

# Lover's Thrall



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Cover art by Amanda Young

**WARNING:**

The following material contains graphic sexual content, explicit language, hot manlove, and is meant for mature readers.

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## Lover's Thrall

Samuel closed his eyes to catch a moment's peace in the hospital's break room before he had to head back to the overly-busy emergency room. He'd run out of coffee and blood in the same day, making him one very cranky vampire. If it weren't for the fact that he'd just celebrated his one hundred and seventy eighth birthday recently, he'd think he was a new fledgling fresh out of med school. At least he'd been able to handle the residency process. Being over a hundred and fifty when you did rotations allowed some tolerance to sunlight and not needing any food or sleep.

"Dr. Wexford to emergency. Dr. Wexford to emergency," Ken, one of the latest crop of residents, said over the intercom.

Ken doll. Samuel smiled as he downed the rest of the hospital's god awful coffee and tossed the empty cup into the trash. It made a perfect arc and sailed neatly into the center of the receptacle. With his surfer spiky blonde hair and eyes the color of the ocean outside his the view from his remote home, Ken looked like the proverbial childhood toy. And boy would Samuel like to play with him. He shook his head to clear the thought as he hurried from the break room and down to whatever the latest crisis was. Tonight was his last night before a two week vacation.

He followed the sound of commotion into one of the bays and stopped. His blood ran cold. The mortal on the table looked heart-stoppingly familiar, and for once Samuel was thankful that his heart didn't beat. Blood caked the man's midnight dark hair to his forehead. A gash ran along the outside of his left eye. An air splint held his right arm, and Samuel bet he'd see bruising on the man's chest from a steering wheel.

"Car accident. He rear ended a truck on the Pacific Coast Highway, just past the turn off to Malibu Canyon Rd. Apparently the truck thought he saw something on the road and our patient didn't stop quick enough. At least that's what the truck driver said."

Samuel listened with half an ear as he stared down at the man he'd once professed to love until the end of time. "Blake Bothman, the founder of Wirefly International," he said.

"You know him?"

Samuel nodded, his throat too tight to say anything more. He drew a deep breath. Damn it, where was his emotional detachment when he needed it.

Ken laid his hand on Samuel's shoulder. "We'll take good care of him. He'll be just fine. I promise."

Sam looked down at Ken's hand with his neatly manicured fingernails. Such youthful optimism. He'd had it once long ago. "Thank you," he said, and hoped like hell Ken doll was right.

On the table, Blake groaned. "Samuel. Must. Get. To Him."

Samuel surged forward. He touched Blake's shoulder. "I'm here," he said. "You're in the ER. You're going to be all right." He glanced at Ken and saw the resident nod. He grabbed a chart and shoved it in Samuel's free hand. Scanning it, Samuel saw nothing more than a few minor injuries, nothing some rest wouldn't cure.

"Samuel," Blake groaned again. His eyelids fluttered open for a moment. Green eyes connected with dark brown. And then they dipped closed. Blake's moment of consciousness had passed.

"Damn." Forcing himself to ignore the surge of fear, Samuel lifted his head to meet the gaze of the nurse standing on the other side of the stretcher. "Let's get a head CT."

Nodding, the nurse trotted off to call radiology. Samuel stared at Blake's face. Once, he'd called Blake his own. Thought they'd be together for years, decades. He'd even considered giving Blake the Gift, so they could be together forever. But that was years ago. Before everything changed. Before Blake left and took Samuel's poor undead heart with him.

Blake would no doubt say Samuel had driven him away. These days, Samuel tended to agree.

Samuel shook himself. This was no time for wallowing in his regrets. He touched Blake's bloodied cheek. "I'll be back, sweetness," he whispered. "When you wake up, we'll talk."

Straightening up, Samuel turned to leave and ran smack into Ken doll. "Oops. Sorry."

"No problem." Ken curled a hand around Samuel's upper arm when he tried to brush past. Those pretty ocean-colored eyes radiated concern. "You sure you're okay?"

Samuel forced a smile. "Yeah, I'm fine. Blake's... an old friend. It sort of threw me for a loop, seeing him here after all this time." He glanced over his shoulder, not quite looking at Blake's too-still form. "Especially like this."

Ken's eyes narrowed. Samuel could practically see the wheels turning. Ken was smart and perceptive. The way he could read people was just scary sometimes. If Samuel stayed there one second longer, he knew Ken would figure out what Blake had once been to him. From there, it would be nothing for the kid to see just how much Samuel wanted Blake back.

Ken moved closer. "Sam..."

"I'm fine. Really. Um, thanks."

Twisting loose of Ken's grip, Samuel strode away with his gaze firmly fixed on the white tile floor.

"Samuel..." Ken called after him, the sound of his feet slapping against the hospital corridor in an effort to catch up. "Sam, wait."

Sam dodged into the men's room, hoping Ken would take the hint and realize he didn't want to talk, not about Blake, not about their own fledging relationship -- if one could call two months of frantic, sweaty sex during their few shared off hours a relationship. Ken was adorable, with a mouth that could suck the chrome off a bumper, but Sam couldn't see it ever being more than that. Ken was too young, too perky, too...everything. He was like a tiny dog nipping at Sam's heels, and right then, Sam couldn't take it. He needed a moment of peace to figure out why Blake was back. Why Blake was here, in his town, when the man had been overseas for the better part of the last decade.

Ken walked through the swinging door, spotted Sam standing by the sinks, and smiled as he headed toward him. "Hey, I thought you might want to talk. I couldn't help but notice the way you were shaking."

Fuck. Sam ran a hand over the bristle on his jaw. "Yeah, well, there's nothing to talk about. I just needed to splash some water on my face. It's going to be a long night."

Ken walked up behind Sam and laid his hands on Sam's shoulders, giving them a squeeze. "Are you sure? You know I'm here for you, right? I know you want to keep things casual, but I care about you, Sam. There isn't anything you can't tell me."

Sam white-knuckled the cool ceramic edge of the sink and closed his eyes, relishing the feel of Ken's hands massaging the tension out of his muscles. "I know. I feel the same way, but there really isn't anything to talk about. Blake is an old friend; there isn't anything else to say until I know more about his condition."

"Sure." Ken pressed his chest to Sam's back and brushed a gentle kiss against the nape of his neck. "You must be worried sick."

"I am," Sam said, leaving out why he was worried. He wished it was over something as simple as Blake's health. His old lover would recover, and quickly. His immune system would allow nothing else. It was what would happen once Blake regained consciousness that Sam feared.

Their relationship has been a volatile one at the best of times; the thin line between love and hate so blurred it was almost nonexistent. While it was true that their passion had risen to beyond the heights of normalcy, so too had their fights. When they hadn't been ripping each other's clothes off, they'd literally been at each other's throats in anger.

Their love had been anything but healthy. In the end, love hadn't been enough. He'd left, too afraid of what they would do to each other if he'd stayed another night.

Now, almost ten years to the day Sam had ended things, Blake had finally tracked him down. God help him if Blake wanted him back, because regardless of what he had going with Ken, Sam wasn't sure if he'd be able to resist Blake once he turned on the charm.

Samuel was working a double. The buzz of the tungsten, the stench of detergent and the waiting room malaise all blurred together. Only Ken's concerned glances provided flashes of lucidity. Their eyes would meet and Samuel felt himself pulled back into this life he was trying to make for himself here. This was what he had wanted, after all, a normal life. Work, sex, blood each tidily in their place and free of the drama he had become so tired of.

He checked in on Blake when a moment presented itself, in between the usual stream of drunken idiots, persistent hypochondriacs, panicked parents and addicts hoping to trick exhausted residents into writing them prescriptions. Ken watched as he slipped in and out, and must have known where he was going. Blake lay still, shadowed eyes restless with twitching lids like he never stopped dreaming. Light from the doorway glanced over his prone body, every angle and line so beguilingly familiar. Samuel didn't go past the doorway but he felt the pull of the man. A pull he hoped, with the fatalistic hope of an autumn leaf, not to succumb to.

Hurrying back to admissions Samuel heard a whisper of sound down a side corridor. Too soft to make out the words but resonating with the patina of long life, and the blood of others. Without a thought Samuel went towards the voice. His weariness dropped away, this was *his* place. And even if he did not hunt here he would not tolerate the encroachment of another. Outrage spiked even higher when he saw a small lithe figure leaning towards another man, all but pressing him against the wall.

Even as they kissed he saw the taller mortal was Ken, the other—the vampire—he did not know. Rage swirled through Samuel, but his blood was thin and starved. He could not sustain the strength of the emotion. As he drew close Samuel saw the swirl of psychic vapor as the vampire drew Ken's essence up from him as casually as inhaling scent from a flower. Ken leaned back against the wall, clearly dazed, hypnotized... and aroused. His eyes were blank and staring. The vampire looked up casually, belligerent. He was a small, dark-eyed, and old. Looking into his eyes was like plunging into icy water. A vampire so old he did not even need to consume the clumsy vehicle of blood.

"I did not realize this little *amuse-bouche* was yours," the elder said archly looking Samuel up and down. "I would have thought you had better... taste. But then, I will know for sure, soon enough."

