



# LOGAN: LIVING ON THE EDGE

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# THE DARK GIFT

And I will give up everything  
To be on my own again  
Free again  
My Way - Limp Bizkit

I walked through the dark streets of Los Angeles toward where I'd left my motorcycle. It didn't take me long to get there, but when I did I was surprised to find a familiar figure lounging nearby. He'd told everyone he was leaving the city tonight and I honestly thought he'd be long gone by now.

"How ya doin'?" Warchild drawled. He was tall, almost a foot taller than me. His hair was bleach blond, and stood up in spikes on his head. His eyes seemed to see right through me, as they always did.

I shrugged in response to his usual question, wondering why I was glad to see him. "Been better. Did you need something?"

"I need a ride," he told me. "My bike is back at the club."

I knew Estrea, my Kindred master, would want me to refuse, she didn't want me anywhere near Warchild. Somehow knowing that only made me want to do it more.

"Get on," I said roughly, putting a helmet on over my thick dark hair.

He grinned and climbed on the bike behind me, his hands going around my waist. He leaned close enough to feel my body heat and sniffed at my hair. I ignored the thrill I felt and started the bike.

I drove the motorcycle through the city's nearly empty streets. I kept to the speed limit, not in any hurry to see Warchild leave town. And I wasn't exactly in a hurry to get back to San Francisco either, there wasn't much there for me now. Rey had been dead a month, and my relationship with Estrea wasn't exactly the best right now.

Tears filled my eyes and I tried my best to blink them away. I mourned the loss of my brother and the freedom of my old life as I drove. As much as I wanted to believe that I'd rebuilt my life, I'd lost everything when my brother had died in that hospital emergency room.

What was there left for me to live for? Vengeance? At first it had seemed like a valid reason to continue, but the more time that passed the more I realized that I couldn't live for vengeance alone. Estrea's friendship had helped, but now I realized that it hadn't been true friendship at all.

Estrea had made it crystal clear that she didn't want me to use my own judgment or do anything other than follow her orders to the letter. It seemed to me that she wanted me to be the puppy Warchild thought I was. That knowledge was like a bitter taste in my throat and no matter how hard I tried I couldn't swallow past it.

As we approached where Warchild had left his bike, I took hold of my wayward thoughts. I didn't want him seeing how upset I was, especially since he'd been right about me all along.

"That was quite a little fit you threw back there," he said as I pulled into the parking lot of the bar. "Feel any better?"

"Not really," I told him, parking next to his bike. "It didn't help anything." I'd frenzied after a battle and torn apart one of the bad guys. Other than causing the Brujah's death, it hadn't accomplished anything but to show me how far I had fallen.

Warchild got off as I turned off the bike and grinned down at me. "Anything I can do to help?"

I eyed him curiously. "What could you do to help?"

If anything his grin got wider. "Break the bond."

That surprised me. Estrea had told me of the blood bond that came from drinking her blood, but the way she'd talked I'd assumed it was permanent. "There's a way to break it? How?"

"Well, we could always kill the bitch, but I would rather just get the hell out of town now," he told me seriously. "There is another way though, one a little more instantaneously gratifying."

Kill Estrea? I could barely get my mind around the idea. Still, if there was some other way I wanted to know about it. I didn't want to live the rest of my life wrapped in silk chains with no will of my own.

"I certainly wouldn't want Estrea killed," I said firmly. She was my master, and as angry as I was with her, I didn't want to see her hurt. "I've never been one for instant gratification either. What did you have in mind?"

"I've heard that being embraced will kill the 'puppy' way of life."

"Embraced? What would that have to do...?" Suddenly realization dawned; he was offering to embrace me, to turn me into a vampire. "Oh."

He grinned again. "Ya game?"

Game: *adjective* - 1. Plucky and unyielding in spirit; resolute. 2. Ready and willing.

"Become a vampire?" My voice was uncertain as I glanced up at him. "I've never thought about that."

I was almost surprised that he was asking. I mean, as strong as I was, Warchild was much stronger. I'd fight him if he tried to hurt me, but I knew there was every possibility that he would win. He could kill me without hesitation or a second thought, but for some reason I wasn't worried that he would try to force the issue. Still, I wasn't quite sure I wanted to agree.

"It's great," he told me, grinning. "You get to stay up all night. Nobody tells you what to do. You get to eat all the ice cream you want to."

His offer was tempting, so tempting. I could take control of my own life again, stop worrying about what my master would think of the choices I made. I had to bite my tongue to stop myself from agreeing instantly.

I was only eighteen, after all. Becoming embraced would mean giving up so much that I'd always taken for granted, things like sunlight and children.

Becoming Kindred would mean losing what little link I had to my old life. It would mean losing everything I'd had left when Rey died, but then again it could help me find his killers. Vengeance might be a cold reason to live, but right now it was all I had left.

I really wasn't any closer to finding out who killed Rey than I had been the night he was murdered. Maybe if I'd had a chance to ask the imposter a few questions I might have gotten some answers, but that was a moot point now. Warchild couldn't have known who the Kindred had looked like when he'd killed him.

Since she'd come back from Austria, Estrea had treated me like a child, like I didn't know right from wrong. Granted I'd made a few mistakes, but one could almost place the blame for that on her. She hadn't fully prepared me for dealing with things like what had happened these last few nights.

But as good as being independent sounded, did I really want to lose the protection that Estrea had given me? After all, accepting Warchild's offer would be like a slap in the face to my master. She'd taken care of me, helped me get my life in order when Rey was killed. How would she feel about me being Kindred?

