



Sophie Athens

THE VAMPIRE ORACLE

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Hunger

In The Cards



*The Vampire Oracle:*

**HUNGER**

*By*

*Sophie Athens*

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**Hunger**

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## **Dedication**

This is dedicated to the hero of my own love story.  
Thank you so much for all your support.

## Chapter One

“Wonderful. You’re making great progress, Britta.” Olivia, tucked comfortably in her leather chair, glanced at her watch. It was 5:50 AM—time to wrap things up. “Well, we’re done for this week.” She looked up and offered a small smile to the delicate, pale-skinned vampire. “Next time, we’ll discuss other methods on how to control those cravings. Try to brainstorm any ideas you can bring to the session.”

Britta tucked a strand of long, blonde hair behind her ear, her gaze running over Olivia’s face and throat in a quick sweep that made Olivia slightly nervous. The gesture reminded her that even a small, unassuming woman who had to weigh no more than a hundred pounds soaking wet could be a deadly predator.

“Okay,” Britta finally said with a crooked smile. Olivia saw that her fangs were tucked safely away. “See you next Friday.” She rose from the plush tan couch and left the office, the door quietly clicking shut behind her.

Olivia stood and stretched, rotating her neck in slow circles. Working with vampires always set her on edge, made her nervous. Though she knew her work was important—teaching vampires how to fit in with humans and suppress their vampiric cravings—she never fully relaxed in their presence. However, all her clients fully adhered to her requested guidelines of behavior during counseling sessions: no fangs, no threatening movements or gestures, and a concentrated effort to behave human while in Olivia’s office.

She closed up the office and headed home, the balmy night breezes

caressing her skin. Before entering her car, she stifled a small yawn and stopped to stare at the soft cirrus clouds slowly crossing the almost full moon. Dawn would be coming soon, and her bed beckoned. It had taken a few months to adjust to working the night shift, a necessity for her line of work, but now, she couldn't imagine life any other way.

Once home, she collapsed onto the couch, too tired to make it to bed, and slept hard, finally waking at 3:30 PM and stumbling over to the mail slot by her front door. She'd heard the mailman arrive earlier but hadn't wanted to rouse herself, instead allowing herself the luxury of sleeping an extra hour.

She absently flipped through the pile of mail, blinking the sleep from her eyes. Cell phone bill. Electric bill. Yet another credit card offer.

Then, a plain white envelope caught her eye. Addressed to her in a flowing script, there was no return address. The postmark read El Dorado Springs, Colorado 80025. Funny, she didn't know anyone in Colorado. In fact, all her friends and family lived on the east coast.

Confused, she flipped the envelope over to see if there was a name or address on the back. No such luck.

Carefully—something told her not to rip the contents—she opened the envelope. Inside was a card with a painting of a male vampire, eyes flashing and teeth exposed. One word in the bottom left corner was written—*Hunger*.

She stared at the image, unable to tear herself away. The vampire's golden eyes glittered as he stared back at her, his white fangs sharp, deadly. She slid the card against her lower lip, an unexpected rush of desire swelling within her belly. The word *hunger* whispered within her head again and again, over and over, and her skin tingled, ached to be touched, fulfilled.

The rest of the mail dropped from her other hand and landed with a soft swish on the laminate flooring. She hardly noticed. Clutching the card in her shaking fingers, she walked up the stairs to her bedroom and perched on the edge of the bed. Who had sent her this? What did it mean?

Her phone rang, startling her out of her dazed fixation. She picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Hey, you're up. Wanna go out tonight?" Her friend Athena's

upbeat voice came through loud and clear on the phone. "You're not working, so no lame excuses. I've heard of this great club we can go to, and the guys are supposed to be super hot."

Grateful for the momentary distraction from the image of the vampire, she placed it facedown on her nightstand. "Thanks, but I shouldn't..." She stopped herself, remembering the surge of energy that had overcome her. She ran the tips of her fingers across the back of the card, the dark purples almost warming beneath her light touch, and sucked in a deep breath. "Actually, I *will* go."

Athena squealed. "Holy cow, really? That's great. Okay, dress to kill. I'll swing by at ten to pick you up."

They hung up. Olivia closed her eyes and plopped back onto her bed, wondering what she'd gotten herself into. And even more, she wondered at the response the card had elicited from her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Athena pulled her dark green Ford Focus up to the valet parking, threw it into park, then practically pushed Olivia out of the car. A young guy, no more than twenty-one or so, took the keys from Athena as she slid out of the car. With a raking glance over Olivia's body, now clad in a short, black skirt and plunging, V-necked, sleeveless purple satin top, the valet winked and hopped into the driver's side. Olivia snickered—the kid wasn't shy, to say the least.

"Come on," Athena said loudly over the rhythmic, thumping base pouring from the nondescript brick building. She tugged on Olivia's bare arm. "Let's go."

The bouncer, a large, beefy guy whose muscles were about to burst out of his tight white T-shirt, waved them inside. Athena pulled Olivia up to the bar and ordered two buttery nipples.

After they did those shots, followed by several more of various sexual names, Olivia, beer in hand, got a chance to look around. A mirrored ball dangled over the dance floor and threw small colored dots of light across the walls, floor, and people as it slowly rotated. The room was packed with dancers who slid errant hands across each others' bodies

in the sexually charged atmosphere. Men and women were almost having foreplay with each other, even necking right there on the floor.

She was grateful for her scant clothing. The room was slightly warm, and the alcohol rapidly seeping into her system didn't help matters at all. She took a sip of her Heineken.

"Stud alert," Athena yelled in Olivia's ear, nodding her head toward the tall, lean guy in the DJ booth at the other end of the room. He was clad in all black, his hair spiked on top. Right up Athena's alley. She liked them tall and dark.

"He's perfect for you," Olivia said back. "Go get 'em, tiger."

Athena slid away from the bar, throwing Olivia a wink. "I'll be back in a few minutes. Do some scoping for yourself, girlfriend." Athena took off, sashaying her way across the dance floor.

A man in his fifties, wearing a white dress shirt and dark gray slacks, shuffled beside her, as if knocked off-balance, then rammed his elbow into Olivia's side. She winced at the jarring pain, and tears sprang to her eyes.

From the looks of it, Athena was already hooking up with someone, whereas all Olivia had to show for the evening so far was a strong buzz and killer side pain. This evening wasn't going as planned.

Maybe it was a mistake to come.

"Sorry," the guy mumbled with half-closed, reddened eyes. He clutched his beer bottle and looked her over quickly, sparing a second, longer glance at her deep cleavage, then thrust out his free hand. "I'm Randy. Can I buy you a drink?"

She gave him a small smile, rubbing her aching side with her hand. "Thanks, but I have one," she replied as politely as possible, holding up her beer.

"That's okay. What's your name?" The guy leaned in closer, his breath reeking of booze. "Are you here alone?"

She flinched in reaction to the overwhelming hot puffs on her face. Time to get away from here, fast. She turned her face away from his, biting her lower lip in desperation as her gaze raked across the floor. Looking for what, she didn't know. Anything to stop this skuzzy guy from hitting on her.



The dance floor split in half as a tall man strode confidently down the middle. He came right toward her. Her breath caught in her throat as she slid her gaze up his strong, firm legs encased in black pants. A blood-red shirt opened at his neck, accentuating his pale skin, and a shock of black hair was cropped short on his head, the front slightly spiked.

But his gray eyes stopped Olivia, froze any thought that came to mind, as they boldly returned her stare. They were the color of a cold winter sky, though the look in them was anything but frosty as he held her gaze.

Her heart raced, beating hard against her chest. As her head swam, she realized she'd been holding her breath. She quickly exhaled then drew in a short burst of air.

The intoxicating man stopped less than a foot from her. His warm, earthy cologne hit her nostrils, and she closed her eyes for a quick second, breathing him in.

He turned to the drunken man then spoke in a low, relaxed tone. "Go."

The guy didn't say a word but walked away quietly, which Olivia saw out of the corner of her eye. She still couldn't take her eyes off the gray-eyed man's face.

He turned his attention back to her, a smile spreading across his mouth. "I'm Marcus," he said, extending his hand. "The owner of this club. Sorry if he was bothering you."

"Olivia." She took his hand. "Thanks for sending him away."

He thumbed the crease of her palm, sending spirals of warm, sexual tingles across her skin, down to her lower belly.

"Would you like to dance?" she blurted out. A flush spread across her cheeks at her unusual boldness, but something about Marcus made her want to be as close to him as possible.

He smiled again, tugging her close to him. His mouth hovered no more than a couple of inches from hers, his eyes hooded. "Love to."

She dumped her bottle in the nearby trash can as he led her out onto the floor, and a grinding song pounded into the room. Alcohol coursed through her body in a warm sprawl, making her movements slower than usual. Marcus moved in close, then closer, his body brushing

hers. Her nipples awoke beneath the thin fabric, perking at the sensation of his hard, warm chest against hers.