The elder seemed to step towards him, leaving Ken standing in a daze. But in a wintry blur he had gone by and turned to the left, towards Blake's room.

Ken's voice was slurred. "Sam?" he said, confused. He swayed on his feet, almost ready to fall.

With a burst of speed, Sam caught Ken before he hit the floor. Lifting Ken into his arms as easily as he would a child, Sam placed him on a spare gurney. Just as quickly, he ran into the main hall, barking out an order at a passing nurse to go check on Ken. As much as he liked Ken and didn't want anything to happen to him, Sam had to get to Blake.

A hundred images of what he might find in Blake's room flashed before Sam's eyes as he sped down the corridor. However, he found only Blake, unconscious and alive, the machines attached to him still beeping and whirring normally.

There was no sign of the elder vampire, although Sam could feel the vestiges of his great power shimmering in the air. Although the vampire was ancient, he had the face of an angel -- a beautiful young man of no more than 20 years. It was the best disguise a vampire could hope for, and Sam knew he had to be extremely careful not to fall under the elder's sway.

Blake's eyes flickered, and he moaned softly. All thoughts of the ancient one fled Sam's mind as he leaned over his former lover's bed. With another moan, Blake was out again. Sam tenderly brushed Blake's hair back over his forehead and was suddenly blinking back tears.

He hadn't realized just how much he missed him.

It was dangerous, all this damn emotion. He had to get out and get his head together. Without giving a reason, Sam ordered security to guard Blake's room. He ignored the whispers and pointed looks from the nurses' station and hurried to the fourth floor. He really needed to check on Ken, but there was something he had to do first.

Eddie Howell looked up from his *Sports Illustrated* and nodded to Sam. "What's up, doc?" Eddie laughed at his own joke, which he did a lot. "Need some blood?" He smiled, and the overhead lights reflected off his balding head.

*Did he ever.* "Yeah, we're running out of O-neg downstairs." Sam smiled and waved a hand. "No, no, don't get up. I need a break from the ER anyway."

"I tell ya, you're the most helpful doc I've ever met at this hospital." Eddie picked up a donut and offered the box to Sam. "Need a sugar boost?"

Pushing the door to the blood bank open, Sam shook his head. "No thanks, I'm watching what I eat."

Inside the cool interior of the refrigerated room, Sam took a deep, unnecessary breath. His senses tingled in the presence of so much blood when he was so hungry, and he quickly went towards the back corner, opening a glass case and taking out a bag of A-pos. His very favorite. His fangs extended, piercing the thick plastic.



As the sweet, sweet nourishment coursed down his throat, Sam closed his eyes. He was going to enjoy this moment. Then he'd deal with whatever else waited for him in the ER.

The blood went down like water and Sam could feel it spreading out through his long-dead veins and arteries. It brought strength and courage along with it, just like it always had.

Sam drained the bag and deposited it at the very bottom of one of the hospital's waste receptacles, making sure there was plenty of other garbage on top. He washed up, taking care to scrub well, and ran his hands through his hair. His shaking had stopped and a mellow calmness stole over him.

Now, he could deal.

Back out in the hallway, he scanned the immediate area and didn't see anything out of place. He had no idea where the nurse would have taken Ken, so Sam began systematically searching the empty patient rooms before heading back to the busy emergency room.

The last private room on the left was not empty. Ken still lay on the gurney and the young nurse hovered over him, glancing worriedly at the monitor that she'd hooked Ken up to. When Sam entered the room, she looked over.

"Dr. Wexford," she said, doubt in her voice. "I'm not really understanding what I'm seeing here."

Sam knew without a doubt what the nurse was seeing, but he knew she wouldn't understand it. Mortals could never understand it. "It's all right, Cecilia," he said gently. "Why don't you let me take it from here and you can go on back to work. If I need you, I'll call."

She seemed at once glad to return to work and unsure about leaving Ken. "All right. Let me know what I can do." Cecilia turned on her heel and left the dim room, only giving a short glance back over her shoulder.

Sam carefully closed the door and bent over the man in the bed. "Kenny," he whispered, resting a hand on Ken's forehead and brushing hair out of his eyes. "Kenny, wake up and listen to me. I need to talk to you."

For a long moment there wasn't a sound. Ken didn't stir and Sam had to place a hand on his chest to even ensure he was breathing. Panic rose in Sam's throat and he was about to pry open one of Ken's eyelids to check his pupils when Ken's eyes flew open of their own accord.

"Want," Ken growled, his voice deep and low and not at all like normal. "Give. Gimme. Want." He reached up for Sam and seized the lapels of Sam's white coat.

Sam found himself dragged nearly all the way onto the small gurney by strength he didn't know Ken possessed, and then Sam was being kissed and licked and nipped until his own head was reeling.

He was also getting turned on, because this was Ken and Sam always wanted Ken, but somewhere in the back of Sam's mind, he had a feeling that this was all being planned out for him. It was too perfect, they were too isolated and alone and it was way too quiet.

And Sam knew something - or someone - was keeping him from Blake.

He pushed Ken back down to the bed and managed to slide off. "I'm sorry," he said to Ken, feeling true regret. "I promise I'll be back to take care of you. I promise." The guilt over the fact that it was probably too late to take care of Ken raised its niggling head, but Sam ignored it and backed toward the door anyway. "I'm sorry, Kenny."

Sam opened the door and moved as quickly as he dared toward Blake's room.

The security guard posted at the door was still there. The man looked bored. Sam couldn't blame him, it was late. Still, Sam felt as if something was off.

"Has my patient had any visitors?" he asked, hand on the door.

"No, Dr. Wexford. It's been quiet. Who is the man? I mean, are you expecting trouble?"

Sam gave a sigh. "I hope not. Just keep an eye out."

"Yes, sir."

Sam pushed open the door and walked in. All seemed quiet, just as the guard said. Too quiet. He slowly approached Blake's bedside. He smelt nothing, heard nothing, but there was a tingle in the air. That elder vampire had been here since he last left Blake. Not good.

Reaching out, he touched Blake's forehead. "What does he want from you? Why were you looking for me?"

Blake's eyes snapped open causing Sam to gasp.

The eyes were Blake's, but the person behind them wasn't the man Samuel knew. They held a flatness, a coldness that didn't belong to his ex-lover. He recognized it and cursed its demonic origins.

As swiftly as he identified it, it was gone. The vestige vanished and a flash of clarity lit the green depths as Blake's gaze focused on him. "Samuel?"

"Shh." He put a gentle hand on Blake's shoulder, prepared to shift to force to hold him down should the apparition appear within him again. Samuel had a good idea what the momentary trace had been and only hoped Blake's preternaturally strong immune system was defense against more than physical injury. "You need to rest."

"No. No time." Blake shook his head against the pillow, mussing his already disheveled hair.

"It's all right." Samuel held him by both shoulders now, trying to still him, not wanting him to dislodge the bandage that covered the gash along his left temple. Even as quickly as Blake healed, the wound was still fresh enough to open up again.

Blake was stubborn even in his weakened state. "No. I have to warn you."

Samuel shushed him again. "Don't worry. I'm here now. You're safe." Blake was growing agitated and the last thing they needed right now was for the machines to pick it up. Their increased beeping would bring Cecilia or one of the other nurses running to check on the patient. He reached out a hand and adjusted the IV drip that ran into Blake's arm, upping the dose a fraction. His aim was to calm Blake, not send him back under. "Everything's fine."

It was a stupid thing to say for so many reasons and Samuel silently cursed his inanity. An elder vampire was casing Samuel's territory with an eye for the people Samuel cared about. Blake was fighting injuries both physical and spiritual. Ken doll was suffering, possibly dying, from soul-loss. And on top of it all, Blake had always been able to tell when Samuel was lying.

The corner of Blake's lips curled into the smallest of sardonic smiles. Even as Blake's eyes fluttered shut and he drifted back into drugged slumber, Samuel heard him mutter, "You're so full of shit."

Samuel ran a hand through Blake's hair, the dark strands still stiff with dried blood. Each touch brought the acrid scent to his nostrils, a smell like dawn. Like danger.

Like the danger facing two of Samuel's mortals. Even though playing with Ken had never engaged Samuel's quiescent heart, the boy had earned Samuel's protection. Besides, he hated sharing his toys. Since being in two places at once wasn't one of the advantages of his immortal existence, he'd have to use the advantages of his mortal persona if he were to keep them both safe. Sometimes being the head of trauma care was more useful than all his preternatural powers.

He punched the call button and told Cecilia to have Ken moved down to this room. As she agreed, a familiar voice rose behind him.

"Parasite. Carrion-eater."

Blake's voice. Blake's body sitting upright on the gurney, but not Blake. All the extra drug had done was put the mortal to sleep and who—or whatever Samuel had seen looking out of his eyes had taken control.

The blood animating his body responded as Samuel stiffened his spine and tensed his muscles. "Did you have some sort of point or did you just come here to call me names?" He now had no doubt that everything that had happened tonight had been planned, arranged. The demon had put the idea in Blake's head, weakened him with the accident, and sent him straight to Samuel.

"Don't you recognize your old lover, Sam-u-el?" The inflection as the creature spoke his name blew through Samuel's mind, awakening a memory. A memory that had nothing to do with the skin and flesh and voice sitting so still on the gurney.