"Estrea would be pissed," I murmured.

Although I hadn't really been talking to him, he answered me quickly enough. "Do you care?" "Of course I care," I replied honestly, looking up at him. "But not enough to stop from doing it anyway, if I wanted to."

"So back to my original question, Bambino," he drawled with a smile. "Are ya game?"

I looked at him thoughtfully. "Don't you need permission to embrace someone?" At least that was what I had gathered from the conversations that I'd been a part of during the last few nights.

His laugh rang out through the darkness, full and deep. "Have you ever known me to ask permission for anything? Besides, Graves is in torpor, and I'm leaving town tonight," he reminded me. "Who's gonna be around to spank me?"

That made me smile; Warchild did whatever he wanted whenever he wanted to do it. He was wild and dangerous, and I knew it. A part of me was drawn to him because of it.

I also knew that I should walk away from his tempting offer. I should go back to San Francisco like I'd told Estrea I would and resign myself to a lifetime of puppy-hood. I should walk away, but I just couldn't make myself do it.

"Would you take me with you?" I asked in a quiet voice. I wouldn't be able to stay if he embraced me. Estrea would be pissed and she'd most likely try to take me out. As a newborn vampire I wouldn't be anywhere near strong enough to defend myself from her.

"If you wanted to go," he agreed.

"I don't think I could stay here after." I took a deep breath to control my fear and looked him straight in the eye. "I'm game."

He smiled and his fangs were clearly visible as he climbed on his bike. "Follow me."

I swallowed nervously as he started his motorcycle, but I'd made my choice. I followed him out of the parking lot through the dark streets of LA to a large warehouse in the industrial district of town.

After we parked the bikes, he smiled at me, then led the way went inside. I followed him and stood watching while he packed his few things in silence.

A voice inside my head kept telling me not to be stupid, to get back on my bike and drive away from Warchild as fast as I could, but I refused to listen. I couldn't see me spending the rest of my life with a master who didn't trust me. This was my only way out, the only way I could hope to have the freedom to finally avenge my brother's death.

When he was done gathering his things, he turned and looked at me. "Is there anything at Estrea's you can't live without?"

"There's a few things in my apartment in San Francisco, but nothing here," I told him. "We didn't exactly plan to stay in LA after I picked her up from the airport last night."

"Like what?"

"Clothes, money." Then I shook my head and looked away. I had my debit card in my pocket, and I could always pick up clothes somewhere along the way. I tried to smile. "I guess nothing I can't live without, right?"

He pulled a decent sized wad of money from his pocket and held it up. "I borrowed some from our Brujah friends." He smiled widely and put the money away. "Are you ready for this?"

Ready: *adjective* - 1. Prepared or available for service, action, or progress. 2. Mentally disposed; willing. 3. Likely or about to do something.

"As ready as I can be," I told him, trying to hide my apprehension. "Will it hurt?"

"I'll try and be gentle," he assured me in a voice so deep it was almost a growl.

He crossed the room in two steps and lifted me against him, leaving my feet dangling far from the ground. Despite his speed and strength, as he'd promised his grip was surprisingly gentle. His fangs dragged across the skin of my neck and I closed my eyes in anticipation.

I felt a sharp pain in my neck when his fangs sunk into me, but it was not unlike what I'd felt the few times Estrea had fed from me and it quickly faded to irrelevance. I grew weaker, limp in his arms, and dimly I realized he was lowering me to the floor, still feeding.

Fear almost overwhelmed me, and I wanted to fight him but I forced myself to stay still. I had to remind myself that I'd chosen this, but I felt as if I'd jumped from an airplane thousands of feet from the ground without a parachute. The thrill of my approaching death was unlike anything I could have imagined, and I had to trust that Warchild would make sure I landed safely on the ground.

The sound of my heartbeat became my whole world. It echoed through the room, straining to keep pumping even when there was little left in my body for it to pump. It became slower, fainter with every beat, with every swallow Warchild took of my blood. Toward the end it became irregular, fighting to keep beating even when I willed it to stop. When it finally did the silence was total and absolute.

Then something intruded on the edges of my existence. I felt a tingling on my tongue, a taste that burned even as it made me ache for more. Whatever it was trickled down my throat and gave me the strength to lick at the source of the fiery liquid. Then it was against my lips and a flood of vitae filled my mouth.

Swallowing as quickly as I could I felt a rush shoot through me. It was like riding the tallest, fastest roller coaster in the world without the safety restraints. I had no control, no way to stop what was going to happen, no protective net to fall back on, yet I still wanted to throw up my arms and scream with pleasure and fear combined.

Images flashed across my mind and were gone before I could recognize them for what they were. I heard music and laughter and screaming but couldn't distinguish which sound was what or who was making them. Every muscle in my body ached, and I felt all of my body dying even as it was brought back to life.

I reached up and grabbed the arm that was held to my mouth, holding on and feeding as deeply and as quickly as I could. I needed more of the precious liquid, all of it. He fought me, easily pushed me away, and suddenly the vitae was gone.

Agony ripped through me, and I felt my body spasm with the pain. Was this what it was like to die? Had Warchild given me too little blood too late? Then the rush kicked in again and I lost all conscious thought.

It was as if I was on my motorcycle, going top speed with the throttle wide open through city streets, dodging traffic and people, missing cars by mere centimeters. Like I was fighting for my life against twenty men, getting hit and hitting back, winning and losing every second.