Sliding her hands along his shoulders, she found herself unable to stop the wanton grind against him. She rubbed the front of her pelvis along his upper thigh, reveling in his sharp intake of breath. She caressed his neck with her fingers, behind his ear, then down the firm muscles of his back.

The music throbbed in her, pulsed like the hunger that flushed her skin and parted her bare thighs in anticipation. Her panties grew wet, warm against her skin.

She wanted this man, wanted him with a need that startled her, even as she grew excited. She pushed her body tighter against him, his lean, muscled thigh wedged firmly between her legs.

He bent over and rubbed his lips along her shoulder, breathing deeply. His tongue lightly touched the dip behind her collarbone. "You taste so good," he murmured.

A small flutter ran through her stomach, and her head felt light, almost dizzy. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been so aroused. But she needed some fresh air, needed to strip off her clothes and feel this man on top of her, pushing into her, needed to run her hands across his skin.

She nudged her face beside his ear, letting the words in the back of her mind flow out of her mouth. "Let's get out of here."

## Chapter Two

Marcus could hear the blood galloping through Olivia's veins, a rapid *thump-thump, thump-thump*. He fought the desire to take a quick taste of her right there, pushing his fangs back up and out of sight. While some of the vampires didn't bother to wait, taking their pleasure—and blood—right there on the dance floor, he preferred to enjoy himself in private.

The damp, musky scent of her sex wafted to him as she slid her warm thighs against his, and he bit back a groan, his cock rigid with anticipation.

When he'd seen her at the bar earlier, he'd been unable to peel his gaze away from her. That damn sexy shirt that plunged almost to her bellybutton, barely covering her breasts. Those generous hips in a short skirt. And those exotic brown eyes. They were wide and almond-shaped, curving gently in the corners.

It had been a long time since he'd been so attracted to a woman upon first sight.

*Patience*, he reminded himself. He was eager to touch her soft skin, lick those hard nipples that were pronounced through her thin shirt. But he wouldn't do that here.

No, he wanted to stretch her out on a bed, strip off her clothes, and stroke her body until she begged him to fuck her, hard.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked her.

Her eyes blinked slowly, slightly glazed from the alcohol, and she shot him a sensual grin, her red lips sliding apart and flashing white teeth.

"Let's go back to my place," she said slowly, deliberately.

He grabbed her hand and pulled her off the floor, need surging through him. They wound their way through the other dancing couples to reach a door at the back of the building. He pushed it open and fumbled in his pocket for his car key as they walked down an aisle of the club's parking lot. A small push of the electronic button unlocked the doors of his silver Audi.

Marcus opened the passenger door, guiding Olivia into the seat. Her long, smooth legs slid in last, and he brushed a finger against her kneecap.

She shuddered slightly, darting her tongue out to lick her upper lip. Her jugular slammed against the oh-so thin skin of her neck, beckoning him to taste her. Just a drop.

*Patience.* He closed the door then hopped in to start the car. "Where to?" he asked.

She gave him directions to her house, located in Shaker Heights. As he sped along the road, he allowed himself to stroke the smooth skin of her thigh, rub his thumb along the outer side of her leg as he slipped his fingers along the inside. Her heat radiated into his hand, and her skirt hitched higher as she writhed beneath his touch.

His cock was going to explode before he made it there.

Luckily, they got to her house, a small brick bungalow along a quiet street. He threw the car into park, flung the doors open, and led her up the front steps.

She dug around in her purse, a small giggle escaping. "I can't seem to...to find my keys," she said. "I know they're in—oh, wait," she exclaimed, pulling them out. "Found them!"

Her hand shook slightly as she attempted several times to thrust the key into the hole. "I keep missing. Sorry."

A small, sinking feeling hit Marcus. He knew Olivia wanted him, could see and smell her desire, but he didn't want to take a woman who was too drunk to make rational decisions. As much as he wanted her, and she wanted him, he wouldn't have sex with her that way.

"Maybe this isn't a good idea," he murmured.

Olivia, who just got the key in the door, spun around. Her brow

wrinkled, and her lips pursed. "What?"

"Well, you're pretty...inebriated. I don't want you to do something you'd regret in the morning." He looked at her small hands gripped tightly together. "Your hand seemed shaky trying to put that key in the door."

She swallowed, her gaze still locked on his. "I'm buzzed, sure, but I'm also nervous. I don't normally do this. But I feel drawn to you for some reason." She inched closer to him, running a hand along his lower abdomen. He bounced to life again, straining against his pants. "Don't you want me?" she asked in a small voice.

Marcus closed the space between their bodies and pushed them inside the house, unable to wait another moment. In the small foyer, he ran his hands along the soft, plump curve of her ass, thrusting her hard against him, then captured her lips in a kiss, plunging his tongue inside her.

She moaned beneath his mouth, opening hers to draw him deeper. Her blood surged through her limbs, her veins calling to him. *Drink, drink, drink.* But he held back his desire, kept his fangs in place. He wanted to taste her, yes, but more than that, he wanted to prolong the pleasure. To truly enjoy experiencing her for the first time.

Olivia gasped as Marcus slid his hands low on her ass, stroking the bare skin between the back of her thighs. She arched toward him, but it didn't take away the throbbing ache in her pussy. "Let's go upstairs," she whispered in his ear.

His hand snug in hers, she led him up the narrow staircase to the master bedroom on the second floor, Olivia stepping gingerly, carefully, to keep from slipping, since the alcohol made her feel a bit off-center. She flipped on the light switch, bathing the room in a soft glow. Fortunately, she'd straightened the room up earlier in the day, so her silky brown comforter was tucked neatly into the sides of her queen-sized bed.

She offered him a shy smile, her heart slamming against her chest with nervousness. What now? Did she need to make a move or would he? She'd been out of the game for too long. "Well, here's my room."

He nodded silently, a half-smile on his face. He reached out to cup her face, his thumb stroking the curve of her lower lip. "What do you

want, Olivia? What do you hunger for? I want to hear you say it.”

She swallowed hard then forced herself to say, “I want you to taste me.”

His eyes widened in surprise.

*Maybe that was too bold to say.* Her cheeks flushed hot from nerves. She started to backpedal, hoping to dig herself out of this embarrassing hole. “What I mean is, I’d like us to have sex. You know, we could—”

Marcus dropped to his knees, pushing her skirt up to her hips to reveal her thin, white, boy-cut panties. Hands on the sides of her hips, he leaned his face close to her pussy, closed his eyes, and breathed in deeply, causing her pulse to pound hard. Then he moved his mouth over her mound and licked her through her panties.

Oh, God. She’d forgotten how good that felt, to have a man’s tongue caressing her pussy. She let her head fall back and slipped her fingers through Marcus’ hair as he moved his tongue along her slit, wetting the thin fabric.

His fingers nudged aside the panties, and his tongue slid across her bare skin this time. She thrust closer against his hot mouth, and he grabbed her ass as he buried his face against her, sliding his lips along the sensitized flesh. Every stroke of his tongue shot daggers of need through her. She’d never felt so hot, so on fire before.

“Right there,” she panted, spreading her thighs apart. She could hardly believe her own self—standing in the middle of her bedroom with a complete stranger on his knees in front of her. This was unlike her. This was bold, sexual, brazen.

And she loved every second of it.

She opened her eyes and looked back down at Marcus.

His eyes met hers, and he moved his face away, his lips glistening from tasting her. “What do you want now?”

“I want you to fuck me.”

His eyes darkened into a deep gray, and he nodded, standing again. He slid a hand around the back of her head and pulled his face down to hers, kissing her hard. She could taste her warm juices on his mouth when his tongue caressed, stroked hers, and her pussy pulsed harder.

His warm hand slid across the lower curve of her breast, cupping gently. She pushed into his palm, and he caressed the tip of her tight nipple with his thumb, sending a shot of pulsing heat straight through her. He dipped his head down to lick the hardened nub with his tongue then slipped the tip into his mouth, dampening the fabric of her thin blouse. Desire spiraled through her, and she gasped as he pulled back and nipped at her nipple.

He pushed her toward the bed, and she clung to him, pulling him on top of her. His hard cock pulsed against her bare thigh through his pants, and she reached a hand down to unzip him.

"Yes," he moaned. "That's it."

Emboldened by his excitement, she opened his pants and stroked her hand along the length of his thick cock, her fingertips swirling along the head. A bead of clear liquid pearled at the tip, and she lifted her finger to her mouth to taste him.

His eyes looked black, the pupils dilated. His eyelids were heavy, almost closed as he watched her. She felt herself caught in his gaze, sinking in her own desperate, feverish desire.

"I want you," she whispered. "Please."

With swift moves, he stripped off his clothes and made short work of her panties and shirt, leaving the skirt pushed up around her waist. He grabbed a condom from his pocket and rolled it on, then slipped a finger along her damp pussy.

She nudged her body closer to his cock, and then he thrust himself inside her, his warm breath panting on her forehead. She gasped at the sensation, at how big, how full he felt in her. It had been a long time, too long, since she'd given into her needs. She clenched her vaginal muscles around him, wrapping her legs around his hips, drawing him deeper into her. "Marcus," she said, "that feels good. Don't stop."

