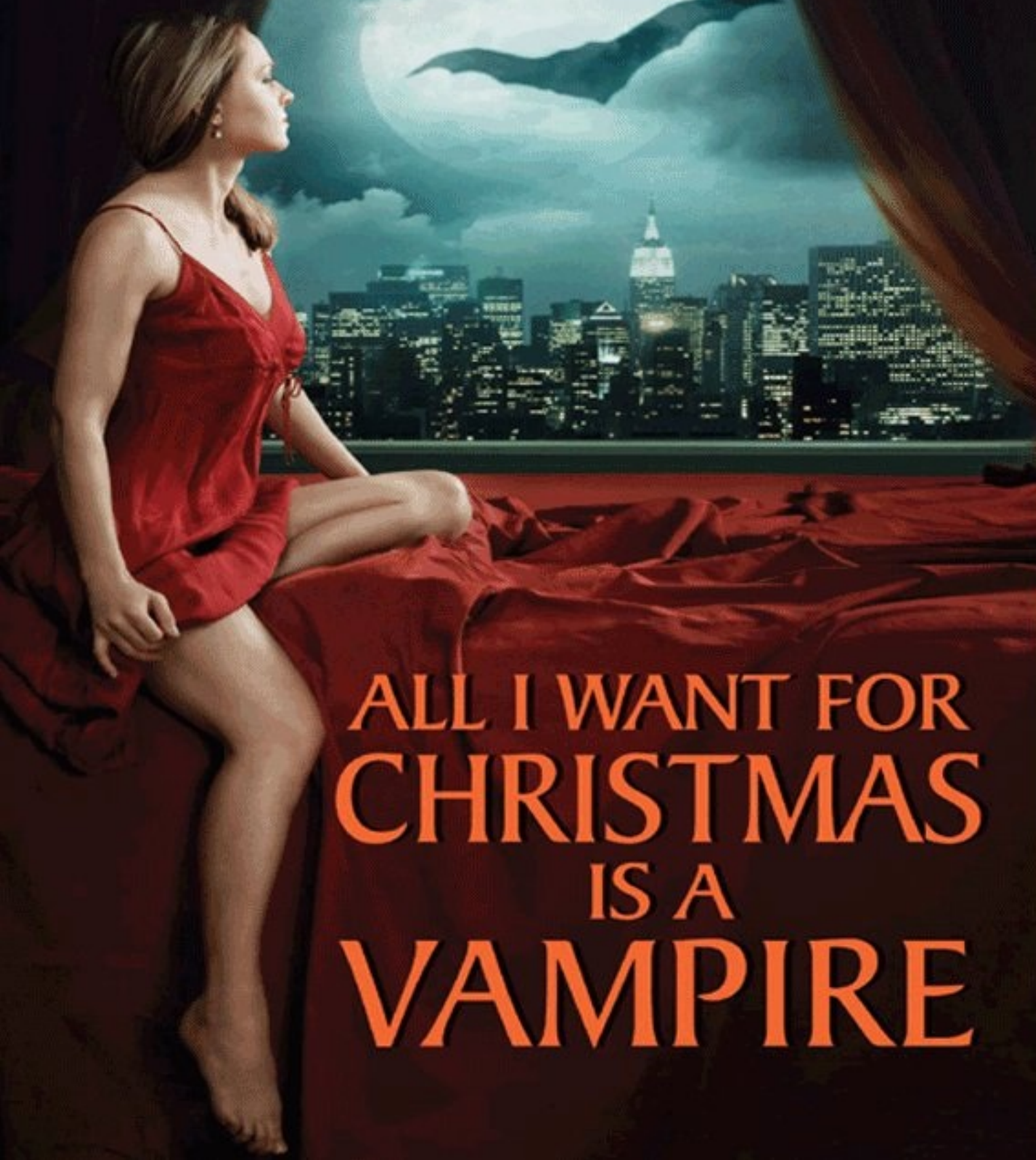


NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

KERRELYN SPARKS



ALL I WANT FOR
CHRISTMAS
IS A
VAMPIRE

Kerrelyn Sparks

All I Want for Christmas Is a Vampire

 HarperCollins e-books

*This one is for everyone who reads
the Love at Stake books,
and the booksellers who sell them.
May your love never be at stake!*

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Chapter One

The air hummed with bass guitar and rampant lust. He'd come to the right place.