Oh, the ecstasy and the torment of dying. In death I felt what I had never felt in life. My body arched away from the floor as I threw back my head and screamed at the pleasure of the pain.

# THE BLOOD IS THE LIFE

Hungry!

Feeding on chaos

And living in sin

Last Resort - Papa Roach

Some time later I realized I was lying unmoving on a hard cement floor. I ached all over, feeling like I'd been in some kind of accident that had bruised every part of my body, even the inside. I was cold, and my entire being burned with need.

I rolled to my side and pushed at the floor until I was sitting up. I heard a whimpering sound to my left and when I turned to look, Warchild was standing in the doorway holding what looked to be a frightened homeless man by the arm in an iron grip.

The man looked terrified, and even from across the room I could smell his fear. His clothes were tattered and dirty, and I could barely make out the features of his face through his beard. Then I smelled his blood, and I knew what it was that I craved.

"Eat up," Warchild encouraged as pushed the man toward me.

The homeless man stumbled and fell to the ground next to me. I grabbed his arm and glanced over his shoulder at my sire. Warchild's eyes burned in anticipation, and when he nodded I looked down at the pulse in the guy's neck.

He smelled horrible, like he hadn't bathed in weeks if not longer, but it wasn't enough to put me off. He was frightened and fighting me, but I just held on tighter. Beneath the stench of sweat and fear was the scent of blood and I wanted it so badly that I didn't care about anything else.

Hunger: *noun* - 1. a. A strong desire or need for food. b. The discomfort, weakness, or pain caused by a prolonged lack of food. 2. A strong desire or craving. *intransitive verb* - 1. To have a need or desire for food. 2. To have a strong desire or craving.

The man whimpered again and tried to push away from me, but I held on tight, pulling him closer. I felt my canines grow longer against my lips and I'd seen enough Kindred feeding to know exactly what to do with them. It was almost too easy, although I felt a little self-conscious about doing it with Warchild watching me so intently.

I sank my teeth into his skin and his rich warm blood filled my mouth. For a moment I gagged, but when I swallowed a warmth filled me that was too good to resist. I drank and kept on drinking.

The blood was hot on my tongue and I relished the euphoria it sent through my body. It made me feel strong again, in control of myself. I could almost feel it moving through my veins and into my extremities warming them, giving me strength.

As I drank I felt the bum's heartbeat pump his blood into my mouth. I savored every drop that flowed past my tongue, enjoying the taste of fear that was intrinsic to the blood. I could almost feel my heart beating in time with his even though I knew it was just an illusion. Heat from his blood shot through me, warming me from the inside out.

I wanted it to go on forever, but too soon I felt his heartbeat stop. When I could get no more blood from his body, I laid him gently on the floor and sat looking down at the corpse I'd made.

Murder – *transitive verb*: 1. To kill (another human) unlawfully. 2. To kill brutally or inhumanly. 3. To put an end to; destroy.

I'd murdered a man, not in self-defense or for some noble purpose, but for my own gratification. I knew that most Kindred drank minimally from their victims, just enough to get by

on. If they needed more, they fed from different people until they were sated. That wasn't what I had done here.

I felt the man's heat inside of me and I couldn't bring myself to regret what I'd done. His blood had given me life, helped me complete the transformation into what I'd asked Warchild to make me: a Kindred. I was a vampire now, a killer, and this was what I had to deal with for the rest of my existence.

The taste of blood was sweet in my mouth and I felt the hunger still burning inside of me. It wasn't as overwhelming as it had been, but instinctively I knew the homeless man's blood had not been enough to fill me.

I looked up at Warchild and licked the blood from my lips. "I want more," I whispered hoarsely.

His laughter sent a thrill down my spine. "Soon," he promised. "We gotta jet before anybody comes looking for us."

He was right, we needed to leave before anyone realized what had happened here. I felt too good to let anyone try and take me down now. I stood quickly, ignoring the body at my feet. I was eager to get out of LA, anxious to learn everything that I could about being Gangrel and a Kindred. "Let's go."

"That's my girl," he drawled, throwing an arm around my shoulders.

I grinned up at him. "Where are we going?"

"First stop, we need more money," he told me.

When I told him I had my debit card on me, he shook his head. "First of all, if you use it a lot, Estrea will be able to track you. Take all you can out at once, but second of all, where's the fun in that?"

"What kind of fun did you think of having?" I asked tentatively as we walked toward our bikes. Warchild was unpredictable, and it was hard telling what he had in mind.

"Fighting for money," he replied as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"What, like Fight Club?"

"Biker types at first," he told me, "'till we get a way's away."

That made sense to me. We needed to stay out of Estrea's radar until we were far enough away for it not to matter. I didn't have a problem following Warchild's lead, I'd thrown my lot in with him as far as I could and now it was time to learn everything he was willing to teach me.

We headed out of town, keeping to back roads and staying under the speed limit, only stopping once at an ATM machine to drain my checking account. We drove until an hour before dawn, then stopped at an empty warehouse somewhere in the desert East of LA. We found a dark room in the basement and made ourselves comfortable.

As the sun came up, it occurred to me that Warchild's method had worked as far as my bond to Estrea was concerned. While I was still thankful for the help she'd given me the night Rey and I were attacked and during the next few weeks, I didn't long to be near her like I used to.

Objectively I knew that I'd agreed to the embrace as a rebellion against my former master. What better way to repay her for doubting my abilities than to leave town with the one man she would most object to me leaving with?

But I couldn't regret my decision. I felt stronger, faster, better than I'd ever felt in my life. Warchild might not treat me like an equal, but at least he wasn't treating me like a child.