He looked down at her, sliding almost completely out and thrusting back in again, and she experienced that odd sensation of dizziness once more as he locked gazes with her. It was almost as if he hypnotized her, and her eyelids were heavy, so heavy. She closed them and leaned her head back, pushing her neck toward his mouth. She had the urge for him to taste her neck, for him to graze his teeth along the

fragile skin.

As Marcus gripped her close, his cock moving in, out, stroking her wet pussy from the inside, his lips slipped along the sensitive area under her ear, and she thrust her neck closer, forcing his mouth harder on her. Some strange, inexplicable urgency filled her, so she turned her face and sank her teeth into the top of his shoulder.

Marcus froze, panting gently against the back of her neck. "So, you want to taste me, too, do you?"

Her head swam, confused, aroused. She ached for him to be deeper inside her, not just with his cock, but under her skin. "I need you to—" She stopped, unsure of how to articulate what she wanted.

Marcus tilted her head so her neck thrust out and gently licked it. He pushed his cock back into her again, fucking her harder, faster. He clutched the curve of her hip as his chest, now covered with a thin layer of sweat, slid across her breasts. Her sensitive nipples beaded hard beneath him. She dug her nails into his back and clawed them down his skin, needing it harder. Harder.

His teeth grazed her skin and pierced through. She cried out, shocked at the sharp pain. Then a wave of lethargic sensuality slid across her skin, through her pores, and she relaxed into his embrace, letting the alcohol and his slow drinking cradle her in a sort of trance.

And somewhere in the back of her thoughts, through the haze settling across her mind, she realized Marcus was no ordinary man.

He was a vampire.

But what startled her even more was that she wasn't afraid of it. In fact, she wanted to give in to him, wanted to taste him the way he experienced her. Being with him had unlocked a sexual fervor she didn't realize she had inside her.

"Marcus," she said, her voice slow, drawn out. "I want you to make me a vampire."



## Chapter Three

Marcus had never been bitten before, except when he'd originally been turned several decades ago. So having Olivia sink her teeth, albeit ineffectually, onto his neck, had sent a surprising, hot thrust of need down his spine.

He lifted his fangs from her throat and looked down at her, licking a drop of sweet blood from the tip of his canine. Her body was warm and slightly damp with sweat, as well, and he could hear the roaring of her veins beneath her flesh. The copper tang of her blood filled the back of his mouth, and he swallowed deeply, studying her face.

Surprisingly, she looked serious, not fully affected by the temporary hypnosis he'd placed on her to ease the drinking of her blood.

"If that's what you want," he said, unable to hide the excitement in his voice. It had been a while since he'd turned someone, and he'd never done so while having sex. This would be new territory for him.

She pushed her pelvis closer to his, her movement thrusting his cock deeper inside her. Her reddened lips parted, and she nodded, her eyes half-closed.

Never one to refuse a request, Marcus clamped down on the fresh cuts of her neck again, drawing her essence from the jugular. The warm, thick liquid spilled into his mouth, and he clamped his lips over the skin. She writhed beneath him as he slammed his cock into her again, his fever, his ache to shoot his seed building drink by drink. Her body grew limp, and her head lolled to the side.

"Yes," she whispered, "don't stop. I'm going to come."

He forced himself to slow his drinking, stroking his cock along her inner walls until she dug her nails into his back again. Her body tightened up, and she jerked beneath him when the orgasm hit, a luscious cry escaping her lips. Her pussy shuddered around him, clenching him in an almost painful tightness, and he felt his own orgasm building close.

As hers tapered off, he rammed into her with swift, hard strokes, the white heat exploding through his balls and shooting down the length of his cock. As he came, he drew a large surge of blood from her, draining her. His head swam. God, it was incredible, coming and drinking blood at the same time. His body felt more alive than it had since before he'd been turned.

Olivia grew still and pale, the color on her skin faded to a sheer white. Her cheeks were pale, no longer flushed. Her breathing had slowed to almost a stop, her chest imperceptibly rising, falling.

It was time.

He pulled out of her, then drew his wrist close and slit the skin with his tooth, holding it over Olivia's mouth. His blood plopped onto her lower lip. Her mouth opened slowly, and he pushed his arm closer to her, rubbing the wound on her mouth.

She gave a slow suck at first then drew more and more blood from him, raising her hands to tighten the grip on his arm. Her face turned up toward his, and she locked eyes with him, her lips curving in a slow smile as her teeth actually pierced his skin this time.

Marcus grew dizzy as she slowly bled him. He tried to pull his arm away, but her fingers dug into his forearm, keeping him close.

He grinned, trying to keep in control. "Baby, that's enough now. You're gonna kill me if you keep going."

She finally pulled away, a small drop of blood still on her lower lip, then lay back on the bed, her face blooming with large, red flushes. "Sorry. I feel so...tired." She closed her eyes, her dark lashes fluttering against her cheeks.

He leaned over, wiped the red dot from her mouth, and kissed her forehead, emotional. Which made sense—he and Olivia were bonded together forever now. "Get some sleep."

She nodded slowly, then turned her head into the soft pillow and

fell asleep.

As Marcus gathered his belongings to leave, he tucked the blankets close around her, licking her neck to seal the wounds. He didn't envy her when she'd awaken—her body needed time to adjust to the new lifestyle—but she'd get used to it soon enough. He brushed a finger against the sexy curve of her lower lip, drawing in a slow breath.

He looked forward to seeing her again.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Tick. Tick. Tick.* The abnormally loud second hand of her alarm clock clanged in her ears like Big Ben. Every click sounded like a hammer to her skull.

Damn hangover. Olivia had never been so ill in her life. Like death warmed over. Her mouth parched, and her body bombarded with sensory details. A sickly sweet floral scent permeated the room, and the well-worn fabric of her sheets rubbed against her bare flesh.

She swallowed several times, hoping it would assuage her mouth's dryness, but to no avail. She should have drunk some water before going to bed last night. Now, she suffered the consequences. This hangover was messing with her head, making her overly sensitive to her environment.

To her dismay, she couldn't remember much of the evening, except that she'd had sex with the hottest man she'd ever seen in her life. And then she'd had the craziest dreams about vampires, stuff that made her blush thinking about it. Hot, sexy dreams.

With a groan, she sat up slowly, glancing at her clock. It was 9:00 PM. She'd overslept—by hours. *I guess having sex must have taken more out of me than I realized.* At least she had time to shower and attempt to liven up before going to work.

Athena would probably be worried about her, too. She needed to give her a call later, between clients.

She wiped a hand down her face, over her eyes, then realized it was a pungent rose scent wafting to her, filling the room. She glanced at the bed beside her. A large, blood-red rose lay nestled on the pillow, a small white card beneath it. She slipped the card from beneath the flower,

amazed at how strong its scent was, and read.

*Thanks for the memorable evening. Marcus*

Olivia smiled at his thoughtfulness, wishing she could remember more about him and their evening together. The only things that stood out were those haunting gray eyes. She didn't think she would forget them soon.

Her neck muscles clenched in agony as she massaged the knots, and she headed toward the shower. She must have slept poorly. She made quick work of her shower, popped two aspirin, dry, then threw on her dress clothes and headed to the office. Her first appointment of the evening would be waiting for her if she didn't hustle.

Luckily, she made it with a few minutes to spare. Tucking her unruly hair behind her ear, she settled on her couch, praying the aspirin would kick in and take away the sick feeling.

Olivia sat still on the chair, sinking into the leather, and closed her eyes. Maybe this was more than just a hangover. Maybe she'd caught the flu from somewhere. She made a mental note to see a doctor tomorrow.

A knock on the door reverberated throughout the room, startling her. Ben, one of her newest clients who was only a teenager, popped his shaved head through the door.

"Is it okay to come in?" he asked, his eyes wide and a little skittish.

"Sure, come on," she said, forcing a smile to her face. She waved him over to the couch.

He sank into the cushions, flipping his hoodie over his head, then thrust his hands into his pockets.

"So, how was your week?" Olivia asked, grabbing the notebook and pen from her desk and flipping to a clean page.

Ben shrugged, mumbling, "Not bad, I guess. Just having a hard time controlling myself. I can't fight my urges." He reached a hand up and scratched his skull, a brittle *scratch, scratch* that set Olivia's teeth on edge.

She forced herself to relax. "Okay, tell me what you're feeling. Maybe we can get to the bottom of this craving by figuring out what the trigger is." Olivia's hand poised over her notebook.

Dragging in a deep breath, Ben leaned his head back against the couch. "Okay, basically, I see a person, and they become alive for me. No, more than that. They become...what's the word?"

"Vibrant?" she suggested.

He lifted his head and nodded, his eyes brighter. "Yeah, that's it. Vibrant. I can see the veins right under their skin, which looks thin enough to break through. I could probably just touch their flesh with my teeth, and the blood would pour right out into my mouth. So I start thinking about how that feels. God, I love the taste of blood. I...crave it."