Ian MacPhie strode across the renovated warehouse, his steps falling into rhythm with the pounding drums. The Horny Devils was the best place he could think of for finding a woman. The nightclub was teeming with them. All lovely and all Vamps.

Bright red and blue laser lights zipped here and there, highlighting the ladies' scantily dressed, bouncing bodies as they danced close to the stage. They surged in time with the pounding music like wild sea at high tide, and he was sucked toward them in a greedy undertow.

One of the red lights zoomed past him, flashing in his face and blinding him for a few seconds. A burst of panic shot through him. What if none of these ladies found him attractive? What if he'd suffered twelve days of agonizing pain to look older and...ugly?

As a Vamp he couldn't see his new face in a mirror. He'd appeared in a few digital photos at Jean-Luc's wedding, or he thought he had. He hadn't recognized the strange man in the pictures. Heather had assured him he looked good, but she'd been such a happy bride, she'd thought everything was beautiful that day.

As Ian's vision readjusted, he realized his moment of panic didn't matter. None of the ladies were looking at him. They all faced the stage, their gazes riveted on the male dancer who strutted down the runway with an Indian warbonnet on his head. The war paint on his hairless chest depicted an arrow that pointed south where a bunch of strategically placed eagle feathers hid his wampum.

Ian took a deep breath and assessed the situation. True, the ladies hadn't noticed him, but he hadn't really tried to get their attention yet. These lassies were certainly in a lusty mood, so his chances were good. Time to put his new face to the test.

He eased into the crowd. Now what should he say? Jean-Luc had successfully courted Heather using charm and wit. He'd give that a try. "Good evening, ladies."

The roar of the music was so loud, only two lady Vamps heard him. They turned their heads and boldly inspected him.

"Not bad," one of them yelled at the other.

Ian gave them what he hoped was a charming smile, though it faltered a bit when he noticed the second girl was wearing black lipstick. He supposed the modern lassies considered that attractive, but

it gave him flashbacks of the bubonic plague.

“Nice kilt,” the black-lipped girl yelled. “Cute knees.”

“Aren’t you a dancer?” the first girl shouted.

“Nay. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Ian Mac—”

“Oh, I thought your kilt was a costume!” The first girl laughed. “Do you seriously dress like that?”

The black-lipped girl joined in on the laughter.

“We need to see more than your cute knees!”

Ian hesitated. He needed a witty, charming response. “I’m sure that could be arranged.”

Unfortunately, his attempt at flirtatious banter went unnoticed. A sudden surge of high-pitched screams distracted the two girls, and they turned back to the stage. Feathers were flying, and the crowd of women bounced up and down, determined to catch a feathered souvenir.

“Begging yer pardon.” Ian tried to regain the two girls’ attention. “Could I buy you a drink?”

“That one’s mine!” The black-lipped girl shoved the other girl to the side so she could nab a feather.

Ian stepped back, dismayed at how the ladies were pushing each other. He glanced at the stage and gulped. By all the saints, the women had plucked the dancer like a chicken. These modern lassies were more aggressive than he’d realized. When it came to finding his mate, he had assumed he would do the hunting.

Ian moved back to keep from getting jostled by the frantic feather-grabbing women. Perhaps it was a matter of timing. Aye, timing was very important when hunting prey. He would sit back and wait for the right moment. Sooner or later, the dancers would have to take a break, and maybe then the ladies would be more easily impressed.

And while he waited, he’d fortify his nerves with a stiff drink. He strode toward the bar. He had all figured out. He was searching for a girl who was honest, loyal, pretty, and intelligent. In that order. And of course she would need to be madly in love with him.

