

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair stands in a dark, misty forest. She is wearing a long, flowing blue gown with a deep V-neckline. Her hands are clasped in front of her. Behind her, a large, full moon glows, casting a soft light on the scene. The trees are dark and silhouetted against the moonlight.

FANGS and FORTUNE

VAMPIRES OF CRESCENT CAPE

L. DANVERS

Fangs and Fortune

Vampires of Crescent Cape

Book 2

L. Danvers

Cover Design by [Melody Simmons](#)

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FANGS AND FORTUNE

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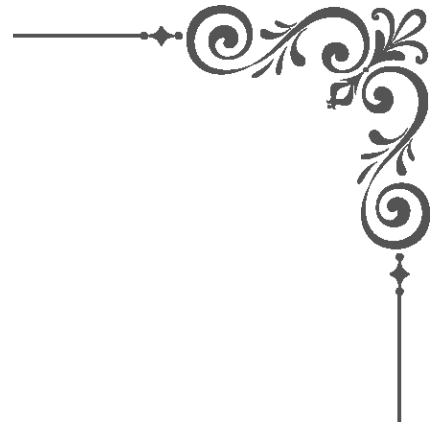
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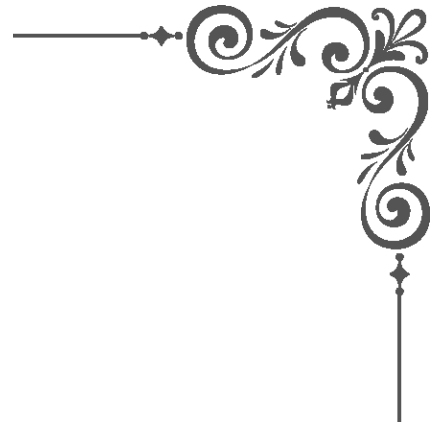
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Danielle

JULIAN PULLED ME IN close. I felt safe in his arms, like I knew he would always protect me. His hold was strong and firm, and I fit into his hug perfectly, like we were two pieces of a puzzle. Yes, technically he'd killed me. But in doing so, he saved me. I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for him. Aiden was ready to let me die. But Julian... he did what he had to do.

As I melted into his embrace, I spotted Aiden out of the corner of my eye. For the briefest of moments, our gazes caught. But he looked away, backing up slowly. Clearing his throat, he said something to Evanna about undoing a protection spell, and they rushed upstairs together. Yes, perhaps seeing me in the arms of his older brother pained him—their relationship was strained enough as it was. But I didn't feel bad about caring for Julian. I'd been manipulated and controlled for years, and I was over it. And in Julian, I'd found someone who didn't need me at all—being a werewolf, he didn't need my blood. Yet, he still looked after me.

A wave of betrayal crashed over me as I watched Aiden ascend the staircase, so much so that I had to turn away. I couldn't even look at him. I'd confided in him. *Trusted him*. I'd told him about how much I missed my parents. And all the while, he knew that he had killed them. What kind of monster did that?

I buried my head in Julian's shoulder, letting the tears fall. He had a reputation for being evil. And yes, turning on his own parents was indefensible, no matter how much they had hurt him. But that was also a thousand years ago. The truth was that, while he seemed to take pleasure in his less-than-stellar reputation, he wasn't the beast people made him out to be. He was honest about who he was. He didn't try to hide it. And from what I could tell, he went to great lengths to protect his siblings from harm.

On top of that, he'd put himself between me and the hybrid, risking his own life to save me. And when I was bitten and suffering from unthinkable agony, he was the one who did what he had to do.

I owed him my life.

Julian pulled back so that he could look me in the eye. The way that his forehead wrinkled in concern was both endearing and unsettling. "How are you feeling?"

"I..." I started, but then thunder rolled across the sky so loud it made my head throb. I pressed my palm to my forehead, grimacing. When the initial pang passed, I opened my eyes, letting out a heavy exhale. But my eyes throbbed. The chandelier overhead was crazy bright. And what was that smell? "I, um... Honestly, I feel a little off."

I hugged my arms around my growling stomach, aware that, on top of all of the other sensations crashing over me at once, I was starving.

Grace scooted over beside me and rubbed my back. "Danielle," she said, tears racing down her cheeks, "I'm so sorry. I was so afraid you were dead."

"She is," Julian replied coolly. "And she's beginning to transition."