A sway of dizziness swept over Olivia, and a deep ache wound through her chest. She swallowed, thinking about the last time she'd bitten her tongue and blood had filled her mouth. She wanted to taste that again.

"And I smell the scent of their body, you know? It's warm and...tangy, I guess. Once I smell them and see their blood under their skin, I start feeling frantic. It's all I can think about. At that moment, I don't want anything else. Just to drink their blood."

Olivia's hand shook. She put the pen down, closed her eyes, and touched shaking fingers to the bridge of her nose. Yes, she could feel that very sensation crawling through her skin as he spoke. The indescribable ache, the overwhelming obsession with quenching that hunger.

Her canine teeth began to throb, and she felt them elongate and prick the inner curve of her lower lip. Her eyes flew wide open, and she darted out of her chair, clamping a hand over her mouth.

"Ben," she said, turning away from him and clutching her desk. She carefully formed her words so her teeth wouldn't scrape her lip. "I'm sorry, but I need to cancel our appointment. I'm feeling very ill today. Can we meet again in a couple of days? I need to see someone." And he'd better have some answers for her.

She heard him stand. "Sure."

"Great. I'll call you. Thanks."

Ben left.

With a finger, Olivia touched her extended teeth in horror. The preternatural senses, the longing for blood, the teeth—the last pieces of the puzzle fell in place.

The dreams were real. She'd been turned. She was now a vampire.

## Chapter Four

After rescheduling the rest of her evening's appointments, Olivia drove down to the night club, her blood pressure through the roof. She couldn't seem to wrap her brain around this new reality. How did this happen?

She sped down the highway as fast as she dared. When she got to the night club, she parked in a free spot just down the road and strode over to the doors. Music thumped out onto the street even though the night was still young, the heavy bass throbbing through her.

The bouncer looked her up and down, but she thrust a few bucks in his hand. "I know I'm not dressed nicely," she said, glancing down at her work clothes, "but I need to speak to Marcus. Now."

He must have heard the urgency in her voice, because he thumbed toward the stairs behind him. "In his office. First door on the left."

Olivia took the steps two at a time, pausing at the top for a moment to catch her breath, then headed through his door without knocking.

Marcus was behind a sturdy cherry wood desk, hunched over a pile of paperwork. He glanced up, his eyes filled with irritation at first by the interruption. When he realized who she was, they softened. "Olivia," he said to her, a smile on his face. "I wasn't expecting to—"

"How could you?" she asked, her voice shaking with anger. "Do you realize what you've done?"

The warmth on his face slid away in a flash, and his eyes narrowed into slits. "Excuse me?"

"Why did you change me into a vampire?" She clenched her hands,

her fingernails digging into her palms.

One eyebrow rose. "You asked me to. Don't you remember?"

"What? No, I'd never do that. I—" A small memory of last night tickled the back of her mind. Of her arching her neck, asking him...

Oh, God. He was right. How could she have forgotten? It must have been the alcohol...or maybe he did something to her when they were having sex.

What was wrong with her? Was it fair to blame him for this? A hot flush burned her face, and she stared at the floor. She'd done this to herself. Caught up in the fever of the moment last night, she'd wanted to feel the sensations as fully as he did, wanted to experience something new. Wanted to live life on the edge and taste the darkness.

Well, she got it, all right. And now, it couldn't be undone.

She looked back up in disgust, lashing out at Marcus as she fought down her own shame. "I can't believe this. What am I going to do now?"

He stood, skirting around the edge of his desk to stand in front of her. His voice was low, intense, his gaze flashing hot. "You'll keep going on, that's what you'll do. And to be honest, I'm not sure why you're so ungrateful of the gift I gave you, the gift *you* asked me for."

"Th-the gift?" she scoffed. "I'd hardly call this a gift." A swell of emotion overtook her, and tears stung her eyes. "I can't do this. I-I don't know what to d-do," she stuttered, gasping to catch her breath. Panic flowed in her at full force, and her lips and fingers began to tingle from the attack.

*Breathe*, she ordered herself, trying to regain herself. *Must be in control.*

The gray softened in his eyes, and he pinched his lips in concern. "I had no idea this would be that bad for you," he murmured. "I didn't know there were people who would reject the lifestyle so...strongly."

She ran a hand across her eyes, trying to swipe away the tears. Her sister's face came to mind.

Mary was always the "black sheep" of the family, and proudly so—Olivia had rescued her from one scrape or another more times than she cared to admit, ranging from abusive boyfriends, to money troubles, to whatever else happened to get in the way of Mary having fun.



“My sister was turned into a vampire. It ended up destroying her.”

When Mary fell in with a small clique of rogue vampires and became one herself, she was beyond Olivia’s help. Mary had been in the wrong place at the wrong time, hanging out with them in some dark alley, and was killed by some wannabe vampire slayer looking to wipe them all out and earn himself a name.

“I’m sorry,” Marcus said, his tone sincere, gentle. He pushed a lock of hair out of her face and stared intently at her. “I’m sure that was hard.”

“It still is.” Olivia’s heart still ached five years later for the loss. It was part of the reason why she’d decided to become a therapist, to specialize in the suppression of vampiric cravings, helping vampires integrate seamlessly into society, not become its scorn—and possibly its prey. “Which is why I feel as strongly as I do about vampires. And why I still believe this is a curse.”

She turned after saying those words and ran out his office, not giving him a chance to respond. A sick ache hit the floor of his stomach as he slid back into his desk chair.

Guilt.

But why should he feel guilty? He’d only done what she asked, granted her the gift of immortality. How could she spurn that gift so easily without even giving it a chance?

A small knock on the doorjamb jerked him out of his thoughts. One of the regular bar attendees, a girl in her mid-twenties, offered him a crooked smile. She was attractive, with faded hip-hugger jeans and a tight black tank top, her hair pulled back in a careless ponytail.

“Marcus, you’ve been working hard. I figured you might want a little...midnight snack,” she purred in a soft voice, running a finger along the base of her elongated throat. “I’d love to help you out.”

Normally, that would have tempted him. Normally, he would have been excited over the process of not only drinking from her, but maybe having a little more fun on the side. Now, however, he found himself soured at the thought. He couldn’t drive Olivia’s miserable face out of his mind, her eyes watery, her mouth shaking from anger and fear.

He waved the girl away. “Thanks, but I’m okay.”

She blinked in surprise but nodded and left.

He heaved a heavy sigh and leaned back in his chair, grabbing the invoice off his desk. Time to get back to work.

If he could even focus now.

\* \* \* \* \*

Olivia left her car parked on the street, crammed her shaking hands into her pockets, and shuffled down the sidewalk. Small clusters of people jostled into her as they passed by, but she desperately tried to tune them out, tried not to notice the throb of jugular veins on men and women, their necks so close, so accessible. They practically glowed, and their sweet skins' scents wafted to her nose. She groaned.

The painful ache in her gut grew stronger by the minute. Her leg muscles began to shake, as well, and she weakened.

*Hunger.*

There was no doubt about it. She was starving and wanted—needed—blood, *now*. She thought about Ben's words, the near obsession with wanting to taste that thick, red liquid, and her teeth began to push down again.

*No, I can't do this.* She swallowed, trying to stop her runaway thoughts. But if she didn't give in to this craving, she'd die. She had to feed. All vampires did.

She fought back the simultaneous feelings of revulsion and relief, scanning the crowd for someone who would help her lessen the guilt of drawing blood by his scummy nature. The seedy bar on the corner held promise. She stepped over and leaned in the shadows against the brick wall, her body shaking from anticipation, as well.

Two women strolled out, arm-in-arm and laughing. Their skins' natural perfume hit her nose, and she breathed deeply, the scent oddly intoxicating. She stared at them, down their legs, able to see the veins beneath their fragile flesh.

*No, patience.* She let a couple of other people pass out the door, fighting the twitching in her body, her hands. Her head began to swim. God, she was starving. Starving. This was agony.

A moment later, a guy in a plaid shirt stumbled out of the bar.

“Hey, there,” he slurred to a departing woman, “wanna come back to my place? I have a big bed—you can even bring a friend.”

The lady turned around and flipped him off, then got into her car and drove away.

*Bingo. We have our guy.*

Olivia licked her lips and stepped out of the shadows. “Hi,” she whispered behind him. “Are you looking for company?”

The guy spun around, swaying slightly, then caught sight of her. “Oh yeah, baby,” he said, a crooked smirk on his face as he sized her up.

Olivia focused all her thoughts, every ounce of energy left in her flagging body on the man, on getting him to respond to her. “Go stand against the wall,” she said slowly, locking eyes with him.

He tilted his head at her, and his eyes glazed over. He pushed his back against the wall, his breathing slow. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* His heart beat solid, steady, within his body, the blood surging through him in powerful waves.

She pushed herself against him to make it look like they were just a necking couple, and he responded, his pulse turning erratic.