That last part was a little tricky. How did he go about making the perfect girl fall in love with him? He doubted his alleged cute knees would be enough.

The female bartender had a phone to one ear and her hand pressed to the other to muffle the loud music. “Sure, I’ll keep talking. So you’re from California? Land sakes, that’s far away.”

Two young ladies materialized beside her. They’d used the sound of the bartender’s voice as a beacon to help them teleport to the right location.

“Welcome to the Horny Devils.” The bartender smiled as she hung up her phone. “What would you like to drink?”

“Two Blood Lites,” one of the California girls ordered. She snapped her sparkly rhinestone-covered cell phone shut, then dropped it into her shiny handbag.

The second girl pointed toward the stage. “Oh my God, he’s so hot!”

The girls forgot all about their drinks as they scampered toward the stage.

Ian lifted a hand in greeting. “Good evening, ladies.”

They passed him by, their gazes glued to the dancing Indian, who was down to his last two feathers.

Ian sighed. What was the world coming to when a man with honorable intentions had to compete with a male stripper? How could he impress these modern lassies? Maybe Vanda could advise him. With her purple spiky hair and spandex clothing, she’d become a very modern woman. And a very successful one since Vamps were teleporting from the West Coast to come to her club.

Ian settled on a stool at the bar and received a bright smile from the bartender. Miss Cora Lee Primrose no longer wore hoop skirts and her blonde hair in ringlets, but she still sounded like a Southern belle from the Civil War.

“Hey there,” she greeted him. “How’d you like to try the latest thing in Fusion Cuisine?”

“There’s something new?” He’d been away for too long.

“Yep. It’s called Bleer. Synthetic blood mixed with—”

“Beer?”

Cora Lee looked disappointed. “You’ve already had it?”

“Nay. Lucky guess. I’ll take a glass.” Ian removed a fiver from his sporran and set it on the counter while she filled a glass with amber liquid. The aroma of blood and yeast made his mouth water. By all the saints, it had been centuries since he’d tasted beer.

“Here you go.” Cora Lee set the glass in front of him.

He took a long drink, then licked the reddish foam off his lips. “Excellent.”

She grinned. “Glad you like it. Are you new in town?”

Bloody hell. He had thought her initial smile meant she recognized him, but she hadn’t. He took another gulp of Bleer to ease the sting. Cora Lee had been in Roman’s harem for fifty years, living in the same house where Ian lived and worked as a guard. Had he changed that much?

“It’s me, Ian.”

Her blue eyes widened. “Ian?”

“Aye. Ian MacPhie.”

“You can’t be Ian. He’s just a young’un.”

He glowered at his glass of Bleer. It was a wonder he hadn’t gone crazy from being treated like a child for five centuries. “Ye used to ask me to help tighten yer corset. Ye must have thought I was too young to be eyeing the curve of yer hips or the way the corset pushed yer breasts—”

“Why, I never!” Cora Lee stepped back.

“Nay, no’ with me, that’s for certain.”

She huffed. “I would never bed a child.”

“I’m three hundred years older than you,” he growled.

She tilted her head to study him. “I do declare, your eyes bear a remarkable resemblance to Ian’s.”

“That could be because I *am* Ian.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure. Who else would I be?”

She gave him a suspicious look. “It’s just that...I don’t recall you being so...”

“Charming?”

“Grumpy.” She sighed. “Ian was such a well-mannered and friendly boy. I was quite fond of him, really.”

“Bloody hell, I dinna die. I just look twelve years older now.”

“Land sakes. How did you do that?”

Ian hesitated. Roman’s Stay-Awake drug was best kept a secret. “It was something I...ate. In Texas.”

“Something you *ate*? You *wanted* to look older?”

“Aye.”

“But why would you do something so awful?”

He gritted his teeth. Being trapped for centuries with a fifteen-year-old face had been a living hell. If Cora Lee couldn’t figure that out, well, he didn’t feel obliged to explain. “Maybe I just want to get laid.”

She huffed. “And you were such a nice young boy.”