# ON THE ROAD

Sick of the tension

Sick of the hunger

A Place For My Head - Linkin Park

During our first week together we stuck to back roads, doing a lot of doubling back and going out of our way to leave false trails. There wasn't time for much of anything but riding and stopping for gas. We stayed mostly in empty or abandoned buildings, warehouses and factories mostly. Most of the time we didn't stop until sunrise was less than an hour away. The first few nights we didn't even stop to eat.

We stopped for gas at a small town in near the border of New Mexico early our third night on the road. I'd been wondering why Estrea hadn't tried to call me so I reached for my cell phone to check the battery, but it was gone. When Warchild came out, I asked him where it was.

"I have it," he told me.

He must have taken it while I was dying that night in LA. That thought didn't bother me, although maybe it should have. I don't know what I would have done if Estrea had called me, and I certainly didn't want the phone back.

"Do you remember things from before your embrace?" he asked as he got on his motorcycle.

"Yeah," I replied, surprised at the question. "Why wouldn't I?"

"I don't," he told me. "I just wanted to know if you did."

He didn't elaborate, just started his bike. I followed suit and a moment later we were back on the road.

We stopped that night in an abandoned factory. It wasn't clean, but it kept the sun from us while we slept. I was getting tired of the filthy places we'd been sleeping in but Warchild didn't seem to mind, so I kept my mouth shut.

"I'm hungry," I told him when we woke the next evening. The craving for blood was strong within me, stronger every night we traveled. I wanted blood and I wanted it now, but my sire wasn't very sympathetic.

"Soon," he replied firmly, the tone of his voice leaving no room for an argument.

Some times I wonder how long he would have waited to stop for a meal if the meal hadn't stopped us first.

We were driving fast and hard on Route 66 just outside of Albuquerque when a cop pulled in behind us. We'd been doing about ninety and neither of us were wearing a helmet, so it's little wonder that we'd drawn the cop's attention. For a moment I wondered if Warchild planned on outrunning him, but he finally pulled over and of course I followed suit.

Warchild got off his bike as the officer walked up to us. My sire had an expression on his face that I'd seen before, and I didn't think it boded well for the cop, seeing as how he was alone.

Aphrodisiac: *adjective* - Arousing or intensifying sexual desire. *noun* - Something, such as a drug or food, having such an effect.

Maybe I should have said something to warn the cop. Maybe I should have tried to stop Warchild when he attacked the human. Maybe I would have if the hunger wasn't burning through me like a wildfire out of control. As it was, when my sire bit into the cop's neck the smell of blood was like an aphrodisiac.



I found myself standing close to the two of them without remembering getting off my bike. The smell of blood washed over and through me, calling to me, and I could almost hear the man's heartbeat.

Warchild looked up and grinned when he saw me as the cop struggled weakly in his arms. "I told you we'd eat soon," he drawled.

The man looked pleadingly at me, held helplessly in the vampire's strong hands. "Please," he begged softly. "Help me."

"He's a cop," I reminded my sire, staring at the small wounds on the human's neck. I tried to fight my hunger, but realized I was already licking my extended fangs in anticipation.

He just shrugged and turned the cop a little to offer me his neck. "He bleeds just like everyone else."

I closed my eyes for just a moment, knowing this was a fight I couldn't win. A part of me didn't want to win. I leaned forward and sank my teeth into his skin near where Warchild had bit him.

The officer moaned, whether from pleasure or despair or both, I didn't know and didn't care. I pulled him closer and realized dimly that Warchild had moved too. He was feeding from the other side of the man's neck, and knowing that somehow made the blood taste even sweeter.

The man's life force coursed through my body, giving me heat and life as he struggled weakly to be free. I drank deeply and quickly, and soon I realized that I was full and he was dead. I pulled away and licked at the blood on my lips, releasing the cop and stepping back a little to watch Warchild drop the body to the ground.

A few minutes later Warchild had gone through the police cruiser and taken everything of value to us. He tossed me a shotgun and several boxes of spare ammo, then filled our tanks from a gas can that had been in the trunk of the car. He took the cop's handgun and money for himself. We left the body in the car some distance from the road and headed off into the night.

After our encounter with the cop, we were careful to stay closer to the speed limit. As wild as Warchild was, he knew we couldn't travel cross-country killing cops whenever we felt like it without drawing the law down on our heads.

When we stopped that morning, Warchild told me we'd look for something to eat when the sun went down. He figured we were far enough away from LA that we didn't have to worry about anyone from there catching up to us.

"How do we feed without giving away what we are?" I asked, confused. Neither of us had the ability to change people's memories.

"Choice of victims," he said simply.

I still didn't understand. "What, unconscious?"

"Who is going to believe some bum?" he explained patiently. "Or a crook or other low life?"

Inquisition: *noun* - A tribunal formerly held in the Roman Catholic Church and directed at the suppression of heresy.

"Gee, the Inquisition?" I shot back. Estrea had told me that the organization was still in existence, secretly hunting and killing supernatural creatures.

He shrugged. "That's the risk we run."

Warchild's attitude seemed foreign to me, but I liked the way he thought. Estrea had never really talked about her feeding habits, but I'd gotten the feeling that she'd been able to twist people's memories so they forgot she'd bitten them. Now it seemed like cheating.

"Aren't we leaving a trail a mile wide for Estrea to follow us?"

"What's she gonna do?" he demanded reasonably. "Ask every bum across the whole USA if they've seen us?"

That didn't seem likely. "I guess not."