For some reason, that reaction made her even hungrier. She tilted his head and pressed her lips against his neck. “Do you want me to taste you?” she asked. Even though he was a scumbag, she still felt obliged to obtain his permission. Taking something, no matter how hungry she was, wouldn’t cut it for her.

He nodded.

She pierced his skin with her teeth, and he flinched slightly, then relaxed with a sigh as she drew the thick liquid out. The blood slammed into her mouth in a shock, and she gulped hard, swallowing it, relishing the warmth sliding down her throat.

It was like breathing in a breeze of fresh air. Instantly revitalized, jerked almost painfully awake, Olivia pressed her hand against the other side of the guy’s neck, forcing him closer beneath her mouth. His head lolled to the side as he let her drink, and she took freely from him, reveling in the sweet, coppery taste.

As she drank, he slumped down the wall, and she followed him, unable to let go. Unwilling to. She’d never felt so alive before, never felt

every cell, every hair on the surface of her skin so sensitized. It was hypnotic.

Her stomach filled, and she could feel his pulse slowing, slowing to a low, steady thump.

Then a hand clamped on her shoulder, and she jerked away from the guy's neck, flinging around in shock. It was Marcus, his eyes dark, unreadable.

He grabbed the drunken guy, leaned over his neck, and licked the wounds. He whispered in his ear, gave him a couple of bucks, and sent him down the road.

The guy staggered away, his eyes focused ahead, still in a daze.

Olivia panted hard, the rush of drinking blood still surging through her, and she fought to regain control of herself. She'd let herself slip far too many times in the last couple of days, let her baser passions overthrow her own sense of logic, of what was right. Who was she? Who was this person she was turning into?

"You took too much blood from him. You'll kill them if you don't stop yourself," he said, his voice sharp.

At his words, she jerked, and her fangs retreated. He was right. Horror at her actions, at taking that man's blood and nearly killing him, slapped her hard in the face.

She sank down to the ground, her palms digging into the gritty cement sidewalk, and let the reality of her life wash over her in all its ugly glory. This was—disgusting. Completely unacceptable.

Tears slipped out of her eyes, splashing onto her pants. "I don't know how to handle this," she cried out, unable to hide the shame, the pain in her voice. She'd never felt so out of control in her life, so scared.

Marcus kneeled in front of her, wiping her face with his fingers. He lifted her chin to look at him, his eyes warm. "You'll learn. You just need someone to show you."

She nodded, sniffing. He was right. Hell, she dealt with vampires every day, helped them battle their own hunger struggles. If she could guide them, surely she could guide herself.

She just needed to learn how to suppress this side of her life. Nothing had to change. It just took more control. This was the perfect

chance to practice what she preached.

More resolute now, she said, "I'll make this work."

She *would* conquer this.

## Chapter Five

“So, in short,” Olivia spoke in a rush, tucking her legs underneath her as she shifted on her couch, “I’m not the same person anymore. And I’m trying to figure out how to fix things now.” She’d spent the last twenty minutes explaining the whole sordid story to Athena, needing to confide in her best friend.

She glanced at the checkered pattern of her pajama pants and fiddled with the leg hem, afraid to glance up at Athena, who sat in the loveseat across from her. Afraid of what she’d see in her eyes. Would it be revulsion? Fear? Disgust?

“Well, it’s about damn time,” Athena finally said.

Olivia jerked her head up, shocked to see the huge smile pasted across Athena’s face. “What?”

Her friend jumped off the love seat and plopped on the cushion beside Olivia. She wrapped her arm around Olivia’s shoulders and gave her a tight squeeze. “Girl, you’ve been uptight and repressed for so long, I was afraid you’d never come out of your shell. Especially after what happened with your sister.”

“You mean you’re not freaked out?” Olivia asked, a wave of relief sweeping over her even as she questioned her need for affirmation by Athena. Amazing. Before turning into a vampire, she’d been a comfortable, confident woman. Lonely, yes, but secure in who she was and what she wanted from life. Now, she was an insecure, needy mess, and she wasn’t happy with this one bit. How could she help others if she couldn’t keep control over her own life and affairs? No, this would not do.

Athena raised an eyebrow at Olivia's words. "Hell, no. I think vampires are hot. Why do you think I dragged you to that vampire-slash-human dance club? It's because I wanted to meet one for myself."

"What kind of club?"

"You didn't know it was a mixed club? Yeah, it's a place where vamps and humans can hang out without worries of being persecuted or anything. That guy who started the place wanted a safe spot to chill in, and since there wasn't anything in Cleveland, he just made one." Athena twirled a lock of hair around her finger.

"I didn't know that's the kind of place we went to. But now that I think about it, there *were* an awful lot of people necking." Olivia thought about Marcus, who seemed comfortable, happy as a vampire. So content.

Granted, it was nice he tried to help others, but promoting or endorsing such activities wasn't helpful to vampires. It just fed into their bloodlust instead of encouraging them to control it.

"Actually, it was the owner of the bar who turned me," Olivia murmured.

Athena sighed, sinking back into the couch. "God, that's so sexy. You're freaking lucky."

"I'd hardly call this lucky," she replied in a dry tone. "I'm now part of the undead, and I'll never be able to see a sunrise again." She sighed as a small wave of depression swept over her with that thought.

Athena patted Olivia's leg. "Hey, don't be down. When's the last time you saw a sunrise, anyway? Your job's kept you up at night for a long time now. This isn't anything new for you."

"Yeah, that's true. The one good part is, at least I'll be able to guide my patients through my own example of self-control."

"One thing, though," Athena whispered, her voice low, a bit shaky. "You have to promise me something."

Olivia darted to look at Athena's wide eyes, fixed at her. "What?" she asked, heart in throat.

"You have to promise..." She paused, drew in a slow, deep breath. "...promise never, ever, ever to talk like Dracula."

Olivia rolled her eyes, elbowing Athena. "I'll do my best."

Now that she knew her best friend was behind her, she felt a little easier about the situation.

The next step—to learn the nuances of being a vampire. And then, how to master and control it. In order to do that, she needed to turn to the one vampire she knew the best.

Marcus.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Thanks for meeting me,” Olivia said to Marcus. She stared up at the moon, a swollen globe that hung heavy and low in the sky.

It had been a rough couple of days, but she’d somehow managed to make it through by drinking the blood from raw meat to avoid giving in to her desires. The memory of the spike of pleasure—and shame—from feeding on the drunken guy wouldn’t leave her, though. She had to get better control over herself.

Hence, why she’d asked Marcus to meet her at the fountain behind the downtown library. Cool water splashed down into the base, the mist floating to her skin as the wind blew in small gusts and mussed her hair. She slipped the band from around her wrist and pulled her locks back in a ponytail.

Marcus shifted on the park bench, turning to face her. “What can I do for you?”

“I need to learn everything there is to know about being a vampire. I’ve studied my clients’ files, read the research material, but until now, I haven’t had a personal experience with it.”

Well, not totally true. She pushed her sister’s face out of her mind. Now was not the time to think about Mary and her fatal overindulgence. Olivia would be different than that. She wouldn’t—couldn’t—cave like that. Because if she did, she’d end up the same way.

Marcus nodded thoughtfully at her words. The moonlight spilled across his face and highlighted his cheekbones, the swell of his lower lip. She glanced at his broad shoulders and well-defined chest, snugly tucked into a dark blue dress shirt. He truly was a handsome man.

“What do you want to know?”



Time to focus. Now was not the moment to let Marcus distract her from her task. "First off, how do you control when your fangs come out? Mine just pop right out if I look at someone too closely or start thinking about drinking...blood." She tried her best to squelch the memory of taking that drink by the bar, tried to focus on the technical task at hand.

*Keep it business.* That was the best way to detach from the emotions, to keep the situation from spiraling out of her grasp.

Marcus chuckled. "The thirst can't always be controlled, Olivia."

She shook her head. "Bull. I don't believe that. I want to know how to physically manage it."

"It's like...sex," he replied in a low voice. "A man can't always control that rush of desire. But he can control what he does with it. Just because he gets hard doesn't mean he has to act on it."

He stared at her lips, and she darted her tongue out to lick them, aware of his sexual scrutiny.

"I see. So the...fangs can't be controlled?"

Marcus shrugged one shoulder casually, draping an arm across the back of the park bench, his hand beside her shoulder. "It can, but it takes a lot of practice. You have to let the desire be inside you without giving into it at that moment."

His fingers stroked her bare flesh casually, slowly, but it was enough to make her skin tingle. She bit back a moan. Her intention to keep it business-like was flying out the window.

"Sometimes, it helps to know you're going to give into it eventually," he continued. "For some people, holding off on that moment of pleasure is just as erotic as the moment of pleasure itself."

His eyes were dark, focused on hers, and she stared back, unable to look away. Her nipples hardened, and her breasts swelled with excitement as a jolt of desire flooded her pelvis, dampened her panties. Marcus was sex personified. He was dangerous, and Olivia would do well to take care around him, before she gave into God only knew what other darkness lurked deep within her.

He leaned close, his face just inches from hers. She could see the moon glint in the corners of his eyes, those pools of dark gray that dragged her into their depths. "Would you like to practice?"