“Aye.” He gulped down the last of his Bleer.

Cora Lee studied him, frowning. “If you got what you wanted, then why are you so grumpy?”

“I’m no’ grumpy!”

Her eyes suddenly widened. “Oh, I get it. You haven’t gotten laid yet. Maybe I can help.”

Bloody hell, he could do his own hunting. He noticed the music’s volume had decreased. The Indian dancer had left the stage, and the female natives were restless. He needed advice quick. “Is Vanda here? I need to see her.”

“Just a minute.” Cora Lee rushed to a table where a lady Vamp sat, chatting with a few male customers. “Pamela! You’ll never guess who that fella is over there.”

Was Cora Lee trying to set him up with Lady Pamela Smythe-Worthing? No. Hell, no. The Regency-era viscount-ess from Britain had also been in Roman’s harem, and she’d spent fifty years sneering down her nose at him.

Lady Pamela stood and examined him. Her frilly Regency gown was gone. She’d completely embraced the modern age with a red miniskirt and black leather camisole.

“Oh dear, look at that shabby old kilt.” Lady Pamela’s snooty accent was still the same. “He must be another barbarian from Scotland. Doesn’t anyone from that dreadful country die a natural death anymore?”

Ian arched a brow. She had to know he could hear her.

Cora Lee grinned. “Pamela, that’s Ian!”

Pamela’s eyes widened. “Surely you jest. I shall be quite overset if you’re toying with me.”

“It is Ian,” Cora Lee insisted. “He grew a bunch.”

“He certainly did.” Pamela’s gaze raked over him. “I must say, this brings to mind a question of the utmost importance.”

“You mean how did it happen?” Cora Lee guessed. “He told me it was something he—”

“No.” Pamela waved a dismissive hand. “The question is”—she leaned close to Cora Lee—“is he a virgin?”

“Land sakes!” Cora Lee giggled. “He did say he wants to get laid.”

“Hmm.” Pamela tapped a finger against her cheek as she considered. “A five-hundred-year-old virgin. This could be interesting.”

Bugger. Leave it to Lady Pamela to make him feel like a circus freak. Ian turned his back to her and strode toward Vanda's office.

"Whoa there!" Cora Lee zipped over at vampire speed and blocked the door. "Vanda gets all riled up if we interrupt her while she's busy."

"Indeed." Lady Pamela sauntered over. "Vanda is the brains behind this business." She smoothed back her long blonde hair. "We're the beauty."

"We sure are." Cora Lee fluttered her eyelashes.

"Congratulations," Ian grumbled. Did the two ladies realize they'd just admitted to being brainless? He silently raised the attribute of intelligence on his wish list from number four to number three.

Cora Lee cracked the door and peeked in. "Woohoo, Vanda! There's someone here to see you."

"It had better be a sexy new dancer," Vanda growled. "Business is down this month."

"I say, capital idea!" Pamela gave Ian a sly grin.

He strode into the office.

Vanda glanced away from her computer screen. "Nice costume. Let's see what you've got under the kilt."

"Oh goody!" Cora Lee clapped her hands together.

"Indeed." Pamela shut the door behind them.

"I'm no' exposing myself." Ian crossed his arms, frowning. "And this is no' a costume."

"Oh, the girls will love that accent." Vanda stood as she looked him over. She was wearing her usual purple catsuit with a black whip around the waist. "You'll need a plaid thong to match your kilt."

"With a red tassel on the end," Cora Lee added.

"Smashing," Pamela murmured.

"Could you make the tassel twirl?" Vanda circled a forefinger in the air.

What the hell? Ian stepped toward her. "Vanda—"

"Come now, we're embarrassing the poor chap." Pamela sidled up to Vanda and whispered, "We think he's a virgin."

He glared at them. "Vanda, do ye no' recognize me?"

She smirked. “Honey, if I’d met you before, you wouldn’t be a virgin.”

Pamela laughed. “Now which one of us will have the honor of deflowering him?”

“We could draw straws,” Cora Lee suggested.