"You're not Blake."

"No. Guess again." Blake's teasing tone, but a cold bitter layer kept Samuel from responding with a smile. Green eyes looked up through dark lashes. The thing was using Blake to flirt with him. "I'm crushed that you could forget me so easily, when you swore we'd be together. For eternity."

If he weren't already room temperature, Samuel's body would have gone cold. As it was, the fresh blood froze in his veins. "Gregory?"

And in that instant he went back in time. His lover died on the Crimean battlefield in his own hospital tent, and Samuel so desperate, so inexperienced had given him the Gift only to watch it drive Gregory mad. So mad that Samuel had finally had to kill the man he had loved to keep him from destroying so many others, to keep him from exposing them all.

"See? It's only been—oh how to reckon mortal time—a century or so? I never forgot you. Your promises. Your body. Your lovemaking. You were, as your newer conquest here might say, a hell of a fuck. Still are if the memories he holds of you are accurate. Though your tastes have grown—hmmm, exotic?"

"But you're—" Samuel stepped closer.

Those familiar green eyes held no trace of Blake. Just this thing that claimed to be Gregory. Blake's lips curved in a smile, those lips whose satin warmth Samuel could still feel on his mouth, his body, his cock.

"A demon?" Gregory finished for him. "You could say that. Far better than the half-life you offered me. It took me a long time to track you down, lover."

"Why?"

"To help you, of course."

“Help me?”

“Something’s coming, Sam-u-el. Something so big and dark that every horror you’ve seen or imagined in your puny time will seem like one of your drives through Hyde Park in your old mortal body.”

Samuel thought of the ancient one he’d seen, the one who had stolen essence from Ken. “It’s already here.”

“Him?” Blake had never smiled so menacingly. “He does the bidding of what’s coming. His power is nothing to what awaits.”

Samuel sometimes missed the ability to sweat, but not now. He wrapped himself in a calm he didn’t feel. “You’ve delivered your message. Now will you leave him?”

“Eager to have his body again? To bend his mind and will with your promises, those small tastes of power you will allow him before you deny him the Gift again? I know everything your Blake feels, everything he thinks. Would you like to hear more?”

“Leave him alone.”

The com buzzed. “Dr. Wexler? Cecelia is having difficulties with Dr. Dahl. Room 18. Stat.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A sea of sweet tasting death moved about Absolon as he leaned against an antiseptic wall. So impersonal now, these passings of men. No old women to wash the dead. No families holding their beloved’s hand as they sloughed off the world. Death surrounded by machines and strangers. So much better. His wary, hard eyes tracked the man who burst from one room almost taking a nurse to the floor as he careened around the corner. Such haste. Such fear. All over two mortals. How droll. How sweet. How wonderful. Waves of the doctor’s panic rolled over him. For a creature a century and a half old, Samuel wore his humanity like an unneeded but favored garment. Like a fine wine, age refined and developed his flavor. A pain that could be cultivated, savored for ages.

A cough at Absolon’s shoulder barely registered. Gregory’s voice, far more intrusive and irritating, did. “I did as you bid.”

Absolon barely turned his head. “I know.” The unwashed reek of a transient’s clothes and skin hit his senses. Far more subtle, the tang of loneliness...hopelessness swept over Absolon. He opened his mouth and breathed the desperation deep. The muted scent, dampened by Gregory’s own hollow wants, charged through Absolon’s frame.

“Let me go then.” The words of Gregory through another man’s mouth. His desires

trapped in a sickened shell.

For a moment, Absolon toyed with leaving Gregory in the bum's body. Unfortunately, he'd need him later and it would just call attention to Gregory. Still, he had no intention of freeing the spirit. "Why would I do such a thing?"

He whined. "But you promised."

Absolon pushed away from the wall. A non-descript man in hospital scrubs, everything calculated to present as unremarkable. Except for his eyes. "You were a fool," he snorted, "when you were mortal, you were a fool when you were undead, and you still are a fool."

"You have the vampire." Gregory plucked at his sleeve. The dead were such inveterate beggars. "You have others."

"And I have you. Go until I call." Absolon shrugged. "When I need you no more, then you shall have what I promised."

As he walked away, Gregory's fading voice caught him. "What if I don't come?"

"That..." He turned and for a moment the mask dropped away, "would be a mistake."

\* \* \* \* \*

Samuel pounded down the hall, cursing under his breath. Leaving Blake -- no, Gregory; God this was confusing -- alone was a bad idea. But Ken wasn't truly Ken anymore. Samuel had no idea what the boy might do, and Cecilia didn't deserve to suffer for something she had no part in.

He heard Ken's growls and Cecilia's panic-shrill voice before he got to the room. He skidded around the corner just in time to see Ken's big hand close over Cecilia's slender throat.

"Ken, no!" Samuel launched himself across the room, grabbed Ken's arm and wrenched it upward.

Ken's hand clipped Cecilia's chin, sending her sprawling to the floor. She scrambled to her feet and backed out of reach. "God, what's wrong with him?"

Samuel almost smiled at the way Cecilia's voice quavered. It took a lot to shake her up.

Ken's hands clamped onto Samuel's cheeks, holding his head in a vicelike grip. "Want," Ken grunted. "Want. You."

Predictably, Samuel's cock responded. He ignored it and pressed both hands to Ken's chest, trying to push him away. The young man seemed to have gained enormous

strength in the past few minutes. Or maybe Samuel had just never known how strong Ken was.

Something about that made Samuel's chest constrict with regret that he'd never gotten to know Ken as well as he'd wanted to.

After a few moments, Samuel managed to wrestle himself from Ken's grip. "Cecilia, get security," he panted, holding Ken off as best he could. "We need to get him in a locked ward."

Silence.

Ken's arms went unexpectedly limp. His blank eyes stared into the middle distance.

The back of Samuel's neck prickled. He turned slowly.

Cecilia stood still and quiet, staring at a figure in the hallway. Dreading what he might see, Samuel followed her gaze.

When he realized what he was looking at, he groaned aloud. "No. Oh, no."

Sam stared into Blake's fathomless eyes and prayed it was his lover running the larger man's body and not the thing—Gregory—that had been in control earlier. Poor Greg had never been the sharpest crayon, but Sam's guilt-ridden decision to transform his then lover had only made things infinitely worse. He should have killed Gregory when he had the chance, instead of letting him live, and go on to become the ghoul he was today.

None of that mattered now though. What concerned Sam was whether or not he could discreetly find out who he was dealing with, without informing the staff of what they were dealing with. He had too much on his hands to spend the night in a straight jacket, and that was what would surely happen if he started spouting nonsense about vampires, ghouls, and whatever-the-hell-else was lurking around the corner and waiting to take him on the moment his back was turned.

"Blake," Sam said, taking a step toward his ex. "You shouldn't be up, babe. You should be resting."

"Babe?" Blake said, one dark brow arcing. "You know I hate pet names, Samuel."

"I'm sorry." Sam exhaled in relief. He could deal with Blake. "It slipped my mind." He took Blake by the arm and guided him toward a chair sitting directly inside the door. "Sit please. I need to take care of this," he gestured to Ken, "and then we need to talk." If the man was able to walk, then he felt no guilt about putting him on hold while he tended to Ken.

A man could only juggle so many lovers, whether they be ex or current, over the course of one night.

Sam could feel Blake's angry gaze on his back as he rushed to help Cecilia tighten the restraints on Ken's arms and legs, but, thankfully, the man remained silent. He ordered a sedative for Ken, praying it would work and buy him some time, and then found an abandoned wheelchair sitting out in the hall for Blake.

He pushed it inside the room, stopping in front of where Blake sat, and set the brake. "Get in."

"I am not—"

"Shut up," Sam ordered, the last of his patience withering away.

Blake's full lips pursed and stood. He stared at the chair as if the seat was going to bite him in the ass the moment his cheeks pressed against it.

"Thank you. Now sit, please. We need to talk in private, but you're in no shape to be up on your feet."

Sam pushed Blake down the hall, trying to think of somewhere they could talk without being overhead. There really wasn't anywhere they could go and be assured of any privacy, so he chose to head back toward Blake's room. He waited until they were inside, the door closed tight and locked, before letting go of his temper. "All right, big boy, spill your guts. I want to know what's going on and, so help me God, you're going to tell me."

"Or, what? You're going to have a temper tantrum." Blake smirked. "The Samuel I knew and loved knows better than to make a threat he can't back up."

Sam leaned over the chair, his hands fisting the cold metal framing the chair. "I've been threatened, my boyfriend has been attacked and is lying tied to his bed, and I'm fucking exhausted. You have no idea what I'm capable of right now, Blake, so don't fuck with me."

Between one needless breath and the next, Blake exploded out of his chair and had Sam shoved up against the wall. He fisted one long-fingered hand in Sam's hair and jerked his head back, exposing the long, vulnerable line of his throat. "What was that, boy? Don't fuck with you? I seem to recall you liking my cock buried in your ass. How could I forget the pretty way you begged for me to take you, over and over again until you're tight hole couldn't take any more?"

"I..." Sam panted, wide-eyed and hard, as he felt the evidence of Blake's desire pressing into his abdomen. Jesus, how did he get himself into this shit? "I... We don't have time for these games right now, Blake."