"Practice?" she repeated dumbly, her mind blank, unable to think. He was too close, and she could feel the heat radiate from him. She remembered the sensations of his body on top of her as he moved in and out, his sweat mingling with hers, his mouth on her neck...the slow, sure pull of seduction and losing herself to that desire, that hunger...

"Practice controlling the canine teeth." A small smile lit his face.

*Stop this!* She needed to focus, now. "Yes," she said firmly, in a voice a bit too loud.

Marcus gave her a smile, the corners of his sexy mouth turning up slowly. "Okay then." He grabbed her hand and pulled her off the park bench. "First things first. We need to find our practice person." He pulled her over to the side of the fountain and silently watched small clusters of people wander by for a moment.

Olivia, on the other hand, watched him, secretly reveling in the comfort, the sensation of his large, warm hand covering hers. His gaze flickered across the crowd. His lashes were long, thick, and he had a slight dimple in his right cheek that popped out as he flattened his lips together, scrutinizing.

He turned to look at her, and she blinked, embarrassed to be caught staring. His head dipped down, and he brushed his lips against hers all too quickly. "If you don't stop looking at me like that, I'm going to take you right here."

Oh, God. For a small second, a wicked part of her thrilled in the thought. But now wasn't the time for flirting. It was time to learn the tricks of being a vampire, not only for herself, but for her clients.

*Yes, think of your clients,* she ordered herself. How much could they benefit from learning these lessons? What value she could bring to their sessions by giving them more practical tips.

"Sorry," she finally said.

"Don't be." He gave her that sexy, crooked smile again, and she nearly melted at the impact. She found herself wanting to make him smile like that again at her.

Great. A new sort of addiction she'd have to conquer. Marcus was all too quickly integrating himself into her life. What was happening to her? Even beyond the vampirism, Olivia was changing. And she wasn't

sure if she liked it or not.

Luckily, Marcus snapped her out of her thoughts. "We have one up ahead," he whispered in her ear.

A young man sat on a wooden park bench about twenty feet away from them. He glanced at his watch several times within the span of a minute and then drummed his fingertips impatiently on the top of the bench, his leg jittery as he waited impatiently for someone.

"Watch him," Marcus said. "Focus on his skin. When you catch his scent, let it slip into you. Watch his blood move within his veins. Listen."

She nodded and caught the smell of the guy's cologne, then the earthy scent of his flesh beneath that, slightly sweet and tangy. Her mouth began to water.

A swell of arousal rose in her, along with panic. She couldn't do this. The hunger would take over again.

Marcus squeezed her hand. "Focus."

She nodded, trying to push down the fear. *Do it.* She studied the guy's neck, listening to the swishing of his blood as it pumped hard through his veins. *Thump-thump. Thump-thump.*

Her teeth tingled, and her canines descended. The urge was upon her, her head light, her mouth shaky, eager to clamp down on his neck, to drink until she was full, until she was alive again.

"Now, pull yourself back," Marcus said. "Let the feeling stay in you, but detach yourself from it."

Olivia closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath of air, filling her lungs to capacity. "Relax," she whispered to herself as she exhaled. She imagined herself pulling out of her own body, observing herself from a distance. The tension, the lust, were still in her, still strong, but they weren't as overwhelmingly distracting.

*Good,* she coached herself. *Now, push the fangs in.*

After a moment, the canines retreated back to normal, tucked away safely within her mouth.

Success.

She beamed at Marcus, thrilled with her progress. Now that she could control the hunger, surely the rest would be a piece of cake.

## Chapter Six

Watching Olivia try to fight her hunger disturbed Marcus to no end. He wanted to push her into accepting who she was, into accepting the vampiric lifestyle, but he knew he couldn't force it on her. She'd have to come to terms with it on her own.

However, that didn't mean he couldn't try to nudge her along the way. Surely the more time they spent together, the more he could convince her to lighten up.

He watched her small face turned up in the moonlight, her curvy lips slightly parted as she concentrated on the task, and his cock throbbed to life. His lungs clenched into a tight fist within his chest, and he swallowed hard, imagining that sexy mouth of hers wrapped around him, sucking him with the eager intensity he'd seen in her the other night.

This woman was slowly driving him crazy, driving her way under his skin. How did she pull such wild reactions out of him? Lust, desire, anger.

Tenderness. Patience. Things he'd never given much attention to before, much less practiced with someone. Marcus was all about pleasure—had been since he was turned. His life before had been filled with the lackluster dullness of being a regular guy, a day-in and day-out rote existence of work, sleep, work, sleep, with no glorious sensations that could possibly compare to drinking blood.

Having been turned into a vampire was a blessing he appreciated. Being able to give and receive satisfaction was a gift he'd never taken for granted. In a world filled with too much staleness, not enough life, he

tried to enjoy whatever came his way and share a little of that enjoyment with others.

And share, he had. But Olivia had him feeling guilty for those indulgences now, had him thinking maybe a little self-restraint was in order. He shook those thoughts off. There was nothing wrong with who he was. At least he was comfortable in his own skin. He'd much rather be that way than too uptight.

Olivia opened her eyes and beamed at him. "I did it," she said, almost breathless. Her eyes sparkled, their creases deep as she shot him a genuine smile. "I controlled it."

That smile was like a punch in the gut, the impact hitting him hard, fast. What was going on with him? Being with Olivia was a heady rush, like breathing pure oxygen.

"Glad to hear it." He felt an outpouring of his own hunger as a waft of her scent hit him. God, he wanted to taste her skin again, wanted to feel her warm, slick thighs straddle his hips, her hair flinging around in abandon as she fucked him, rode him hard.

He stepped closer, and her eyes widened. The smile slid from her face as her expression turned serious. He touched the cupid's bow of her mouth with his fingertip, then leaned down and caressed her lips with his.

She sighed beneath his kiss and arched forward, her hands sliding to the back of his neck, touching the small hairs with the tips of her fingers. He shivered, dragging her flush to him, pressing his hard cock against the apex of her thighs. Her pelvis ground against his as if on instinct. He would lose it completely if he didn't get out of here.

With regret, he dragged his mouth away. "Come back to my place."

She nodded, and he grabbed her hand, leading her to his car. The air around them burned with sexual tension. It vibrated between them, hot and fervent, urgent. With every ounce of control he could muster, he drove his car to the dance club's parking lot and pulled into his dedicated spot. One advantage of owning the bar—he lived on the top floor, so he was always close by.

They booked it up the back steps to his private entrance. He keyed the door and let her in, locking it behind them. The last thing Marcus

wanted was to be disturbed.

“Wow,” she whispered, wandering through the living room, “this place is awesome.” She cast her gaze around the rough-hewn crimson brick walls, her fingers brushing along the top of his dark brown mod-style couch. “I’ve never been in one of the lofts downtown before. This is enormous.”

At the moment, he couldn’t care less about his décor. The only thing he wanted to focus on was her. He pressed himself against her back, nuzzling the arch of her neck. Her skin was clean, soft, tempting. He slipped his hands around her, under her cotton shirt, and cupped her warm breasts, thumbing the lace of her bra. She moaned as she dropped her head back onto his shoulder.

Something was happening in Olivia, something inside her that compelled her to be close to Marcus. It went beyond lust, beyond mere physical attraction. He was a sexual magnet, to be sure, but there was something about his patience in instructing her, his desire to help her, that made her feel comforted. Secure, even.

She turned around, and he groaned when his hands slid to her back instead of being on her breasts.

She smiled to herself. Time to turn the tables. Time to exercise her control again—and this time, in a way that benefited them both. Reaching her hands up, she cupped the sides of his angled face and drew his gaze to hers. “What do you want?” she asked him in a soft voice.

He swallowed hard. His Adam’s apple bobbed up and down as he studied her face. His mouth crooked in one corner, and he said, “I want you to taste me.”

Those words sounded oddly familiar for some reason. She had a sudden image, followed by an intense flash of heat springing to her face. She remembered Marcus asking her the other night what she hungered for, then licking her wetness when she’d responded.

He’d turned her words right back on her.

Olivia chuckled under her breath, and then she dropped to her knees. He drew in a sharp intake of breath as she unbuttoned his pants then dragged down the zipper and released his hard, throbbing cock into her hand. It pulsed within her palm, and she sighed in anticipation,

rubbing her lips against the soft head.

“Oh, God,” he rasped, his voice ragged.

Her own desire to please him pulsed within her, and her heart raced madly within her chest, excited by his response. Her hand slid up and down the length, and the tip of his cock dripped liquid with each upstroke. She licked the juices, marveling at the light, almost absent flavor, then wrapped her mouth around the head and pushed her lips down the shaft as far as she could without gagging.

Then, wanting to push him toward the edge, she swallowed, her mouth and throat contracting around his cock in a tight squeeze.

Marcus shuddered from the action, stroking the top of her head with a shaky hand. “That feels so good.”

“Mmm,” she murmured in agreement then withdrew her mouth from around him.