"Besides, her digging that hard should raise some eyebrows," he added.

"If she even bothers," I murmured. Then I thought about it. "Do you think she will?"

"Yeah," he replied. "She might start to."

"Start to?"

"Well, first she'd have to find which direction we went," he reminded me. "And since we aren't using your ATM anymore, or your cell, or mine, there will be hardly any trail for her to follow. She'll just run in circles till she gives up."

"No trail but the bums," I reminded him, "and who's gonna believe them, right?"

He grinned again. "Yep."

Warchild led me to a rundown section of Albuquerque and parked behind a seedy bar. He told me it was time for dinner, and led me toward a nearby alley. It was dark and filled with rubbish, but my sire smelled something worth hunting for. Near the back behind a pile of wooden crates a man was tinkering with a broken radio.

"Have at it," Warchild told me.

I looked up at him in surprise. "What?"

"Dinner," he said simply, pointing to the man.

Hesitantly I started down the alley. I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do, how I was supposed to get blood from the guy. I mean I could have just beat him unconscious, but that seemed rather crass.

When I got closer the man looked up, suspicious and wary at first until he saw me. I guess the fact that I'm small and a woman didn't worry him. It should have. Dangerous predators often come in small sizes.

"Hey," I said softly.

"Hi," he replied, his voice low and almost growling as if he hadn't spoken in some time. He shifted a little and sat the radio down next to him. His eyes ran across my feminine form, which made me smile. He was acting like he was the predator and I was the prey.

For a moment I was at a loss as to what to do next, then I asked myself what Warchild would do. I grinned.

"How ya doin'?" I asked, moving closer.

Finally he seemed to understand that he was in fact the prey and started to get to his feet. I put my hand on his shoulder and crouched in front of him.

"Going somewhere?" I murmured, letting my fangs elongate in my mouth. My dinner gasped and watched transfixed as I moved in for the bite.

The blood was good, warm and full of a taste Warchild later told me was fear. It filled my mouth and I swallowed quickly, almost gulping the delicious life giving liquid. I left the man sitting stunned next to his precious radio and rejoined my sire.

Warchild grinned down at me and draped his arm around my shoulder. "Good job. Now we find something for me to eat."

A few blocks down the street we found another man for my sire to feed from. Watching him was like watching an eagle swoop down for his prey. He was quick, sure and relentless as he lifted the man from the ground and held him against the wall while he fed. I hoped some day I would be as good at it as he was.

Afterward we left town, headed for Texas. We still kept to back roads, traveling mostly on Route 66 when we could. We stopped for gas when we had to, usually combining the refueling with feeding.

I felt hesitant and awkward at first, but watching Warchild made me hunt with more confidence. Sometimes when hunting was scarce we would feed from the same mortal, and for some reason I found that much more satisfying than feeding alone.

We drove through northern Texas and into Oklahoma, sleeping in whatever unused buildings we could find. We didn't stop in Oklahoma City although in retrospect we should have. When I asked why we drove through the capital, my sire mumbled something about the prince being a real asshole.

Warchild wanted to make Tulsa by sunrise that morning, but we'd run into a construction detour that delayed us for more than an hour. About fifteen minutes before dawn we pulled off the highway into some brush that flanked the road.

When I asked him what we were doing, he just told me to help him hide the bikes. With some reluctance, I did what he asked. We hid the bikes well off the road, but there was no cover for us. I was afraid the sun would catch us out in the open and I didn't want to burn, but Warchild wasn't concerned.

"Hold on tight and close your eyes," he said softly as he put his arms around me.

The eastern sky was painted a pale pink, but I trusted him so I did what he asked. I put my arms around his waist and buried my face in his jacket, closing my eyes tightly. To my surprise, I never felt the sunlight on my skin, there was only a sinking sensation as I fell into the daytime slumber that I'd succumbed to every morning since my embrace.

When I woke it took me a minute to realize that I was buried in the ground. Warchild's arms were still tight around me, but I couldn't see or hear anything. The claustrophobia set in hard and fast, but before I could start to struggle, we rose from the ground.

I pushed away from Warchild and rolled to my feet, swearing in Spanish.

"Problem?" he asked, amused.

"Yes," I yelled back. "You could have warned me. I hate being confined like that."

"Fine, next time I'll leave you to the sun," he said casually as he strode toward where we had left our bikes.

Hell, now I'd pissed him off. I ran after him, more than a little pissed myself. "Look, I'm tired of sleeping in creepy factories, and empty warehouses. There was a motel ten miles back, why couldn't we have stopped there?"

He started pulling the brush off the bikes without answering.

"Warchild," I said, trying to be more reasonable. "We have money, why not spend it? It'd be nice to have a shower, and a change of clothes, you know?" When he stopped and turned to look at me, I smiled sweetly and added, "We could stop at a no-tell motel and bust in on some business man with his paid date. Think about how some well fed cuisine would taste for a change."

He grinned. "All right."

I hid a sigh of relief and helped him uncover our bikes.

We stopped early that morning at an out of the way run down motel, and the next night we found ourselves a better meal. A couple in the room next to ours were occupied in a little side action away from their respective spouses, and they were more than a little surprised when we broke into the room.

It didn't take long to subdue them and because they didn't want to be caught together, they didn't even scream. I held the man down on the bed and bent to drink from him while Warchild picked up the woman and had his own snack. Within ten minutes we were back on the road, and he even admitted that I was right. Drinking blood from someone with a steady diet was much better than feeding from bums in an alleyway.