My throat went dry. I remembered what Julian had done—snapping my neck after he and Aiden fed me their blood—but I'd been so grateful to be here that it hadn't hit me until now what that meant. "I'm a vampire?"

His features shifted into a somber expression. "You will be once you feed."

"But I can't... I won't..." There was no way I would go through with it. I'd been a victim of vampires for too long. I had no interest in becoming one.

But, at the same time, I wasn't ready to die.

I was only eighteen. And I'd been held captive since I was eight years old. I hadn't even gotten to live yet. I hadn't gone on a real date. I hadn't driven a car. I hadn't gone to a real school—sure I'd read tons of books, but I wanted an education. I wanted to help people. Not hurt them.

Grace wrapped her arm around me in defense. "Can't she drink some of Aiden's artificial blood?"

“After she turns, sure. But first, she’s going to have to feed.” He gave me a pitying look. He knew me well enough to know that that was the absolute last thing I ever wanted to do.

“He’s right, I’m afraid,” Evanna chimed in. The Albright witch was sitting beside us, across from Ben. Shadows danced across her face as thunder bellowed outside. “She has to drink within the next twenty-four hours. And quite a bit, I’m afraid.”

A lump formed in my throat. I forced it down, shaking my head as I did so. This wasn’t an option I was willing to consider. Yes, I wanted to live. But not like this. It didn’t matter if once I turned I could drink artificial blood. I wasn’t going to take another life. I’d already killed a hybrid—the one that had bitten me. It was in self-defense, but that didn’t lessen the guilt. Deep down, whoever that was was still a person. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted the slain supernatural. Everything had happened so fast that no one had had time to clean up the evidence of the night’s carnage. Looking at the dead hybrid, the person whose life I’d taken with the blade Ben had given me, made so much blame swell within me that I feared I might break apart. “No. There has to be another way. I won’t kill anyone. I mean it, Julian.”

He glanced at his brother. “Care to chime in here, Xander?”

Xander stood with his weight on his right leg, his hand in his back pocket. “Sorry, little vamp,” he said with a shrug. “You don’t have much of a choice in the matter. You can either feed or die.”

I waited for him to add something, anything, reassuring.

“I know you don’t want to, but you’ll get over it,” he said. “Soon, the hunger will be so intense you won’t be able to think about anything other than the sweet *ecstasy* of drinking blood straight from the vein.” He pressed his fingers to his lips and kissed them, like he was an Italian chef or something.

I still hadn’t figured Xander out. There had to be more to him than this ambivalent attitude toward life. But right now, I didn’t care to waste time thinking about it any further. Instead, I turned to Grace, eyes pleading for comfort.

Grace let out an audible huff. “Don’t listen to him, Danielle. We’ll think of something.” She cupped the back of her neck, lost in thought. Suddenly, her brows lifted. “What about a blood bag? I can give you some of mine.”

“Me, too,” Ben added. I glanced back at him over my shoulder, giving him a nod of appreciation between snuffles.

“Except that she can’t have any of your blood,” Julian interrupted, speaking to Grace. “Now that your powers have awakened, your magic will render her violently ill.”

Her shoulders slumped. “Oh.”

I drew in a long breath, trying to keep myself from hyperventilating. I was so appreciative of Ben offering up some of his blood, but, if what I knew about transitioning was right, it wouldn’t be enough. Not without killing him, at least. A rush of warmth crept up my cheeks. My throat tightened, and I could hardly get the words out. “What am I going to do, Julian?”

Charlotte gave out an annoyed sigh. She sauntered up behind her older brother, rolling her eyes as she did so. “Don’t be so dramatic. It’s not that bad. I’ll teach you how to hunt. You might be surprised by how naturally it comes to you. It’s mostly following your instincts.”

“No,” I said with surprising intensity considering I was shaking. I wasn’t going to hunt down some innocent stranger and drain them dry. I didn’t have that kind of cruelty in me. And I wasn’t about to take any advice from Charlotte of all people. She rubbed me the wrong way, and I had a suspicion that despite everything I knew about her siblings, she was the one I really needed to watch out for.

She laughed. “Whatever. When you change your mind in a few hours, come find me.”