He grabbed her shoulders and tugged her body up, his eyes hot, filled with desire. For her. The realization that she affected him as strongly as he did her was heady, powerful. Intoxicating.

“What are you—” She stopped mid-sentence when his hand flew to her jeans, tugging them down. Having him desire her this much, unable to suppress his need, made her burn in response.

Now. Olivia had to have him now. She grabbed his dress shirt and ripped it open, the buttons popping off. She didn’t care—she’d buy him a new one later.

Marcus growled, flinging her sleeveless shirt off in a similar fashion, then tossing his own pants off. His arousal stood firm, lengthy between them. He was unashamed in his desire, and surprisingly enough to her, she wasn’t ashamed either. Though Olivia never had much practice letting go of herself, Marcus brought out the animalistic nature in her.

She grabbed his hips and tugged him close, his cock pressing into her belly. “Tell me what you want now,” she murmured, remembering the game she’d started.

“I want you to fuck me,” he answered, his hands stroking her breasts.

Her pussy clenched in small, uncontrollable spasms at his light, teasing touch across her nipples. She dragged in a shaky breath and

nodded, eager to feel him inside her again.

Marcus lay back on the large couch, his hard cock standing straight up. She slid one leg over him and straddled him, rubbing her damp slit along his shaft. He rubbed himself on the outside of her pussy, the head of his cock stimulating her clitoris. A swirl of desire spiraled from her pelvis through her limbs. She lifted up and speared herself upon him in one move.

God, sex with him was better completely sober and alert. The erotic, hazy memories she had were nothing compared to the sensation of Marcus, hair mussed and eyes dark, staring up at her, his hands clenched tightly around her hips, his cock filling her, spreading her wide around him.

Propping herself on her knees, she used her thigh muscles to slide up and down his length. His hands grew tighter around her hips, gripping her in an iron clasp. But she enjoyed the feeling of his fingers digging into her bare skin.

She'd pegged herself a long time ago for a gentle-sex kind of girl, but Marcus quickly changed her perception of what she wanted. Needed. Hungered for.

He pushed her down on him with a strong thrust, his eager pelvis grinding against hers. A low groan escaped her lips, and she met his rapid motions, leaning back slightly and thrusting her breasts in the air so his cock hit her G-spot.

"Yes," she panted, moving harder, faster. The scent of their sex, damp and earthy, wafted through the air, encapsulated them. Beads of sweat ran down her skin, slicked her thighs. She clenched him tighter with her leg muscles, the fervor of her excitement building.

He slid one hand to her clitoris and stroked slowly with his thumb, swirled the pearl of flesh. "Are you going to come for me?"

Startled by the question, she simply nodded, her orgasm just a breath away. Her eyes locked with his, and she came on his cock, her pussy shuddering and clenching him tightly with each spasm. His gray eyes were half-lidded, intense, endless as he stared at her, felt the wave of heat roll over her.

When the sensation subsided, she sighed deeply, letting the last



strokes of pleasure taper off. Marcus grabbed her hips again and pushed into her hard, then thrust his head back into the couch cushion as his orgasm shot into her.

She slumped over, stretching her bare, sweat-slicked body over his. He wrapped one arm around her, his movement languid, relaxed.

“I can’t seem to get enough of you,” he murmured against her forehead.

Olivia nodded. She felt the same way. Marcus was in her blood now, both literally and figuratively, and she had a realization that her desire to be with him wouldn’t be easy to control.

## Chapter Seven

Olivia draped across Marcus' warm body, running her fingers along the muscled planes of his chest in slow, steady movements. She couldn't keep her hands off him. When was the last time she'd felt this way about a man? Had she ever?

"That was amazing," he said. "Thank you."

She looked up and smiled against him, pleased she wasn't the only one so strongly stirred. "Thank you, too. I agree."

"I'm feeling a little hungry," he replied, his voice dropping down low, the sensual tones vibrating against her cheek within his chest. "Care to join me in a hunt?"

Her heart thudded, and she stilled her fingers, remembering her first time of drinking from the guy outside the bar. Like a drug, that surge of power and blood in her body was addictive, beckoning her when she didn't expect it. A part of her desperately wanted to experience it again, all the while knowing it was wrong, shameful. She'd gone too far before with the drunken guy and had to have Marcus stop her. Unacceptable.

How could he ask her to do that, to put herself at risk of losing control? What if she took a life this time?

She sat up, her lips pinched tight. "No thanks. I'm not drawing from people anymore." The meat she'd been drinking from was about as satisfying as chewing on cardboard, but she'd make it work. It was the better, smarter option, and she was proud of herself for not caving these past few days, no matter how badly she'd hungered to. No matter how much the memory of the smell, the taste of human blood taunted her.

She'd determined never to be like Mary, running around on a whim and taking whatever pleased her, not caring about how others around her felt.

His face stiffened, and he sat up on the couch, staring at her with one eyebrow raised. His gray eyes regarded her with confusion and more than a little skepticism. "That's not possible. You need blood to survive."

Like she didn't know that by now. His condescension rankled her. But all this talk of blood got to her. Her own hunger shook within, stir her senses, and she fought to push it down, irritated by her weakness. *Snap out of it.* This was not the time to sink into bloodlust. She'd never lose herself in that again, no matter how sweet those sensations were.

"I'll find it from other means, but I'm not drinking like that. Besides, if I don't learn to suppress my vampiric side, how can I teach my clients to do the same? They'll—we'll..." She corrected herself, remembering she was one of *them* now. "...we'll never integrate into society unless we acceptably control ourselves."

"Wait, why do we have to integrate with society at all? There's nothing wrong with who we are, so there's no purpose in controlling our nature." He tilted his head, scrutinizing her, and she felt like an ant under a microscope. His voice was even as he spoke to her—gentle, soothing, the way she talked to her patients. "Why do you feel you need to suppress yourself? What are you so afraid of?"

No, no, no. She didn't like being on the spot, didn't appreciate the way he tried to change her mind. "Don't play therapist with me," she charged back, her voice a bit more heated than it probably should have been. She was losing her cool, fast. "I know how this works."

That was *her* job; to probe, to analyze. She refused to have her motivations, her deepest fears, gutted from within her and thrown out on the table for everyone to see.

Suddenly aware of her nakedness, Olivia rose from the couch and gathered her clothes, throwing them on in a rush. She'd left herself a little too wide open, in more than one way, and wasn't comfortable with Marcus asking so many questions of her.

Questions she wasn't ready to face.

They dressed in silence. His eyes were shuttered, unreadable, his

face a blank slate as he didn't make eye contact with her.

When she finished dressing, she pointed her finger at him, filled with the urge to pull an emotional response from him like he'd done with her. "Maybe instead of studying *me* so hard, you could take a good look at yourself. This...hedonistic lifestyle of yours is just a cover-up for something meaningful missing from your life. Why the need to overindulge? Tell me, Marcus, what are *you* so afraid of?"

He stood in a rush, eyes flashing, jaw set in stone. "*I'm* not afraid of anything. In fact, I'm happy with my life. At least I'm comfortable with who I am, unlike you." He scoffed, then sat back down on the couch, crossing one ankle over his knee, his arms draping across the back of the cushions in a masculine, confident gesture. "This is ridiculous, trying to turn the tables on me. I'm not the one living a lie and encouraging my clients to do the same."

That hurt. Her throat closed up for a long moment, and her eyes flooded with tears. She tried to push down the stinging pain in her chest his words caused, which hit all too close to home. All she wanted was the best for her clients, for herself. Who was he to judge her?

"What's ridiculous here is your selfishness," she lashed out at him through a veil of tears. He was no different than Mary. And like with her sister, Olivia just couldn't seem to reach him. "You take from people without thinking about their needs. It's all about you and what you want, isn't it?" She grabbed her purse and darted to the door, desperate to flee before she broke down in front of him.

*Hold yourself together.*

"You'll never be happy suppressing yourself like this," he said in a soft voice to her back.

*We'll see about that.* She carefully closed the door behind her without a backward glance, ready to prove Marcus wrong.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, I'm doing what you said, but I don't feel happy. I just don't know," Britta hedged, smoothing a strand of blonde hair away from her face. She stared at her small fingers clenched tightly into the red throw

pillow draped across her lap. "I don't feel...right."

Olivia nodded absentmindedly. She hated that she was so distracted by her own uneasy feelings when she should have been giving her full attention to her client. But the ever-present slight edge of hunger gnawed away at her insides, reminding her every waking moment that she had to overcome herself, her desire, in order to stay in control.

It was ridiculous how the bloodlust never went away, no matter how hard she fought to ignore it.

"Dr. Johns," Britta said, sniffing lightly, "are you listening?"

Olivia shook her head and blinked rapidly, forcing herself to clear her thoughts and focus on her client. "Absolutely," she answered, pasting on a fake smile. "Please go on."

"When does this get easier to deal with?" Britta's voice was unsteady. "When do I start feeling better about it? Because it feels like this is never going to get better, and I'm just miserable." She sighed deeply and dropped her head in her hands.