## A CHANGE OF PACE

My suggestion is to keep your distance  
Cuz right now I'm dangerous.

Break Stuff - Limp Bizkit

When we started staying at motels, we didn't travel as far every night. We even hung around some cities for a couple of hours, looking for a decent meal. I began trying different things while hunting, luring people outside, or getting into their hotel rooms on some ruse or another. At one point it occurred to me that I was behaving like a cat with a mouse, but it was fun and Warchild encouraged me every step of the way.

The sweet taste of blood never ceased to amaze me. If Estrea had told me what being Kindred was like, I would have begged her to change me herself, not that I thought she would have. Drinking blood was better than anything I'd ever done in my life, and I made sure to drink my fill whenever Warchild said it was time to eat.

It was fun to hunt with him. Sometimes he'd eat first, and I'd watch while he separated his prey from the herd of humans at whatever spot we'd stopped to feed. Sometimes he'd watch me on the hunt for some older man who couldn't resist a sweet young thing. The best times were when we worked together to get a human alone with the two of us. We'd feed together, and the blood would be that much sweeter for it.

At first I tried to convince him that his want, take, have philosophy was skewed at the very least, but it was like talking to a brick wall. He had his idea of how Kindred survived, and nothing I said or did was going to change it.

"We're not humans," he reminded me. "Why live by their rules?"

There was nothing I could say to answer that. Even Estrea hadn't lived by mortal rules, although she'd followed them a lot more than Warchild seemed to. After I thought about it for a while I realized that all vampires disregarded human law to one extent or another.

Estrea and most of the other vampires I'd been in contact with lived subject to the prince's laws in whatever city that they happened to be staying in. Warchild lived by his own rules, but he also understood the consequences of breaking someone else's laws. From what I could tell, he chose what ones to break and what ones to follow based on what he was willing to accept the consequences for.

Being with Warchild was more fun than I'd thought it would be, once I quit trying to convince him to stop breaking the law. He saw nothing wrong with stealing when we needed something, or beating someone up when they pissed him off, and soon I came to appreciate his point of view.

After Tulsa, Warchild started taking a little time each night to teach me things about my new vampiric abilities. He showed me how to grow claws on my hands, and how to talk to animals.

I got some new clothes, and it felt good to be clean again. Sleeping in motels was much better than sleeping in filthy abandoned buildings and the food was much more satisfying.

During one of our training sessions, I asked a question that had bothered me since we'd left LA. "Warchild, why did you offer to embrace me?"

He shrugged. "Since when do I need a reason for anything?"

That didn't answer my question. "What, you go around embracing people for no reason?"

He stepped closer to me. "I do what I feel like doing," he reminded me in a low voice. "I thought you might like to know that sort of freedom too."

"Why did you care?" I demanded softly. "I mean, why not pick one of the other puppies that were running around and set them free?" There had been plenty around that last night in LA.

He shrugged. "Kindred spirit, I guess."

Kindred – *adjective*: 1. Of the same ancestry or family: kindred clans. 2. Having a similar or related origin, nature, or character.

Something about the way he'd said that made me smile. I wouldn't have thought that I was anything like Warchild before my embrace, but now, of course, everything was different.

"Well whatever your reason, I'm glad you did." I threw my arms wide and twirled, laughing at the freedom I felt, freedom he'd given me. "I'm free!" I yelled into the night.

He laughed deeply, watching my antics. "C'mon bambino," he said after a long moment. "We gotta ride."

I laughed again, happy that night just to be undead and free in America. I got on my bike and followed him out of town.

Things weren't always carefree on the road with Warchild. The first time we drove away from a gas station without paying I was a little too slow and almost got pulled from my bike by the clerk before I recovered enough to kick him away from me.

Still, there was an upside to dying. The night was now filled with possibilities that had never occurred to me before. Every human I looked at was a potential meal, pulsing with warm pure blood that would satisfy the hunger that gnawed on the edges of my mind every moment of every night. We took what we wanted when we wanted it and were gone before anyone could try and spank us for it.

The dark alleys and the brightly lit main streets of the cities we passed through seemed the same to me, but all were different. Monsters lived in the shadows, monsters like Warchild and me, but humans still managed to live normal happy lives unknowing and unconcerned about what it was we could do to them.

I was more aware than ever that a single misstep could mean death to any one of them. Accidents and illness took lives every night, and if we wanted to, Warchild and I could do the same. If we chose to, we could be like angels of death to any human we met. It was a heady feeling, and one that took some getting used to.

Before I'd met Estrea, my life had seemed so simple, so common. Even with Carmen yelling at me every chance she could, I'd still been happy. I'd looked forward to meeting a special guy, getting married, having children. Now all of that seemed like something someone else had dreamed about.

Once I'd looked at cute guys and wondered what it would be like for them to love me, what it would be like to make love and grow old with a man I loved. Now when I looked at a human, any human, all I could see was a meal, all I could think about was the taste of their precious warm blood.

Monster – *noun*: 1. One who inspires horror or disgust. Monstrous – *adjective*: 1. Shockingly hideous or frightful. 2. Deviating greatly from the norm in appearance or structure; abnormal.

Warchild had made me a monster that night in LA, and each night I learned something new about my monstrosity. I loved hunting with him, loved the thrill of the chase, the taste of blood on my tongue. I felt freer than I'd ever felt before, stronger, faster, harder.

I knew that dying and killing had changed me in ways I could never have anticipated, but I didn't care. Now I could look back on the child I had been and pity her for her innocence and her belief in what she'd thought was right. I loved being a vampire, loved stalking our prey through the dark streets at Warchild's side.