Blake licked a long trail up Sam's neck, from bottom to top, and then nipped at the fleshy lobe of his ear. "I'd say this is exactly what you need. Maybe after I fuck some sense back into your head, you'll remember your place."

Blake nipped a trail back down Sam's neck, sending shivers down his spine and blood rushing to his groin. He was hard within a breath, pressing against Blake's thigh. He felt light-headed, chest heaved for breath, and his heart worked overtime as arousal made itself at home.

Sam's hands rose to lay on Blake's chest as if to push him away, but the moment his hands came in contact with his ex-lover's skin heat shot up his arms and heat suddenly overwhelmed his body. He didn't know what was going on, but it made him grow thicker, harder, until Sam felt as if he was about to explode.

"What are you doing to me?"

Those beautiful green eyes Sam remembered so well sparkled with lust and domination. Hard to believe that not long before, he'd been injured. Whatever Gregory did to Blake allowed him to heal even quicker than he normally would. Sam wasn't sure to be grateful or not.

"Nothing you don't want." Blake's hand slid down Sam's side to his hip then inward until he was gripping the erection scrub bottoms couldn't hide. Sam groaned and felt helpless to push his ex-lover away. "You remember now, don't you, Sam?" His hand squeezed Sam's cock tighter, drawing another groan. "What it was like between us?"

Words were lost on Sam as the past came back to him. The long nights that ended with cuts, bruises, sore muscles, and...lots of great sex. Rough, demanding sex. Two tops struggling for control, but even with his supernatural strength and speed, Blake most often won the battle. And he never let Sam forget as it was Sam's fiercest enemy. Even worse than the noon sun.

Blake bit the flesh between Sam's shoulder and neck, definitely leaving a mark. Sam's fingernails raked Blake's bare chest, drawing tiny drops of blood. The scent, all too familiar, assaulted his senses.

Violent. No other word for what Sam and Blake had. It was the main reason Sam finally left. He should stop this now. The logical part of his brain that was drowning in lust and want struggled to surface and force his body to do just that. It was close. Right there, the word stop on his tongue.

Then Blake kissed him and logic lost the fight and fell into the abyss of physical desire. Sam welcomed Blake's tongue, his taste, his scent being rubbed on him like a cat would mark its territory. Sam was lost.

That was until a scream wrenched him from the dangerous bliss he'd sunk into.

With all his considerable strength of both body and will, Samuel tore free of Blake's grasp, shoving him away so hard that Blake stumbled back against the bed. Blake laughed and shot him a wicked grin. "Save a little something for me, won't you?"

"Oh, we're not done," snapped Samuel, although he couldn't have said just what his promise might encompass.

As he ran from the room, the scream came again. Was that Cecilia? Shit! Where the hell was security?

This was not how he'd planned to spend his shift--racing between an ex-lover intermittently possessed by another, dead, ex-lover and a current fling who'd had enough of his spirit sucked out of him by an elder vampire that he was craving the stimulus, the quick fix, that only sex could bring. How the fuck had Samuel come to this point? In one hundred and seventy-eight years, he'd never experienced anything as bizarre as tonight...and that was saying something.

He rounded the corner into the room where he'd left Ken and Cecilia and stopped short in the doorway. Ken lay where Samuel had left him, still and slack but now also strapped down. Cecilia, usually calm and steady under the most intense pressure ER could throw, was crouched in a corner, shaking, her mouth gaping in a rictus of terror.

Security was there all right--two tall, burly men whom even your above-average hospital crazy would hesitate to challenge. Neither of them was remotely equipped for what they now faced.

An angelic face masked the vampire within; a sweet smile held nothing but malice. The ancient one stood at ease in the middle of the room, one long-fingered hand resting idly on Ken's foot where it poked from underneath disheveled blankets. His eyes shifted languidly from the cowering Cecilia, past the guards as if they didn't exist, and focused on Samuel.

Samuel was heartily sick of it all. And he was done running from room to room, trying to clean up after this arrogant bastard.

*Watch your thoughts, child.*

The voice spoke directly in his brain. Medium volume, silken tone.

"Let's stop the games. What is it you want?" Samuel could only make use of a primitive larynx, but if power made you an asshole like the one before him, he'd take his primitive skills.

*Respect.* The word cracked like thunder in his skull.

Cecelia crouched unmoving in her corner, the security detail frozen. Thrashing as much as his restraints permitted, Ken murmured then groaned.

*He wants me to finish him. To take what remains.*

“Well then, you’re both going to be disappointed. I ask again. What do you want?”

*What I want is immaterial.*

Gregory’s warning had been correct then. The ancient vampire was a pawn.

*What I require is a soul. Choose one for me to take.* He waved a thin pale hand at the mortals in the room.

“If your master needs a soul, let him have yours.”

*How quaint. Do you actually believe creatures such as we possess a soul? Why else should we feed but to replace it?*

Samuel didn’t know about a soul, but he did have a conscience. And his conscience told him that these people were his to protect.

*Choose or I will rip the choice from your brain. And then I will rip the heart from your chest.*

If the being in front of him had that power, he would have acted already. There must be something binding him, keeping him from taking.

“What is your name?”

*Do you believe that foolishness? That my name will give you some power? It is Demosteles of Corinth. Much good may it do you.*

And Samuel had thought his classical studies worthless. With murmured gratitude to whatever headmaster had dragged him through *The Odyssey* he said, “You ask because you cannot take one without my permission. To do so would be the greatest breach of hospitality. This building is mine. You are here as a guest. The mortals in it are under my protection. I will not give any to you.”

A sigh blew like wind through Samuel’s mind. *It is a public accommodation. I will go make my selection elsewhere.*

“I eat here. I sleep here. This place is mine.”

*And what of your breach as host? My request is not so improper.*

Samuel smiled, showing all of his teeth. “Your customs, Demosteles of Corinth, not mine. In my world, you might have been permitted to leave your card—at the back door like any laborer or tradesman.”

Instead of darkening, Demosteles grew paler with rage, but if he could have acted he would have, long since. The lights in the room flickered as quickly as a strobe, but Samuel’s immortal eyes could witness Demosteles’ ignoble retreat out of the window. He’d won them a small measure of safety.

When he turned back, the security guards were helping Cecelia to her feet.

“Doctor Wexler? What happened?”

“I don’t know.” Samuel offered them all a calm smile, without the show of teeth. “I heard you scream and came in.”

Ken was still thrashing beneath the restraints.

“Would you leave me alone with Doctor Dahl? See that no one comes in,” he added to the security guards.

“Of course, Doctor.” Whatever Demosteles had done to blur the three mortals’ memories, Samuel could still smell their fear. All three were desperate to get out of this room.

When the door shut behind them, Samuel pushed a chair in front of it and crossed to Ken’s bedside. Those sea blue eyes opened and fixed on him, clearing for an instant. “Samuel. I need...”

“I know.” Samuel hoped he did know. There was only one cure he could think to offer.

He freed Ken’s hands, and then his chest. Ken’s mouth attacked his, arms pulling Samuel down. Threading his fingers through those sun-streaked curls, Samuel used the pressure of his hand and mouth to slow the kiss. Ken relaxed as arousal began to replace the gnawing hunger within him.

Ken now followed Samuel’s lead and for a moment, it was easy to forget about the events of the night, to lose himself in the familiar exciting taste and feel of Ken’s warm tongue stroking against his own. The heat of Ken’s body. The smell of life so strong as it beat through him.

Samuel wanted nothing more than to sink inside that warmth. To surrender to the rhythm of their hips meeting as he sank deep inside that hot tight hole. But that’s not what this was for. Not for Samuel, but for Ken. To save his life, his soul.

They’d gotten him into a hospital gown, and for that Samuel was thankful. As Ken relaxed back against the pillow, Samuel shoved the gown to his neck, licking the salt

from that tanned skin. Ken soaked up so much sunshine, he carried it with him, let Samuel have a taste of what he could no longer fully enjoy.

Normally, he'd take his time on that expanse of bronze skin, tongue the dark nipples, the flat planes of muscle, the fine golden hair leading him down, but the night was waning, and his own strength with it.

Ripping off the last restraint, Samuel pinned Ken's legs apart and drew his cock into his mouth. Ken arched off the bed, driving forward and Samuel let him go deep into his throat, swallowing around him with a quick flutter.

Backing off for an instant, Samuel soaked two fingers with his spit and pressed them down under Ken's balls. Gulping that hard cock deep again, Samuel let his fingers slide down and into Ken's ass, twisting and rubbing.

"Fuck me."

"Shhh, love." Samuel lifted his head again to murmur, hoping the security detail was more interested in what was going on outside the room than in it.

Unable to resist a moment for his own pleasure, Samuel ran the flat of his tongue along the shaft and then swirled the top, tasting a drop from the slit. Then he widened his jaw and took Ken to the root, breathing in the sweat and musk of his arousal, soft curls brushing Samuel's nose as he swallowed and hummed. He used his thumb to press on Ken's prostate from the outside, even as his fingers rubbed the gland from within.

Ken arched, fucking Samuel's throat, words lost in indistinct gasps. When the first spurt of come hit the back of his throat, Samuel swallowed and then pulled off to sink his teeth into the inside of Ken's thigh, while Ken bucked and shuddered, soaking his belly and Samuel's hair.