“You can drink from me, Danielle,” Ben insisted. “And if the worst happens, then... Well, this is all my fault anyway. If I hadn’t come here—”

“I appreciate that,” I interrupted. “But this *isn’t* your fault. I insisted on coming here, and if you had said no, I would have found a way to do it anyway. And while I appreciate you offering to help me, I can’t drink from you. What if I can’t stop? What if it’s not enough? I could never live with

myself if I accidentally..." my voice trailed off as a shiver shimmied down my back.

"Wait a second," Grace said, her eyes brighter than I'd seen them in days. "Are the other girls still here in the castle? Amara and Tara. Are they here?"

"I think they were taken back to the village after we all went our separate ways. There wasn't much of a point in keeping them around after Aiden had made his choice." I could feel the weight of Xander's glare resting on me. His words wounded me more than I'd care to admit. It was as if he blamed me for everything.

I knew he was being protective over Aiden—he'd hated Julian for years, anyway. Still, the truth was that, if it wasn't for the "minor little detail" Aiden had kept from me, perhaps I'd be in his arms now instead of Julian's. But the way things turned out was *not* my fault. I wasn't responsible for Aiden's terrible life choices. Maybe if he had been honest, I could have found some way to look past it. But then again, maybe not, all things considered. Either way, if he could keep something so important from me, even if I could manage to forgive him, how could I ever trust him again?

The answer was that I couldn't. Not after what he'd done. I couldn't even think his name without feeling a sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach.

"We can go to the village, then," Grace suggested to me, ever the problem-solver. "You had friends back there, didn't you? We can get some volunteers. You wouldn't have to suck the life out of anyone. We could get a bunch of them to each donate a little. It could be their choice that way. That doesn't sound too bad, does it?"

"Yeah, Grace," I said weakly. "I'm sure people are going to be lining up to help me turn into one of the monsters holding them captive and sucking the blood out of them on a weekly basis." Xander and Charlotte both crossed their arms when I said that. Those two may not have looked much alike, but there was no doubting they were siblings. I cleared my throat, feeling the weight of their frustration. "No offense."

"Look," Charlotte huffed, tossing her hair over her shoulder. "I have better things to do all day than help you with your existential crisis. Like, oh,

I don't know... planning a funeral for my sister who is dead because of *you*."

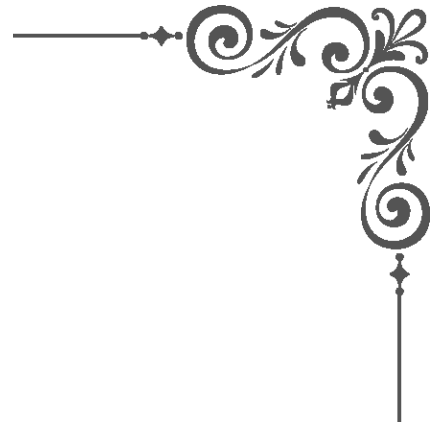
Julian released me from his hold and stood before her, challenging her with a look. "Be careful how you speak to her."

She started to protest, but she was too emotionally exhausted to fight. Instead, she said, "If you need me, you know where to find me." And with that, she rushed upstairs.

Grace laced her fingers between mine. I rested my head on her shoulder, grateful to have her by my side. I didn't know what I'd done to deserve a friend like her. We barely knew each other, but because of our bizarre circumstances, we'd come to realize that we needed each other.

"Grace," I said in a low voice so that only she could hear me. "What am I going to do?"

She hesitated. "I don't know. But I promise you this: whatever you decide, you won't have to do it alone."



Danielle

I BURIED MY HEAD IN my pillow and screamed until my throat started to feel like sandpaper. It was like, if I could shout hard enough, the anxiety brimming within me would expel itself.

I felt the reassuring touch of Grace's hand on my back. She gave me an attempt at a comforting pat, but I was too upset. She was trying her best. It wasn't her fault. There was nothing anyone could do to make this better.

Realizing that I was letting my emotions get the best of me, I turned over and sat up, hugging the pillow as I rested my chin on top of it. Grace waited by my side until I was ready to talk about it—which was saying a lot because it took a long time for me to calm down.

The tears slowed to a trickle, and I let out a long breath, taking note of how warm it felt as I exhaled—a sensation I had never slowed down enough to notice before until now. It was funny how having to choose between life and death made you more aware of the little things—life's small observances that I'd always taken for granted.

I'd made my choice.

"I'm not going to do it," I said.