# OUR OWN FIGHT CLUB

Violent timing explains the aftermath

Dark Blue - No Doubt

By the time we hit Springfield, Missouri, we were running out of money. Gas wasn't cheap, and even the cost of the crappy motels we were staying in added up. We actually got a lot further than I would have thought we could due to the fact that some nights we didn't pay for our gas. We were down to our last hundred dollars when Warchild pulled into the parking lot of a seedy biker bar in Jefferson City.

"Stay here," he ordered as he parked his bike. He strode to the door of the bar and kicked it off its hinges. "Is there anyone in this shit hole that thinks he's man enough to beat me?" he demanded so loudly they could have heard him in St. Louis.

After a moment, a very large biker walked out, taller even than Warchild. Even from twenty feet away I could smell the stale sweat and beer on him. In very short order the biker had put up seven hundred and fifty dollars against my sire's money and his bike.

Con - *transitive verb*: Slang - To swindle (a victim) by first winning his or her confidence; dupe. Swindle - *transitive verb*: 1. To cheat or defraud of money or property. 2. To obtain by fraudulent means.

At least half the patrons of the bar filed outside to watch Warchild's con job as it began. I got off my bike and had to push my way through some of them to get close enough to see anything.

Warchild kept dodging the biker's punches, taunting him the whole time. After a few minutes, the biker was pissed enough to pull a knife. My sire moved quickly then, dodging a knife to his stomach and ending up behind the biker. The guy stopped moving when he realized that Warchild had twisted his arm enough that the biker held his own knife to his throat.

Of course at that point the biker had no choice but to concede. I thought Warchild was just going to take the money and leave when he turned back to the biker.

"Double or nothing," he called out.

The biker was apparently feeling pretty cocky, either that or he felt he needed to salvage his pride because he agreed. Some of the other patrons pooled their money and the pot ended up close to two grand in cash as well as Warchild's bike. I hoped my sire knew what he was doing.

We had already fed that night, and Warchild was in peak form. He sidestepped every punch the biker threw until the man started getting reckless. Then Warchild stepped back and faked a sneeze.

"Wow, I think I'm getting a cold from all this fanning," he taunted, sniffing and stepping back. "I don't think I can fight you."

"You're giving up?" someone from the crowd yelled.

Warchild stretched lazily. "No, I'll just get someone to fight in my place."

"Who's going to do that?" the biker demanded.

Somehow I knew what Warchild was going to say when he started grinning. I stripped off my jacket as he turned to point at me.

"I'm not gonna fight a little girl," the guy scoffed.

I raised an eyebrow at him and stepped forward, handing Warchild my jacket. "Afraid you'll lose?" I asked softly.

Anger tightened the biker's face, but at some snide comments from the peanut gallery, he nodded and took a ready stance. I glanced at Warchild and smiled at the anticipation on his face as I readied myself.

The biker was more than a foot taller than me and easily a hundred pounds heavier. He grinned like he thought he'd be able to beat me with no problem. I watched him warily, waiting for an opportunity to take him down.

He circled me, looking for an opening while I studied every move he made. He was obviously no slouch when it came to fighting, but I doubted he had much experience brawling with vampires.

Finally he got sick of circling and threw his arms wide, inviting me to throw the first shot. I wasn't fooled, I knew if I tried to hit him he'd be ready for it. I mimicked his action hoping to lure him in. It worked.

He tried to bum rush me, but I managed to not be where he was aiming. Once he realized he'd missed, he turned and backhanded me across the face. It didn't hurt, not even a little, but I pretended that it did. I let the blow take me to the ground and rolled to a crouch.

Before I could stand, his foot rushed toward my head, but I rolled again, coming up to punch him in the side. When my blow didn't faze him, I spun for a roundhouse kick. He saw it coming and tried to move out of the way, but he wasn't fast enough. My foot contacted with his solar plexus and he doubled over, going down to one knee.

I'd had enough of playtime. I kicked him in the face, and felt his nose give way under the impact. He fell back, out like a light. The smell of his blood filled the air like a sweet perfume, making me want to feast on the man even though Warchild and I had fed earlier in the evening.

As I turned to grin at my sire, I saw that the crowd was stunned at my victory. Warchild laughed deeply then turned to collect our money. Unfortunately, it wasn't going to be that easy.

"You cheated!" one of the people in the crowd yelled out.

I turned to face the man who looked quite a bit like the one I'd just knocked out. "I'm five-four," I replied, acting confused. "How can I cheat?"

"You're a ringer," he challenged.

Ringer – *noun*: Slang - A contestant entered dishonestly into a competition.

Laughter bubbled up and I couldn't stop it. He was right, of course. How could they have known that I'd been trained by the best or that I was a vampire?

My laughter sparked something in the crowd, and several of them jumped Warchild and me. They thought they could take us down, but they thought wrong. It took us a few minutes, but when we finally collected our money and walked away, there were half a dozen more unconscious bodies lying on the ground.



# ANIMAL INSTINCT

We had a good time

But time goes on

Sheryl Crow - Over You

It was late by the time we hit St Louis. We found a dive hotel to stay at and settled in for the day. When night fell, we hit the streets. It didn't take long to find another bunch of bikers to challenge, and this fight went much like the last one. Warchild set the guy up, and I took him down, but this time no one challenged us when we walked away with our money.

I was hungry, so we went to another bar down the street. I watched the crowd of humans while Warchild amused himself playing pool. A Native American named Carlos was running one of the tables, and he was pretty enough that I wondered what he tasted like.