Blood filled his mouth, the sensation dizzying on top of Samuel's own arousal. It coated his tongue, his throat, the salty tang rich and sweet. He took as much as he dared, and by the time Ken's breathing had slowed, he was licking the wound to seal it.

"Again. Fuck me. Please, Samuel. I need it."

"Here. This is what you need, love." Samuel bit deep into his thumb and coated Ken's lips with what his veins had blended. Ken's blood. Samuel's immortal blood. His blood, his saliva could heal some wounds. He only hoped it could heal Ken's soul.

Ken licked his lips, eyes wide and fixed on Samuel's. "What—"

Samuel drove his thumb between the parted lips. Ken sucked. The tug went straight to Samuel's unsatisfied cock, and it was all he could do not to rut against Ken's belly.

When Samuel felt a bit lightheaded—from more than the blood pumping into his cock—he pulled his thumb free. He cleaned Ken’s lips with his tongue, the soft texture and the taste of blood almost robbing him of Samuel’s last ounce of control.

He waited, watching. Ken blinked and then looked at him. His Ken-doll. Home behind those beautiful eyes. “Sleep, Ken. You’ve had quite a night.”

The eyes blinked again. Of course, with Samuel’s blood freshly in Ken, Samuel could bid him do anything. Years from now, if he Called Ken, he would come. Is that what he had done to Blake? Was it Samuel’s unconscious need that had brought Blake into the midst of all this?

Samuel washed up at the bathroom sink, the ache of his denied cock bleeding into his thighs as the erection eased. His balls were still on the edge of mutiny when he stepped into the hall and nodded at the security guards.

He took a few steps away, exhaustion weighing down every bone and muscle he could name. Since he could name them all, he had to stop and rest against the wall.

That was where Cecelia found him. A light touch on his arm had him blinking awake and staring into her face.

“Doctor Wexler, I’m terribly sorry, but your other patient, Blake Bothman?” She lowered her eyes. “Doctor, I’m afraid he’s dead.”

Samuel ran to the room. The door stood open, the detritus of medical intervention pushed to the side...crash carts and trays with adrenalin shots testimony to tragedy. A lone nurse scribbled the last note on a chart then whisked past on her whisper quiet clogs. The silence was astounding. Machines that pinged a pulse, breathed breath into lungs and forced blood through veins bracketed Blake’s bed like pallbearers unable to carry him further.

Guilt crashed down about his shoulders. They must have paged him. Wrapped up with Ken, focused only on that life he’d forgotten about Blake. Abandoned him. Now, eyes that seethed passion stared blindly at a cold ceiling. Accusing him in their vacant glare as he stepped to the side of the bed and swept Blake’s hair from his stone cold forehead.

Rage welled up in his chest, grabbing his heart with claws and squeezing. A bitter snarl of frustration and grief burst unbidden from deep within. Samuel slammed the wall with his fist. The growl turned into a sob that robbed him of breath.

“Tears for the dead, from the dead.” Samuel spun at the sound of a voice. “How quaint.” Deep, rich full of the tones of unturned earth welled up from a shadow in the corner. Sinuous and deadly, the shadow moved coalescing into the shape of a man.

“Who are you?” Samuel hissed. “How did you get in here?”

Deep cinnamon eyes set in a face of burnished brass considered Samuel. His hair, waves of dark curls fell to frame a perfect face. “Names, names.” Bright white teeth flashed in a predator’s smile. “You asked my servant that earlier. Although, it did serve you some purpose.” Moving to the bed, the man pushed the corpse of Blake to the side and sat on edge of the bed. “Abalam, Abbadon, Merihem, many things have men called me. You might call me Absolom Shedim.” The heat of a summer sun over the sand pressed through the room as he spoke. “Men now must but have two names, or no one knows who they are.”

The only defense, until he knew what he was dealing with, was scorn. “In my time common men were called after their trade or their fathers.” Often immortal beings were cursed with a pride inverse to their power.

As though it were beneath him to rise to the taunt, Absolom shrugged. “Davidson, does not carry the same ring.”

“You had a father?” That gave Samuel something to seize on. “So you once were mortal?”

“Perhaps, maybe.” Absolom stretched out, forming his body to Blake’s like a beau catching his lover in sleep. Samuel shuddered. “Or I am legend to life.”

“Everything that once was mortal has a weakness.”

“I don’t like low hanging trees much.” The grin flashed again.

“Why did he die?” Even as he said it, Samuel knew he wouldn’t get that answer. “He shouldn’t have died. You did it.” Samuel spat the accusation.

Again, not even a flicker of remorse. “Of course. He served his use.”

“You used him and threw him out.” Even the immortal who lived off the life of others had morals. Not a mortals morals, but morals all the same. “Like yesterdays trash.”

Like a cat, he moved and curled and uncurled until he stood by Samuel’s side. A mesmerizing undulation that Samuel couldn’t even process until it was done. “And how many have you betrayed,” His voice bore the roar of the Sahara winds, “by your love?” Absolom licked his full, brown lips. “You know it, and yet you continue. Selfish. Because you cannot stand to see them die, you condemn them all call it salvation.” Rich laughter bubbled up burning Samuel with its touch. “And oh how you cry when they leave you. Betrayed by those you betrayed. Abandoned without hope as you stole it from others.”

“How dare you...”

“And yet you dare. You tinker with the life of the one you say you love now. Taunting him with tastes of your blood. Every hit an addiction layered into his soul. Twining it with sex and lust...the potions of your poison so that he begs you not to let him be without.”

“But if I left him like that he’d die.” Samuel sputtered.

“And if you bring him over, you betray him. So you string him along with tastes.” The wind turned to the hiss of serpents. “You cannot bear to see him wither and yet you know you will loathe him for your own failing if you cave. Oh what would Damocles do if he knew you had his sword?”

Samuel stared at Absolom as comprehension slowly dawned. The color drained from his face, leaving his cheeks cold and clammy. “Is that what all of this has been about? Everything you’ve done has been in search of my sword?”

“Your sword?” Absolom asked. “I think not.”

“The sword of Damocles is in my possession. Does that not make it mine?”

“Temporarily, perhaps.” Absolom paced the length of the room, his gaze wandering from one item to another, never alighting on any one thing for more than a few seconds. Halfway across the small room, he turned and stared at Samuel with an eerily intense gaze. “You will take me to the sword and relinquish it tonight, or suffer more loss.”

“Excuse me?” Samuel glanced down at the pallid face of his former lover, his beautiful eyes forever closed in slumber, and felt a rage the likes of which he’d never experienced filter through his system in a torrential wave of heat. “You have the nerve to come into my territory, cause havoc and hurt the ones I love, and then make demands on me as if I owe you something? I don’t care if you are more powerful than I am; you will vacate this building at once and for all.”

“Or what? You’ll cry.” Absolom smirked. “I have nothing to fear from you, other than your pitiful tears of anger and remorse.”

Filled with impotent rage, Samuel raced toward Absolom. The change fell upon him, his teeth and nails growing to abnormal length in preparation of the battle to come. It mattered not that he would probably be out thwarted by Absolom; he only wanted to make the creature pay for what he’d done – for Blake and Ken.

He flew into Absolom, knocking the other creature backward with a mighty lunge of strength. Before he could do any damage, he was spun around and shoved into the wall with enough strength to knock the breath from his body. Absolom grabbed his wrists in an unbreakable grip and pinned them to the wall above Samuel’s head.



Absolom stared down at him with a lecherous, almost amused grin on his ruggedly handsome face. He tsked. "You should know better than attacking one of your elders, boy. I could snap your head clean off your neck with no more than a flick of my talons. Lucky for you that I appreciate a little pluck in my men. However, there's no time for dalliance just now. I require the sword. Now."

Samuel's vision swam, the room dissolving around them in a wild swirl of insubstantial colors. Vicious nausea struck him, sending bile up the back of his throat. He squeezed his eyes closed, hoping to stem the dizzy torrent before he vomited what little sustenance he had on his stomach.

When he opened his eyes, he stood alone in his living room, facing the brick fireplace. Above the mantel, in a place of honor in his household, the sword gleamed like a silver beacon of hope. Could he use it against Absolom. He didn't know why the other man sought the blade, but surely Samuel could use it to his own advantage.

He nervously gazed around the room, searching for Absolom. He was nowhere in sight, but that didn't mean he wasn't around. If Absolom was capable of teleportation, then it was possible he had mastered the ancient art of invisibility as well. Only the oldest creatures were rumored to have such abilities, but then Samuel had never met someone capable of teleportation either.

Anything was possible.

Samuel stared at the sword. He's had it so long he rarely thought about it. In fact, it hung there practically ignored. But now it had his full attention. He reached up to take it down, then stopped, remembering Absolom's words. He said that Samuel would relinquish the sword to him, however, if he knew where to find the sword, why hadn't he just taken it himself?

He withdrew his hands, fingers curling into fists. That's exactly what Absolom wanted. For some reason, he can't retrieve the sword himself, so he transported him here, where Samuel would take hold of the sword. Then what? Could Absolom take it from him? Could it be used to kill Absolom? So many questions and no answers. Yet.