An instinctual cry burst from Grace's mouth. She buried her face in her hands, shaking. My heart shattered in an instant. I hated seeing her like that. I didn't want to hurt her. "I'm sorry, Grace. I don't want to die. But I don't want to live out my days as a bloodsucker, either."

"I know," she said, lips quivering now that she had lifted her head. "I'd probably do the same. I'm just..." She floundered for the right word.

"Scared?"

She nodded.

"Me, too." A laugh escaped my lips as the memory of a similar conversation between us and Tara came to mind. I wondered how she and

Amara were doing now. As much as being a blood slave sucked, I was glad they had been out of harm's way when Princess Bianca was here.

I squared my shoulders, confidence overpowering fear. "But it'll be okay," I continued. "I'm glad I'm at least doing this on my terms. I'm sorry that I'll be leaving you to deal with this whole mess, though. I'll talk to Julian. I'll make sure he gets you back home."

She forced a smile. "Thanks, I guess. So..." she started, puckering her lips, "I have to ask. What happened back there with Julian? And why was Aiden acting so weird?"

I realized then that I had my memories back, but Grace didn't. She and I had both learned of Aiden's secret—that he was the one who had killed my parents and kidnapped me in the first place—back while we were staying at Ben's. But, realizing how it had affected me, she and Julian made the decision to remove the memories from me—and from Grace, too. They agreed she wouldn't be able to keep it a secret. They were trying their best to look out for me, and ultimately, they had allowed me to make the final decision. But when I turned, the memories flooded back.

"Talk about a deal-breaker," she said when I told her what Aiden had done. "Gosh, Danielle. I'm so sorry. I don't even know what to say. What a scumbag."

I didn't realize I'd been squeezing my hand into a fist until my palm ached from my nails digging into it.

"Okay, well that explains what's going on between you and Aiden—or the Jerk Who Shall Not Be Named, as we'll now refer to him. But what about Julian? You *hugged* him." A look of pure disgust overtook her features.

I gave her a playful eye roll. "He's not as bad as you think."

"We are talking about the same person, right?"

I rubbed my arm, lost in a reverie. "I don't know what it is, but there's this... this connection between us."

"Like a 'love at first sight' thing?"

I scowled. "I don't know about that. I wouldn't say I love him. Care for him? Sure. But love... No, I'm not there yet."

She raised her eyebrows, hopeful. “Yet?”

Realizing my slip of the tongue, I corrected myself. “I guess I never will be.”

“You can change your mind any time. It’s not over until it’s over, you know?”

A smile tugged at my lips. “I know.”

Grace readjusted herself so that she was now sitting cross-legged across from me. She scratched the back of her neck, trying to figure out what to say. And honestly, I didn’t know, either. So, I let the first thing that popped into my head slip out. “Do you think it’ll hurt? Dying, I mean.”

She cocked her head to the side. “Seriously? You’re already dead. You tell me—did it hurt?”

“Oh.” Feeling like an idiot, I rubbed my temple. It was weird. I didn’t *feel* dead. Other than the buzzing of the light overhead grating on my last nerve and the incessant growling of my stomach, I felt normal. Normal thoughts. Normal worries. Normal fears.

“Well?” Grace pressed.

“No. Getting bitten hurt like crazy.” The memory made my insides twist into knots. *Hurt like crazy* didn’t even begin to describe how it had felt. It was like every cell in my entire body was throbbing. It was torture. “But after that... it disappeared. I was with my family and our dog. I was happy. Confused, but happy.”

“Hm.” Her lips curved up. “Sounds nice.”

I bit my lower lip, drawing it between my teeth. Nodding my head, I added, “Yeah. It was.”

“Um... do you want me to get you something to eat?”

My cheeks flushed. I was mortified. “You heard that?”

“Given the fact that vampires have acute hearing, I’m betting everyone in the castle heard that.”

Ugh. So embarrassing. “Flora,” I called out. She and the other maidservants had returned to their posts now that Princess Bianca was dead.

Flora, Amber and Layla had been kind enough to allow me and Grace to chat while they waited down the hall in case I needed anything.

Within seconds, the heavy wooden door creaked open. “Yes?”

“Could you get me something to eat?”

Her eyes widened joyfully. “You mean—”

“No!” I interrupted. “Not blood. Like, real food. I’m starving.”

Grace lifted a finger in the air. “Me, too.”

Flora’s smile fell into a frown. “As you wish.”