"See anything interesting?" Warchild asked softly, following my gaze.

Interesting – *adjective*: Arousing or holding the attention; absorbing.

I eyed Carlos as he bent over the pool table. Just looking at his deeply tanned skin and long dark hair made me hungry. "Maybe."

"Want company?"

Normally I would have said no, but tonight I wanted to play. "Yeah," I told him, my eye still on my chosen prey. "Give me about ten minutes."

Warchild grinned. "Gotcha."

Carlos put his coat on to leave and I knew it was time to make my move. I slid from the barstool and managed to make it to the door just as he was leaving. I 'accidentally' bumped into him as he opened the door.

"I'm sorry," I said timidly, looking down at the floor.

"It's okay," he replied.

I could feel his eyes on me and I looked up through my lashes. A few short weeks ago my shyness would have been real, but now I had to make an effort to seem timid.

"I haven't seen you around before," he said thoughtfully. "Do you come here often?"

"Oh, no," I whispered quickly, glancing fearfully over my shoulder toward Warchild. I hadn't bothered to heal the bruises on my neck from the last fight I'd been in, and I knew the guy could see them in the light that shone above the door.

Carlos was looking at Warchild when I turned back to him. "Is that guy giving you problems?"

I shrugged and eased outside, brushing up against Carlos on my way through the door. The hiss of his indrawn breath told me I'd gotten the reaction I wanted. With a last regretful look at Carlos, I started down the sidewalk.

"Hey," he called softly, walking after me. When I stopped and turned around, he asked what my name was.

"Alexandra," I replied softly. I'd always hated that name, it sounded too soft and helpless to me. Of course, in this instance, that was exactly how I wanted to seem.

He smiled. "Do you need a ride somewhere?"

I glanced toward the bar. "Oh, no. I couldn't."

"Are you sure?" he asked. "A girl like you shouldn't be out alone in this neighborhood."

I looked up at him shyly, hesitantly. "I really shouldn't, but...."

Sucker - *noun* 1. One who is easily deceived; a dupe. 2. One that is indiscriminately attracted to something specified.

He was a sucker for my 'helpless maiden' act. He gestured toward his car. "Come on, I'll take you home."

I kept glancing at the bar as I followed him, trying to give him the impression that I was afraid my companion would come out and find us together. He opened the car door for me and after getting in himself, he pulled out onto the main street.

Ten minutes later we were in the hotel room sitting side by side on the bed. Carlos reached over and brushed my hair back from my face, then leaned closer to kiss me. I pulled back, not needing to pretend hesitation.

For a brief moment it was like I was someone else, someone who needed a soft hand and a gentle touch. His hands were warm on my body, and I could almost pretend that the passion I felt was for him and not for his blood. It was only the touch of his hand on my breast that snapped me out of it.

I wasn't a soft, warm woman who needed a gentle touch. I was a vampire, cold and hard, and blood was what I wanted. I let my fangs drop and turned my head to bite into his jugular vein.

His blood was warm and rich with passion. I savored the taste as I drank from him slowly, anticipating the action to come. I didn't have to wait long for the next act. The sound of the door kicking in made Carlos jump in surprise, and I released my hold on his neck.

"I'm home!" Warchild shouted from the doorway, slamming the door shut behind him.

I looked up, licking at the blood on my mouth. "Better hurry while he's still warm," I drawled as Carlos leapt to his feet.

Warchild moved quickly across the room grabbed Carlos by his shoulders. The man tried to fight, but he was no match for my sire. I watched as Warchild sank his teeth into the man's neck very near where I had bitten him. I didn't bother to get up from the bed, I simply grabbed his arm and sank my teeth into his wrist. The taste of desire was still thick in the blood, and it was intoxicating.

The only time I'd felt anything like the way I was feeling now was after I'd drank from Estrea. At the time I didn't know what it was I felt, but looking back I can see that Carlos' blood was arousing urges in me that I'd never felt when I was mortal. I wanted more of it, all of it, and it didn't matter to me that we were draining the life from the man we held between us.

Moments later Warchild dropped the body to the floor and wiped at his mouth with the back of his hand. I looked up at him, surprised at the expression on his face. His eyes mirrored the desire I had seen in Carlos' eyes, the desire I could feel coursing through my body.

What happened next is a bit of a blur. I can vaguely remember that we tore the clothes off each other and ended up in bed. I remember a sharp pain as he entered me, and that we were like animals, mating mindlessly with Carlos' hormones to egg us on. It was very intense, overwhelming passion that drove us higher and higher until even the stars exploded. We laid there afterward, naked and still intertwined as the waves of ecstasy receded.

"We should jet," Warchild told me as he rolled off of me.

I reached for my clothes, confused and wary. When I'd still been human, I'd often wondered what sex with Warchild might be like, but I'd never imagined it could be anything like this. Once he'd embraced me, the need for blood had blotted out any thought of sex.

"Warchild?" I asked softly.

"Yeah?" He never even glanced my way.

"Does this mean..." I let my words trail off, not sure what I was asking.

He looked at me in surprise. "It was just a little blanket dance, bambino," he told me. "The animal instinct kicking in."

"Cool." I tried to smile, not sure if I was relieved or insulted by his casual attitude. Either way, it didn't matter how I felt. Warchild is not the type of guy who gets into a relationship. He's the kind that gets his kicks and moves on, and if that was the way he wanted to play it, that was the way it was going to be. As great as fucking Warchild had been, hunting with him was better.