"Your plan won't work," Samuel said out loud. No answer. His hands dragged through his hair. It had been a long night and exhaustion was grating on his nerves as was daylight. Though he could stay awake longer than sun rise, he didn't always keep his strength. "The sword is mine, Absolom. If you want it, you have to take it."

Silence was the response. Could he be wrong? A string of curses flowed from his mouth. He didn't have the patience for games tonight. He'd lost an ex-love, while nearly losing his current flame. Not to mention all the mental games and running from room to room.

Samuel sat on the couch and made himself comfortable. Doubt crept in, but he held to his

decision. He would not touch the sword until Absolom made himself seen and he obtained more answers. He hoped being away from the hospital would keep his friends and the others safe. Then again, this being could teleport.

“I know you are here. Might as well show yourself.” He swallowed hard. He was no match for the ancient, but perhaps he had a chance to outsmart him. “I can sit here all day.”

“You are a stubborn fool, aren’t you?” Behind him a voice sounded, making Samuel jump.

He turned as a stunned smile spread across his face. “Blake?” It was a trick. Samuel knew it was a trick, but oh how he wanted it to be real.

Green eyes sparkled with sly delight. “Who else, baby?” Blake sat on the couch beside him, so close that his thigh pressed against Samuel’s, but no warmth, no pulse of life came with the touch. He reached out a hand and trailed cool, lifeless fingers along Samuel’s cheek.

Samuel’s expression darkened. He wanted to pull away, forced himself to remain where he was. This was his ground, his *home* for fuck’s sake. He wasn’t going to let some game-playing, undead shape-shifter take command here. “Blake is dead,” he said with a chill that would have weakened any living soul. The faux-Blake didn’t flinch, but his hand ceased its caress. “You’re not even a good fake. Blake hates—” He caught himself, made the painful correction though grinding teeth. “—hated pet names. Whoever the hell you are, you are not winning any points with me this way. Drop the act.”

The image before him shifted into another face, this one less familiar yet recognizable still. Dark eyes in the face of an angel. Blake’s large form shrank in on itself to become small and lithe.

“Demosteles of Corinth,” said Samuel with contempt. “Of course. Come to do your master’s bidding, have you? He’s too busy, naturally. Too *important* to come here himself, so he sent his tool instead.” The dig struck home. The ancient one removed his hand from Samuel’s cheek. Samuel allowed himself a tiny smile of satisfaction. It flickered across his lips and was gone. “I don’t recall inviting you into my home.” It was a stalling technique. The elder vampire, while still subject to many rules, had outlived that particular barrier’s restraint where those like himself were concerned.

“Don’t let’s play that game. It’s an insult to us both,” snapped Demosteles. His tone was almost petulant, still stinging from Samuel’s insult. Good. Samuel was glad to have found what could be the only chink in Demosteles ancient armor. “You know why I’m here.” The elder vampire leaned in to him, licked full lips, making them wet, tantalizing, inviting. “I thought we could make this a pleasant transaction. You give me the sword and I give you something in return. You’ll not be disappointed.” One hand massaged Samuel’s leg, moving up towards more dangerous territory, and he felt himself

weakening, drawn into the other man's seductive web.

"No!"

Only Demosteles' smirk and soft "Shhh" clued Samuel into the fact that he'd shouted the word. Samuel swallowed hard against rising desire that he knew wasn't real, was merely a manipulation. He met Demosteles' dark gaze with his own. "Get off of my couch and out of my house. You can't do anything here without my consent and I *do not consent*."

With a snarl worthy of any werewolf, the ancient one rose fluidly to his feet. "Watch your step, youngling. *He* won't take kindly to your poor treatment of me."

Samuel stood up slowly and took a deliberate step towards his unwelcome guest. His voice was calm and low, his diction precise, driving home each word with its simple clarity. "I don't give a good god damn what *he* will and what *he* won't." This creature, this underling, this pawn was not going to get to him. Samuel would not allow it. He needed more time to think and plan. There were still rules of engagement and if Absalom thought he could work around them by sending this one to do his dirty work, he had another think coming. Samuel knew better.

He took another menacing step towards Demosteles, who didn't move but whose demeanor grew wary. Samuel wasn't overly tall, but he was certainly taller than the form the other man preferred to take and he used that height difference for all it was worth. He loomed. "This is my place," he said, his tone as dark as his expression, as dark as his eyes. "My domain. Get the fuck out of my home." Samuel followed the curse with the ancient spell of command that not even this elder vampire could defy. "Demosteles of Corinth, I banish you from this place for as long as I possess it."

Demosteles' expression was one of stunned disbelief mixed with fury. Before he could voice the protest he was so obviously preparing, he vanished, forced out of his spot in time and space by the power of Samuel's invocation.

Samuel stood still in the middle of his living room for several seconds, waiting. A tiny part of him hadn't expected the spell to work. He was relieved to find that part mistaken. He smiled grimly. "Tell me there's no power in knowing someone's name..." he muttered to the empty room. Then it struck him. An idea of how he might defeat Absalom Shedim. His smile grew predatory.

But if Samuel was going to face off against Absalom, he needed more strength. Hidden by a five-pound bag of mini carrots, a fresh cold pack of blood rested on the bottom shelf of the fridge. And even more convenient than the blood storage at work, he had a microwave that in thirty-seven seconds would serve it body temperature.

The microwave dinged, and he allowed his fangs to descend. Tearing into the bag, he emptied it in a couple of swallows.

“Sam? Are you coming back to bed?”

Samuel started. How long had he been standing naked in his kitchen, staring down at the empty blood bag in the trash?

“Sam?”

He pushed away from the wall, head as fuzzy as if the bag had been full of opium. Blake. Blake in bed waiting for him. Why did that seem wrong? Some dream of demons and monsters and Blake’s corpse, cold and still.

Samuel shook his head to clear it, his lip catching on a fang. Why were they still down? He licked the blood from his lips and teeth and went into their bedroom.

Blake was sprawled on their bed, one dark-furred leg bent, shadowing his cock and balls. The sight made desire curl through Samuel’s stomach and he flung himself on his lover.

Blake met his kiss and then pulled away. “Again? Didn’t you get enough?” His low voice rumbled with that teasing whisper.

Samuel’s cock insisted that there was no such thing as enough. The fresh blood coursed down, pumping him hard. His balls ached as if satisfaction had long been denied. “No,” he answered.

Blake tipped up his neck, offering that blood-rich skin to Samuel’s tongue and his fangs started to drop again. He cupped Blake’s ass in his hands, fingers sliding into the crease.

“Samuel.”

“Hmm?” He could almost taste Blake, the sweet fresh smell overpowering the flat metallic taste of the old blood on his tongue. He’d be deep inside him when he sank his teeth into a vein, wrist or throat, the warmth sliding along his throat while Blake’s hot muscles clamped around his cock.

“C’mon. You were going to tell me about that sword. The one in the living room. Remember?”

Remembering seemed to be the last thing Samuel wanted to do. Not when there was all this hot male flesh under his hands. His fingers found Blake’s hole, still loose and wet from their last fuck. For an instant, he remembered that dream with perfect clarity. Blake smelling of death instead of life. Silent. Motionless. Why did that dream suddenly feel more real than this moment?

“Samuel? The sword.”

The sword. Fuck the sword. Samuel held Blake open with his thumbs, rubbing the head

of his own cock against the slick skin of his crease.

“Sam? Sam?” The hard rap of skin on glass, echoing through the room.

He looked over his shoulder. Dawn was starting to light the sky, and in that dim light he could make out Ken, face pressed against the window while he pounded on it with both hands.

Blake and the bed were gone. He was in the living room and something dark was rushing from the lighted horizon. Rushing straight for Ken.

Sam raced to the door and flung it wide. Ken fell inside, hitting the tile, just as Absolom landed on the threshold. Sam had no time to help Ken up, or ask why he was there, as the large, dark vampire loomed like a specter of death in the doorway. “I’ve come to offer you a trade. The life of your lover for the sword. You have exactly thirty seconds to choose which you’d like to sacrifice.”

“Um, pardon me for saying so, but it seems as if I have the sword and Ken both, while you have neither. How is that a trade?”

Absolom smirked. In the time it took Sam to blink, his menacing image blurred. One minute he was standing at the door and the next he was in the living room, with Ken trapped in his grip. One razor-sharp fingernail pressed against Ken’s throat, a tiny trickle of blood oozing from the small cut. “Now what do you have, my boy? And you’re down to fifteen seconds.”

Sam stalled for time. “If you want the damn sword so bad, why don’t you just take it? You know where it is.”

“This is true, but the sword must be given. I cannot steal it without dire consequences.”

That made no sense to Sam, since the sword was virtually powerless as far he knew, but he wasn’t about to bicker over whether or not Absolom had the capability to walk into his home and steal a weapon that had been in his family for generations. At the moment, he didn’t really give a shit why the loon wanted it. He could take the damn thing and floss his pearly white teeth with it, for all Sam cared. He wasn’t going to sacrifice Ken’s life for a hunk of metal.

“Fine.” Sam glanced away from Absolom’s cinnamon red eyes and met Ken’s wide, frightened gaze. “Let Ken go and it’s yours.”