“I’m no’ sleeping with any of you,” Ian growled. “Vanda, it’s me, Ian.”

“What?” Vanda blinked, then she narrowed her eyes. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Bloody hell.” He ran a hand through his long hair and accidentally pulled a strand loose from the tied leather strip in the back. “I thought ye might cut my hair like ye used to. And I—I need to talk.”

“Ian?” Vanda walked up to him, looking at him closely. “It’s really you? What happened?”

“I know!” Cora Lee waved a hand in the air. “He ate something.”

“You *ate* something?” Vanda gave him a dubious look.

“He could eat me,” Lady Pamela murmured, casting him a seductive look from under her eyelashes.

Cora Lee pressed her fingers to her mouth and giggled.

“I canna say more on the matter.” Ian motioned with his head toward Cora Lee and Lady Pamela. A secret would never be safe with them.

Vanda nodded slowly, then glanced at the two blondes. “You two check on the customers.”

“Humph. You just want the virgin to yourself.” Lady Pamela strolled from the room, followed by Cora Lee.

Vanda shut the door, then walked back to Ian with a grin spreading across her face. “I can’t believe it! You’re all grown up.” She hugged him. They had once been close in height, but now the top of her head reached his chin. “What on earth did you eat that made you grow older?”

“Doona repeat this, but I drank Roman’s Stay-Awake drug. I took it twelve days, so I aged twelve years.”

Her eyes narrowed. “But you’re so much bigger and taller...it must have hurt.”

It had. He shrugged. “My hair grew a lot, too. I thought it might need cutting.”

She pulled the leather thong free from his ponytail and stood back to study him. “I don’t think the short curls suit you anymore. You have a rugged look to you now.”

Rugged? As in mountainous terrain? No wonder he was having such a hard time shaving. There’d always been a small dent in his chin, but now it felt more like a bloody crater. Actually, it was bloody.

half the time. Shaving without a mirror was damned hard.

“I like your hair long.” Vanda circled her desk and retrieved a pair of scissors from the top drawer. “But it’s a little ragged on the ends, so I’ll give you a trim.”

“Thank you.” Ian sat in a chair facing her desk.

Vanda fetched a hairbrush from her handbag and went to work easing out the tangles. Ian closed his eyes, enjoying her familiar touch. She’d cut his hair for the last fifty years, and in that time, he’d confided more to her than anyone else. Even Connor and Angus.

He couldn’t tell another man how frustrated he had been. Connor was his immediate supervisor, and a tough guy who would have interpreted his frustration as childish whining. Angus MacKay was the head of MacKay Security and Investigation and Ian’s boss. He was also the one who’d saved Ian from certain death by transforming him in 1542. But Angus had struggled with guilt for trapping him with the body and face of a fifteen-year-old. Nay, he could never let Angus know how unhappy he’d been. But Vanda had understood and kept his secrets.

The scissors snipped. “When did you get back in town?” she asked.

“Tonight.”

“You teleported here from Texas?”

“Nay. I was in Scotland.”

“Oh.” She continued cutting. “The last I’d heard you were in Texas, guarding Jean-Luc.”

“I was. Last summer.”

The snipping sound ceased for a moment. “I heard Phil was there, too.”

“Aye.” Was Vanda interested in Phil? He’d been the daytime guard at Roman’s townhouse where the harem lived there. As far as Ian knew, Phil had kept his distance from the ladies. It was one of Angus’s cardinal rules. A guard never ever became involved with his charges.

Vanda went back to cutting. “So how is Phil?”

“Fine.” Ian wondered if she knew about Phil’s secret.

“Is he coming back to New York?”

“Eventually. He’s training someone to be Jean-Luc’s new daytime guard.” Meanwhile, Connor had hired a new mortal guard, Tony, to live at the townhouse while they waited for Phil to return. Ian hadn’t met him yet, but he wondered if Tony was a shape shifter, too.

“What were you doing in Scotland?” Vanda asked.