"I can understand that," Olivia said in a soothing voice, writing down a few notes on Britta.

*Dissatisfied with results of plan and her future in general.  
Has low hopes for feeling better. Expresses dejection.*

She paused at the words, an eerie feeling overcoming her. Was she describing Britta or herself? Since implementing her plan of action a couple of weeks ago, she'd successfully kept away from all humans as much as possible to avoid the temptation of drinking. She'd even left Athena's calls unanswered for fear she'd be tempted to draw from her. Until she fully conquered this bloodlust, she had to be in a self-imposed isolation.

So, she'd shopped at a local 24-hour grocery, stocking up on several pounds of raw meat for sustenance. And while it worked, it was vastly unsatisfying, the taste comparable to a flavorless light beer instead of a robust lager.

Yes, her plan had worked. She'd kept her lust at bay without acting on it. And she'd been utterly, undeniably miserable the whole time.

It didn't help that she'd avoided Marcus like the plague. Not that he'd been contacting her—she hadn't heard word one from him since leaving his apartment that night. He was probably still furious with how things went. But her own fury had quickly faded, turning into sadness and loneliness.

"Are you sticking to the plan?" Olivia asked. "Maybe we can rework it a bit to ease your discomfort."

Britta nodded, and she sniffed again, the sound muffled in her hands. "I'm doing exactly what you said, but I feel like I'm missing a piece of myself. This feels wrong."

Olivia thought of Marcus, his gray eyes smiling down at her in the moonlight. "I can understand that feeling," she said, trying not to sigh. A dull ache pierced her chest at the thought of him, at his last words to her.

Could she—or her clients, for that matter—ever be truly happy squashing such a huge, all-encompassing part of their nature? Maybe this wasn't like trying to quit smoking or start a new diet. Maybe this was like censoring something that made them who they are. One couldn't ignore sexuality or gender. Was vampirism the same way?

Perhaps being a vampire didn't have to be all or nothing, and she'd been wrong all along. A flush of heat ran up her face. By listening to Britta, Olivia had gained a new perspective on the situation. It seemed vampirism couldn't, and shouldn't, be suppressed.

Marcus was right. She'd been approaching it wrong from the start. Control was important, yes, but not at the expense of personal happiness.

She nibbled on the end of her pen, trying to articulate her thoughts. "Britta, do you feel comfortable with the idea of moderation in your vampiric tendencies?"

Britta looked up, wiping away the tears in her eyes. "What do you mean?"

Olivia's brain whirred at full speed as she formulated a plan. One that would not repress the vampiric nature, but would accept it. "What do you think would help you feel like you were being a socially responsible person, but still satisfying your needs?"

Britta thought for a moment. "What if I only drank blood from people I had an agreement with or something? That way, there's no hard

feelings, and no one has to worry about me being a danger to society. Do you think that would help?"

Olivia nodded slowly, a sense of excitement swelling in her. "We've already discussed how you can control your fangs. So by careful observation of yourself when drinking, you can keep from drawing too much blood from a donor."

In fact, Olivia could do that, too. She didn't have to be like Mary, throwing caution to the wind and not caring about hurting others.

And she didn't have to be like her current self, either, not caring about her own needs and hurting herself. There could be balance, as long as she wanted there to be.

"Oh, that's true." Britta sighed deeply in relief. "I've been practicing that since we talked last week, so I'm getting the hang of it." She leaned forward on the couch, giving Olivia a big smile. "This has helped me so much. Thank you." She grabbed her purse from the floor and stood.

Amazing. Having a vampire patient end a session with her excited and eager was something she hadn't experienced before. It was uplifting. "I'll see you in a couple of weeks," Olivia replied.

Britta left. Olivia glanced at her watch—it was a quarter to six. She ran a hand over her hair, smoothing the ends down, then grabbed her keys and headed home. It was time to sleep.

Now that she knew how to truly help her patients be successful, to embrace their nature instead of being ashamed of it, there was only one thing left to do.

She had to talk to Marcus, if he would even see her.

## Chapter Eight

Olivia awoke from her deep sleep, her stomach fluttery from nerves. She'd wanted to go see him right after her session with Britta, but knew she'd never make it there and back on time.

No, it was best to wait, to give herself time to plan out her words. Her apology. Not that anything had come to her. Maybe it was better to wing it instead of having a set script. More heartfelt that way.

Why was she so blasted nervous about this? He was just a man. A man who had entranced her from the beginning, had shared his gift when she asked for it, believing he did her a favor. Had kept her from succumbing to the bloodlust and taught her how to control herself. She owed him. But not just that. She wanted to reconnect with him, to have another chance. Was it too late?

Only one way to find out.

Olivia darted to her closet and dug through her wardrobe. She needed something special, something that would catch his attention, maybe help him remember their attraction for each other, soften him a bit while she tried to reach out to him.

She settled on a pair of low-slung jeans, a tight black dress shirt with a silver chain draping across her waist, and strappy black heels. After running a comb through her hair and slicking on her favorite pale pink lip gloss, she grabbed her purse and keys and took off for the club.

There wasn't a parking spot in sight, so Olivia handed her keys to the valet and paid him to park her car. She headed into the club, which was already hopping with a deep bass beat and purple lights flinging



across the room. Then she went straight to the bar and downed a quick shot to calm her nerves.

*Relax.* He wasn't going to bite. She bit back a nervous giggle at her thought—it was the biting that got her here in the first place.

Turning her back to the bar, she surveyed the room, heart in her throat. She saw no sign of Marcus. Was he down here? Should she go upstairs to see him? Was she even welcome up there anymore?

The alcohol warmed her stomach, eased her nerves. Screw it. Time to be brave, to stop letting fear overwhelm her. She left the shot glass on the bar and strode to the stairs behind the bouncer. He gave her a small nod, obviously recognizing her from when she'd been with Marcus before, and let her pass up the stairs.

She reached the top and knocked on the door. No answer. Her stomach fluttered with disappointment, and she leaned her forehead against the cool wood. What now?

"What is it you need, Olivia?" a low, familiar voice said from behind her.

Olivia spun around and came face to face with Marcus. Her heart slammed behind her breast as his familiar gray eyes studied her face with cool detachment. God, he was so incredible, so handsome. How could she have kept away from him for two weeks?

She dragged in a deep breath, filling her lungs. "I—" Time to think fast. "I need to apologize to you." She dropped her gaze to escape his scrutiny and studied the toes of her shoes. "I was completely wrong to judge you the way I did, and for that, I'm sorry. I hope you can forgive me."

With that, she paused her speech, silent, lungs clenched tight in fear. He said nothing in response, and she was afraid to look up, not wanting to see the distance in his eyes. After a minute, she plunged ahead with her thoughts, needing to finish her words, ineffective though they seemed to be. "Anyway, I realized you were right. It was wrong to deny that part of myself and to force my clients to do the same." She shrugged and shifted the strap of her purse on her shoulder, then braved a look in his eyes.

His face was unreadable.

She gave him a small smile, trying to ignore the sinking sensation in her gut, the disappointment that slowly seeped into her limbs from the distance in his expression. *Courage, Olivia. Finish what you have to say.* “Anyway, I just wanted to thank you for everything you did for me and wish you the best.”

God, telling him goodbye was more painful than she realized.

“You know, you were right about me,” he finally replied, his voice quiet, his eyes boring into hers. “I couldn’t admit it, though. Before you, I didn’t care about self-control because I didn’t need to. I just wanted to feel good, and I figured everyone around me felt the same. But I was arrogant and assumed too much, and that’s not fair. Through you, I saw how much selfishness can hurt others. So I owe you an apology, too.”

So he wasn’t still mad at her. Relief filled her, and she exhaled the breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding. She bit her lower lip, shaking her head. “We’re quite a pair, aren’t we?”

Marcus chuckled and slid closer to her, wrapping her in his arms. She sank into his warm embrace, her curves fitting perfectly against him, feeling better than she had since they’d fought.

“I adore you, Olivia,” Marcus said, his lips pressed against the side of her head. “I’d love to see you again.”

Heart pounding in her ears, she nodded lightly, snuggling her face into his neck, smelling the scent that was uniquely Marcus. The man who taught her how to enjoy life. “I’d like that, too.”

They linked hands, his fingers tight around hers, and he brushed a soft kiss against her lips, his breath warm against her skin. A swell of longing, of arousal, arose in Olivia at the sight of his darkening gray eyes, and she looked forward to quenching her hunger with Marcus for a long time to come.

The End

## **Author Bio**

Sophie Athens has always had a love for romance ever since she was a pre-teen hiding in the bathroom to read her mom's Harlequin novels. However, it wasn't until 2007 that she picked up her laptop and started writing. *The Vampire Oracles: Hunger* is her first novella.

Sophie has a degree in English and happily lives in Ohio with her family. In her free time, she loves to play video games, watch chick flicks, read scads of books, shop for hot shoes, and harass her friends. Please visit [www.sophieathens.com](http://www.sophieathens.com) for more information.