Absolom jerked Ken’s hair back, pulling his chin up, and pressed the tip of his fingernail more deeply into the wound on Ken’s neck. “Bring it to me. Now.”

Ken whimpered. “Please, Sam. Do what he says.”

“I’m going. I’m going.” Sam held his hands up and began to back toward the mantle. He kept an eye on the two men, fully aware that it would be a mistake to turn his back on Absolom. He plucked the sword off the mantle, the metal heavy in his hands, and carried it back. “Here. Take it and leave us in peace.”

Absolom eyed the sharp edge of the blade, and then sneered at Sam. “Do you take me for a fool, boy? Hand it to me with the handle out.”

*Fuck.* Sam carefully grasped the blade and turned the handle toward Absolom. “Just let Ken go and fucking take it already.” He held his breath as the other man’s grip lessened on Ken’s throat. If this was going to work he would have to time it perfectly.

He bowed his head, feigning subservience in order to put the other man at ease, and watched out of the corner of his eye. The moment Ken’s foot lifted to move, he flipped the blade up in the air and swung, slicing Absolom’s head from his body. Ken dove for the floor, shouting. For a split second, nothing happened and Sam feared he’d fucked up. Then a thin line of red appeared across the alabaster skin of Absolom’s and grew into a cascade of deep crimson spilling down the front of the other man’s torso. The expression on Absolom’s face changed—his eyes widening, and his mouth going slack—and then the head slid from his body and toppled to the floor at Ken’s feet with a wet splat.

Ken scrambled to his feet and threw himself at Sam, trembling. “Jesus, fuck, that was nasty. Who was that asshole? I thought I was a goner there for a minute.”

“It doesn’t matter who he was. All that matters is that you’re safe.” Sam petted Ken’s fine, blonde hair and kissed his forehead. “What are you doing here anyway, baby? You should be at the hospital.”

“I don’t know. One minute I was asleep, having the strangest dream about drinking deep, coppery red wine, and the next I was here.” Ken shook his head. “I really don’t know, but I feel okay now. I’m a little shaken up, understandably, but I feel fine. Great, in fact.” He pressed closer in Sam’s arms. The hard ridge of an erection poked Sam’s hip. “There’s something seriously wrong with me. All I can think about was how close I came to getting my throat slit, and yet I don’t think my cock has ever been so damn hard.”

“You’re perfectly normal, baby. It’s just your body’s way of wanting to prove you’re still alive. That’s all.” Sam could well empathize with Ken’s predicament.

The scent of blood perfumed the air. The fragrance of Ken’s need joined the heady bouquet and twisted it into a potently erotic scent sure to make any vampire stand hard and proud. Sam’s body couldn’t resist. His cock was reacting to the adrenaline coursing through his blood, the feel of Ken’s firm little body in his arms, and the bloodlust he couldn’t control. He wanted nothing more than to throw Ken to the ground and jackhammer his tight ass, but there were more pressing matters that needed to be taken care of first. Absolom needed to take a dirt nap.

Sam pulled away from Ken. “Wait here, baby. I’ll be right back, and then I’ll take care of you.”

Ken’s forehead wrinkled. “Where are you going? You can’t go out into the sun.”

“Not for long, no, but the sun hasn’t completely risen yet. I just need to be out long enough to get this SOB’s ass out of my house.”

“Why?” Ken’s gaze followed Sam across the room, where he lifted Absolom’s body and slung him over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry. “He’s dead, right?”

“Yeah, but I’d feel a lot more comfortable if there was nothing left of him but ash.” Sam started for the door, and then remembered he’d forgotten the head. “Hey, Ken? Would you grab his head and hand it to me, please?”

“All right.” Ken stood and trudged over to where Absolom’s head rested on the carpet. Sneering, he lifted it by the dark tips of hair, and held it out away from his body as he carried it to Sam. “Here.”

“Thanks, babe.” Sam took the head. “You try to release, okay? I’ll be right back.”

Ken used the hand that hadn’t touched Absolom’s head to scrub the lower half of his face. “Hurry, Samuel. I need you.”

Sam frowned and headed for the front door. He and Ken needed to talk. Unfortunately, it would have to wait until after Sam disposed of Absolom, and then fed Ken the sustenance he needed to fully recover from the evening’s events. Hopefully, another little taste or two of Sam’s blood would keep Ken from having any lasting effects from the ordeal he’d been through.

After dumping Absolom’s body off the side of his porch—and only managing to make his skin itchy from the sun exposure to the sun, rather than singed—Sam entered the house and went looking for Ken. He found him stretched out on the mattress of Sam’s bed, naked and stroking one fist up and down the length of his slender, ruddy cock.

“What’re you doing?”

Ken quirked a single eyebrow. “That should be obvious.”

“Well, yeah, but I’m pretty sure I told you to relax, not to make yourself at home.”

Ken grinned. “Getting off is the quickest way to relax me.”

“Mm hmm,” Sam muttered, although it was damn hard to be upset when presented with such a beguiling view. Ken was a gorgeous specimen of manhood, all golden skin and

lean muscle. It was damn hard to remember what he was supposed to be aggravated about when all the blood in his body was trying to squeeze into his cock.

“You could help me with this, you know? It is your fault.”

“How do you figure that?” Sam crawled onto the bed, his gaze fixated on the way Ken’s hand moved up and down, stroking his hand from base to tip, milking glistening drop of precum from the slit.

“You’re the one running around naked. What did you think was going to happen? Now shut up and suck my cock.”

Sam’s pride flared at the order, but his cock didn’t mind it one bit. He moved closer, damn tempted to fulfill Ken’s request, and licked his lips. He could almost taste Ken’s bitter flavor spilling over his tongue. Instead of bending to suck Ken’s cock into his mouth, Sam stretched out beside Ken, lying with his head angled toward Ken’s lower body.

Catching on to what Sam wanted, Ken flipped onto his side and faced Sam. He ran a smooth hand up the inside of Sam’s thigh and then trailed his fingernails lightly over Sam’s balls.

Sam shivered, his sac wrinkling in response to the attention. He reached down and grabbed his cock, holding it steady while he used the sharp edge of a fingernail to slice a thin cut along the shaft. He winced at the quickly-vanishing sting, but was satisfied by the results and the way Ken’s scent intensified at the sight of his blood. Crimson fluid welled up and trickled down the sides of his shaft, even as the fragile skin mended and sealed closed.

Impatient, he gripped the base of his cock and tapped the blunt against Ken’s rosy red lips. “You wanted it. Now suck it.”

Ken didn’t need to be asked twice. He dived onto Sam’s cock like it was a melting ice cream cone, licking and slurping up the blood and moaning like a whore.

“Fuck, yeah. That feels good.” Sam closed his eyes and relished the sweet sensations of Ken’s tongue working his cock before the urge to take a more active role overcame him.

He shifted his upper body and pulled Ken’s uppermost thigh over his shoulder, opening the other man to his desires. Ken moaned and wiggled, bucking his groin closer to Sam’s face. Sam buried his nose against the other man’s sac and inhaled. Ken smelled so fucking good, musky with just a hint of sweat, the way a man should. Beneath it all, Ken’s blood pumped furiously, a call to Sam’s baser instincts. He wanted to sink his teeth into Ken’s femoral artery and glutton himself on the sweet ambrosia, then turn Ken over on his stomach and fuck him until they both collapsed in a satiated heap of arms and legs.



Instead, tongued Ken's balls, and batting them around with the tip of his tongue. His sucked one fragile orb into his mouth and the other, rolling them on his tongue.

Ken moaned his pleasure around Sam's cock and sucked faster, bobbing his mouth up and down the rigid length. Saliva dripped down Sam's shaft and moistened his balls, making them slide through Ken's palm with no friction as the other man massaged and caressed them with a firm hand—just the way Sam liked. No one could suck cock better than Ken, when he set his mind to it.

Ken dragged his mouth up Sam's shaft and let the swollen tip pop free. Cool air raced over Sam's wet cock as Ken panted. "Stop teasing and suck me. Please, God. I need to cum."

Before the last word slipped from Ken's luscious lips, Sam leaned in and swallowed Ken's cock to the root at the same time he slid the tip of a dry finger into Ken's tight ass. Ken bucked and moaned, pushing the tip of his cock against the back of Sam's throat. He relaxed his jaw and tightened his mouth, moving in a furious pace meant to get Ken off with as little fuss as possible.

As good as sex with Ken could be, Sam was exhausted. Daylight didn't usually bother him so strongly, but he could feel sleep chasing him, weighing him down. All he wanted to do was get off, make Ken cum, and then go to sleep. They could fuck like bunnies later.

The suction around Sam's cock increased until it bordered on painful. Pleasure coiled tight in his groin, his balls lifting to hug the base of his shaft. Pleasure boiled inside him, growing ever larger until it spilled out, coating the warm, wet mouth around him. Ken kept sucking, pulling the fluid from Sam's body, as he shook through the spasms of release.

Spent, Sam rolled over into his back and dragged Ken's body atop him. He gripped the other man's ass and pulled him down, plunging Ken's cock into his mouth. Squeezing the firm globes of Ken's ass, Sam pushed and pulled until Ken got the idea and started to move on his own, fucking Sam's willing mouth and taking what he needed.