“Nothing much. After all the growing I did, Angus insisted I take a few months off to...recover.”

“Then it was painful.” She leaned over his shoulder to look at him. “Are you all right now?”

“Aye.” That wasn’t quite true. Growing five inches in less than a fortnight had taken some adjustment. He’d had to drink huge amounts of synthetic blood to fill out his bigger body. While in the Highlands, he’d had some major repairs done on his small castle. He’d helped with the construction work at night, and the result had added some muscle to his bigger frame. But still, he tripped over his huge feet and cut his new face when shaving, especially around that damned crater in his chin. “I’m fine.”

With a dubious snort, she resumed cutting. “How was Scotland?”

“Fine.” He was always elated when he first arrived in the Highlands, for it was home and it filled his soul with peace. But after a few nights, he would always realize that every mortal he knew from his past was dead. And then the loneliness would set in.

Vanda sighed. “I get the feeling there’s a lot you’re not saying. I thought you wanted to talk.”

“I am talking.”

“I don’t have all night like I used to. I have a business to run.”

He paused, listening to the clicking sound of her scissors. How could he just come out and say that he wanted to find true love and be blissfully happy in a marriage that would span the centuries, and yet he wasn’t sure how to go about it? “How is yer business?”

“*Fine.*” She tossed her scissors on the desk and brushed out his hair with more force than necessary. “Are you going to talk, or do I need to take my whip to you?”

He grinned. Vanda liked to act tough, but she was all bluster and no bite. “All right. I’ll talk. With my new, older face, I’ve been thinking...”

“Amazing. Did your brain grow, too?”

“Verra funny. I came here tonight because I’m looking for...” He couldn’t say the words *a woman*. Vanda would probably laugh at him. “I have a crater in my chin.”

She laughed at him. “It’s a dimple.” She tilted her head, studying him. “Are you worried about your looks?”

“No, of course not.” He shifted in his chair.

She perched on the edge of her desk. “No one has told you how you look?”

“Men doona speak of such trivial matters. Jean-Luc’s new wife said I looked...good.”

Vanda snorted.

Bugger. He knew Heather had been lying.

Vanda shook her head. “Good is a huge understatement. You’re absolutely gorgeous.”

A seed of hope burst in Ian’s heart. Maybe the right woman could fall for him. “Ye—ye’re no’ just being kind?”

“Have you ever known me to be particularly kind?”

“Ye have been to me.”

“Well.” She adjusted the whip around her waist with an annoyed look. “You remind me of my youngest brother. But I guess I can’t treat you like a child anymore.”

“Sorry to spoil yer fun,” he growled.

She grinned. “I’m really happy for you, Ian. You must be thrilled to be all grown up.”

“Aye.” He drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair.

Her smile faded. “You don’t look very thrilled. What’s the matter?”

“Now that I look older...I’m looking for...”

“Yes?”

“A woman.”

Her mouth twitched. “Well, that’s a start.” Her eyes suddenly widened. “Oh my God, you really are a virgin?”

“Nay! I’m almost five hundred years old. What the hell would I be waiting for?”

“Lady Pamela thinks you are. You didn’t deny it.”

“It’s no’ something a man should discuss in public. It’s verra private.”

Vanda chuckled. “You’re so old-fashioned. Sex isn’t something to be ashamed of.”

“I’m no’—” He couldn’t deny it. By all the saints, he was ashamed. “It’s no’ the sex, ye ken. It’s the way I had to go about it. It—it never felt right.”

Vanda’s face grew serious. “We’ve all done things we regret in order to survive.”

“This was more than regrettable. I dinna behave with honor.” He’d never confessed this to anyone before.

“What did you do?”

He gathered his shoulder-length hair in the back and tied the leather thong around it. “After Angus changed me, he told me how to go about feeding. In exchange for blood, I was to give the ladies pleasure and make sure they were satisfied.”

Vanda sucked in a deep breath. “Sounds good to me.”

Ian looked away, embarrassed. “I dinna know now. I was only fifteen, ye ken, so I frequented some brothels at first so I could learn. I—I was a quick learner.”