The smell of Ken's arousal rose and swirled around them like a fine mist. Ken's asscheeks flexed and relaxed under Sam's palms, his cock growing more rigid. Sam angled his head back to take Ken deeper, and concentrated on loosen his throat muscles. On the next pass, when Ken's crown butted the back of his throat, Sam swallowed. Ken moaned and froze, the tip of his cock buried in Sam's throat, and started to cum.

Sam held still until the urge to breath became too urgent. He pushed against Ken, urging the other man to get off him. When that didn't work, he gripped Ken's thighs and rolled them over.

Ken grunted and then bashfully ducked his head. "Sorry. It just felt so good."

Sam flipped around and rested his head on the pillow beside Ken's. "I'll live." *Or perform a reasonable facsimile of it.* After all, it wasn't as if he were truly alive by human standards.

Satiated from his orgasm, and on the verge of sleep, Sam recalled his need to clarify a few things with Ken. He didn't really feel like talking now, but what he needed to say couldn't be put off any longer. He petted Ken's flat stomach. "Hey, Ken?"

"Hmm?" Ken murmured drowsily. His eyelids lifted, and he gazed up at Sam with sleep-heavy eyes the color of the clear, summer sky.

"I, um, know we were a little lax about putting labels on our relationship when we started sleeping together, but with everything that's happened, I just need to make sure you understand that I'm not looking for anything serious. I care about you—I enjoy the time we spend together—but I'm not in love with you."

Ken stared at him for a moment before he burst out laughing. "Sweet Jesus. Is this where I have to explain my intentions to you?" He shook his head. "I like you, Sam. You're a great guy, with a delicious fucking cock, but I'm not in love with you either. It's just sex—amazing fucking sex—but nothing more than that."

"Thank God." Sam exhaled in relief.

"So, we're good?" Ken rolled onto his back and stretched, displaying the delicious way the muscles in his chest and torso flexed under the golden surface of his velvety skin.

"Yeah," Sam said, cuddling up against Ken's warmth. "We're good, babe."

He rested his head on Ken's shoulder and snuggled close. He felt like an ass for making assumptions, especially since he'd been dead wrong, but he'd wanted to clear the air between them once and for all. As much as it pained him to admit it, Absolom may have had a point when he'd accused Sam of being selfish. He didn't like to be alone, so he strung men along until one of them decided to move on. It wasn't a crime, and he never mistreated anyone or held them against their will, but he didn't want to lead Ken on and then chance hurting the other man further down the road. Although his passion for Ken's body had only seemed to swell with time, rather than ebb as it had with most mortals, that didn't mean it never would.

As sure as the sun rose and set, the time would come when one of them wanted something more than a physical relationship. The thought of Ken leaving him caused a deep-seated ache in Sam's chest, but he shoved the fleeting emotion away before it could take root. He'd deal with their eventual demise when it happened, and in the best way he knew how.

It was only a matter of time.

## **About the Authors**

What's better than one hot man? Two. Come and chat with the authors M/M romance. You never know what kind of goodies we may have in store for you.

<http://www.slash-and-burn.blogspot.com/>

## **Ally Blue**

<http://www.allyblue.com/>

Married nearly twenty years, two entirely fabulous children, one entirely fabulous (in a manly way) husband. Been an RN for the last eighteen years. I am originally from the Alabama Gulf Coast, but have lived in the lovely Western North Carolina mountains for over twenty years now, and I love it.

Like so many other female slash writers, I started out by writing fan fiction. Not telling who it involved, as it was real people rather than fictional characters (bad, bad Ally... ). I quickly graduated to original character fiction, and discovered that I liked that even better. It's the hot boy-on-boy action that flips my switch, though, so that's what I still write, for the most part.

My first short story was published in the ezine Forbidden Fruit (go to the links page and check it out!). I have since become a regular contributor to Forbidden Fruit, and have also had short stories published in the erotic ezine Ruthie's Club, as well as a story in the Torquere Press ezine Fresh Off The Vine. My books are available through Loose Id and Samhain Publishing. Check out the "books" link in the menu above for cover art, blurbs, excerpts and purchase info on all my currently available and Coming Soon works.

## **Amanda Young**

<http://www.amandayoung.org/>

Amanda Young is a multi-published, erotic romance author. Since she tends to write whatever strikes her whimsy, all of her novels fall into various subgenres. Among her titles you'll find contemporary, manlove, and paranormal.

Basically, she writes stories about men and women who love indiscriminately and wholeheartedly. Her characters are never perfect; they're flawed and oftentimes troubled. Which makes it that much more satisfying when they receive the happy ending we all deserve. No matter what genre her books fall into, she can guarantee they'll end with a happily ever after. In her opinion, it's just not a romance without one.

## **Emily Veinglory**

<http://www.veinglory.com>

New Zealand-born Emily Veinglory began writing her first novel while studying for her PhD. Since then she has continued as a scientist by day and writer by night (and on weekends). Emily writes fantasy and romance often with a dark or paranormal twist, including two fantasy romance novels with Samhain Publishing.

### **James Buchanan**

<http://www.james-buchanan.com/>

Hola, I'm James Buchanan, a multipublished author of, primarily, homoerotic romance & fiction. Life wise, I grew up in a small Texas town, hours away from any other small Texas town and about as far west as you could go and still be considered in Texas. A stint at the University, where I ostensibly majored in English, garnered me a degree useful for being someone's secretary. The absolute lack of employment opportunities sent me to Southern California. After a stint in County Mental Health (administration not client) I ran screaming into the field of Law. So far I have been practicing for more than a decade and someday I might even get it right.

Currently I volunteer as the Obelisk Awards Coordinator, List Dom and MySpace WebMaster for the Erotic Authors Association. I also edit the newsletter for the ManLoveRomance Author Co-op. My novella Twice the Cowboy won both the Preditors & Editors Best Romance Novella of 2006 and the Golden Rose 2007 award for Best Novella.

### **KA Mitchell**

[www.kamitchell.com](http://www.kamitchell.com)

K.A. Mitchell discovered the magic of writing at an early age when she learned that a carefully crayoned note of apology sent to the kitchen in a toy truck would earn her a reprieve from banishment to her room. Her career as a spin control artist was cut short when her family moved to a two-story house, and her trucks would not roll safely down the stairs. Around the same time, she decided that Chip and Ken made a much cuter couple than Ken and Barbie and was perplexed when invitations to play Barbie dropped off. An unnamed number of years later, she's happy to find other readers and writers who like to play in her world.

### **Keira Andrews**

<http://www.keiraandrews.com>

Keira Andrews is a copywriter by day, erotic romance author by night (and weekend). When resting her aching hands, she enjoys obsessing over tennis, figure skating and her favourite TV shows, of which there are many. Keira also loves long roadtrips with good music, good friends and greasy food.

### **Maia Strong**

<http://www.maiastrong.com>

Writing, acting, bellydancing, and teaching people to talk in funny voices. Who knew you could make a living doing stuff like that? I didn't, and in fact I can't. Those are the things I do to feed my soul rather than my stomach.

I've always written, but I never expected to write romance. I have documented evidence of a seafaring play I wrote in the second grade. Something involving a giant duck, if memory serves; I'm too scared to dig it out of the binder and find out for sure. Since that rather inauspicious beginning, I've turned my hand to fantasy, science fiction, action adventure (with dinosaurs, oo!), and now "red hot" romance--with fantasy in it because that is my first genre love. It's inescapable when the first time you read *The Lord of the Rings* is in the fourth grade. (I read Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy the next year, but I didn't get it. I have yet to try reading it again lo these many years later.)

### **Marty Rayne**

<http://www.martyrayne.com/>

Books have been my first love since I can remember. I grew up getting lost in new and exciting worlds. The characters becoming my friends or enemies, even if for the duration of the books. Writing came next off and on through the years, but I never really took it seriously or thought of making it a career until a few years ago as I got sucked into the world of the internet. With the encouragement and help of a wonderful friend, I finally ventured into the field of writing.

I am a licensed massage therapist and have recently completed my study with the LongRidge Writing School. I'm also a wife to a wonderful and supporting husband (my very own knight in shining armor), a mother of four boys (the youngest a set of twins), and a grandmother.

I live in Florida and love spending time taking long walks on the beach with my husband and learning Karate with my children.

### **Mary Winter**

<http://www.marywinter.com/>

Mary commutes between her dream home near the Mark Twain national forest in Missouri, and her current residence in Iowa. She lives with a menagerie of animals including an opinionated horse and a cat who was a dog in past life. When not writing spicy tales of erotic romance, she enjoys writing science fiction and fantasy, spending time with her horse, and enjoying the outdoors. Lucky for her, her partner (hero) shares these same passions, and usually both of them can be found in their respective dens writing.

### **Tory Temple**

<http://www.torytemple.com/>

Tory lives and works in southern California, where she spends a lot of time around firemen. She visits the beach frequently and wears flip flops even in the winter. Tory likes television, salted pistachios in the shell, and chenille socks. She dislikes cauliflower, not being able to find the right shoes in the morning, and not having enough free time. She shares her space with numerous pets, including but not limited to cats, dogs, and tortoises.