“That’s not so awful.”

“It *was* awful once I stopped going to brothels. I had trouble seducing the ladies when they thought I was a child. I was getting verra hungry, so I resorted to using mind control to make them see me as older. I left them happy, but...”

“You felt guilty?”

Ian clasped his hands together. “Aye. I deceived them. Every relationship I have ever had was based on trickery and deception. I canna stomach doing that again.”

“I see.”

He sat up. “Now, for the first time in my life, I can be honest. I can finally find the right woman for me.”

Vanda smiled. “Then you’ve come to the right place. With your handsome face, you’ll have no problem getting lucky tonight.”

“I’m no’ looking for one night. I’ve had centuries of one-nighters. I want to find my true love. I want the same kind of happiness that Roman, Angus, and Jean-Luc have.”

Vanda’s smile turned into a grimace. “Then you’ve come to the wrong place. The ladies who come here aren’t usually interested in commitment.”

Ian slouched against the back of his chair. “Then how can I find her?”

“Maybe I can help.” Vanda eased off the desk. “I was thinking about finding a nice guy for myself, so I joined a site online.” She sat behind her desk, grabbed the mouse, and clicked. “This is the hottest new place for singles.”

Ian leaned over the desk so he could see the computer screen. He scanned the site called *Single in the City*. It boasted more than half a million clients, all in the vicinity of New York. “That willna work for me. I canna date a mortal.”

“Why not?”

“I told you. I refuse to deceive the woman I’m courting. I would have to lie to a mortal until I knew she could be trusted. And then, when I confessed my true nature, it would destroy her trust in me. It wouldna work.”

“I disagree. It worked for Roman and Shanna.”

“He was no’ courting her from the start. He just wanted a dentist. Their romance happened

accidentally. And believe me, she was verra upset when she found out the truth.”

Vanda shrugged. “She got over it.”

“I willna lie to the woman I’m courting. So she had better be a Vamp. A Vamp would understand all I’ve been through. A mortal woman would no’ take kindly to the way I used other women in the past. And I wouldna blame her.”

“If she loved you, she would understand.”

“My mind is made up. All I want is a vampire.”

Vanda sighed. “Okay, but I think you’re limiting yourself.”

“And she must be a bottle-drinking Vamp who is honest, loyal, intelligent, and pretty.”

“Now you’re severely limiting yourself.” Vanda frowned at the computer screen. “Luckily for you, there’s a way to tell who’s a Vamp.” She clicked on her profile. “See this?”

Ian read the line she pointed at.

I enjoy life to its fullest. (V)

“All the Vamps slip these Vs into their profiles,” Vanda explained. “It’s our secret code to let each other know who we are. If someone asks to meet you, and she doesn’t have the V in her profile, you simply refuse.”

Ian’s heart beat faster. This was not how he’d envisioned hunting for his true love, but it was a lot better than nothing. “It might actually work.”

“Of course it’ll work. I have a digital camera here.” Vanda opened a drawer. “We’ll take your photo and fill out your profile. It’ll take a few hours.”

“Hours?”

“The profile is quite extensive. You’ll have to write an essay.” Her face brightened. “I know! I’ll do it.”

“You? Why?”

“Because I’m a woman, and I know what women want to hear. This is brilliant!” She grabbed a pen and notepad.

Her offer was very appealing since Ian had no idea what he should write in an essay. “Remember, it is important to me that ye be honest.”

“Of course. But get real, Ian. We can’t say you’re five hundred years old in your profile.”

“I’m four hundred and eighty.”

She tapped the pen on the paper, waiting.

“Fine.” He groaned. “Ye can say I’m twenty-seven.”

“Great.” She wrote the number down. “And how tall are you now?”

“Six foot two.” He frowned. “Be sure to say I want an honest and loyal woman. Intelligent and pretty, too.”

“No problem. Now smile and show me those dimples.” She lifted the camera. “And don’t worry about a thing. I’m going to make you irresistible.”

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