



Nice Girls Don't Bite Their Neighbors (Jane Jameson series Book 4)

By Molly Harper

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Molly Harper is the author of the popular series of paranormal romances set in the small Kentucky town of Half-Moon Hollow. She also writes the Bluegrass series of contemporary ebook romances, most recently *Snow Falling on Bluegrass*. A former humor columnist and newspaper reporter, she lives in Kentucky with her family. Visit her on the web at MollyHarper.com.

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1

Whoever said childbirth is the most difficult thing a parent can go through has never dealt with a moody teenage vampire.

**—*Siring for the Stupid:
A Beginner's Guide to Raising Newborn Vampires***

Three months after he moved into my ancestral home, Gabriel Nightengale's last box was finally unpacked. The catch was that we could never break up, because I had run out of friends who were willing to help us move.

“I have good news,” he said, striding into the library, where I was sprawled on the velvet chaise longue we'd moved into the room only a few days ago. I was reading *Persuasion* again, but this time, I was reading Gabriel's very old, very delicate original edition. It was practically a religious experience.

This was a vastly different library from just a year ago, when it was stuffed with my well-worn paperback versions of Jane Austen and Roald Dahl novels . . . and my creepily extensive collection of unicorn figurines. This was a grown-up library. I'd cleared out quite a bit of space for Gabriel's books and furniture. It wasn't a difficult choice, considering that most of his books were valuable antiques, whereas most of mine were purchased at secondhand paperback shops.

I'd also packed most of my unicorn collection away in the cellar, threatening Gabriel with permanent sunburn if he so much as breathed a word about it to Dick.

As Gabriel moved toward me, my pitifully hideous but lovable dog, Fitz, raised his head from my knee. Gently nudging Fitz aside, Gabriel pressed kisses along the line of my throat and announced, “My VHS tapes now have a permanent home in your entertainment center, alphabetized and divided by genre.”

At this announcement, Fitz trotted out of the room in search of some pair of Gabriel's shoes that he hadn't managed to chew yet. I peered up at him over the top of the book, cringing. “So now would be a really bad time to tell you that I don't have a VHS player anymore, right? This is a strictly digital household.”

Gabriel groaned and flopped down next to me. “I'm going to have to buy *Casablanca* again.”

“You didn't notice the lack of a VCR in the TV cabinet?” I asked.

He shook his head. “You know I don’t understand half of the gadgets you have around here.”

That was true. The previous week, I’d caught him trying to “reboot” my wireless network by kicking the router across the room. That was a long conversation. I shook my head. “How did I end up in a relationship in which *I* am the tech person?”

He leaned in and kissed me. “When you taught me how to work my voicemail, I knew I could never let you go.”

I giggled as Gabriel crossed the room and selected an older volume from the crowded shelves. I watched him move, unabashedly lovestruck. My human relationships had been few and far between, but they’d been polite, civilized—boring. I craved Gabriel with a bone-deep lust I’d once reserved exclusively for Godiva truffles. I was fixated, not just in the physical sense—although that was an obvious, and occasionally distracting, bonus—but also with what he thought, how he saw the world, how he saw me. It was addictive to see myself reflected in his liquid silver eyes as strong, beautiful, intelligent, and interesting, though slightly exasperating. We each provided a vital service for the other. He made me stronger, and I kept him from taking himself too seriously.

Gabriel settled in next to me, absorbed in a vintage copy of *Jane Eyre*. We sat like that for some time, quietly reveling in not having anything to do, anywhere to be. Crisis-free moments like this had been rare in our relationship.

“*Jane Eyre*?” I asked. “Not your usual selection.”

He nodded. “You’ve only mentioned a dozen or so times that Edward Rochester is second only to Mr. Darcy on your ‘Fictional Character Free Pass List.’ I want to know what I’m up against.”

I smirked, snuggling into his side. “You stand a fair chance. As long as you don’t have a crazy wife hidden away somewhere . . .” I stared at him for a beat.

“I don’t,” he said, shaking his head at me and opening his book.

That may have seemed like an unfair shot, but Gabriel and I had suffered serious relationship issues related to his “careful editing” of his past. Case in point, the fire in my cellar caused by Gabriel’s psycho childe, Jeanine, who had stalked me, nearly killed me with aerosol silver, and eventually arranged for our friend Andrea to be forcibly turned into a vampire. I try to resist pointing out that of all this could have been avoided if Gabriel had told me about Jeanine, instead of playing the tortured “I can’t tell you because you’ll hate me, so I’ll protect you by keeping you in the dark” card.

Trust me, that card never works. I ended up with more undead friends and a serious cleaning bill for smoke damage. And then, as the vampire who technically defeated her in a Taser-versus-lunatic-soaked-in-lamp-oil battle, there was the hassle of receiving the proceeds from Jeanine’s estate through the Council, then donating them to various charities. I didn’t want one penny from her crazy behind darkening my doorway.

“Just checking,” I said, smiling sweetly and earning an undignified but amused snort from Gabriel. I returned my attention to poor, persevering Anne Elliot. Once again, I wondered how she managed to go so many chapters without bitch-slapping every single person she came into contact with. I actually wrote a paper about it in college. My professor deducted points for using the phrase *bitch-slap* in the title.

It was totally worth it.

I was just settling into the salons of Austenian Bath when Gabriel muttered, "This is strange."

I looked up to see him pulling a long blue-gray thread from between the nearly translucent pages. My jaw dropped, and I was kneeling on the chaise in a flash. "Is the binding coming loose? No, don't pull it! I can take it to my book doctor tomorrow night."

"Stop hyperventilating, sweetheart. I think it's a bookmark," he said, pulling on the thread until he'd stretched it into my hand. "Here."

I wound the thread around my finger. "What passage was it marking?"

He scanned the page and lifted an eyebrow. "It's an Edward and Jane scene. I know how you love those. Edward's saying, 'I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you—especially when you are near me, as now: it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated in the corresponding quarter of your little frame.' "

I was so caught up in watching his lips as they formed the words that I barely noticed the sudden tension on the fiber wound around my finger. I realized now that Gabriel had slipped a ring onto the thread and was sliding it toward me. I watched as the respectable diamond twinkled in the light of the oil lamp.

"I'm not Edward," Gabriel promised. "I'm not afraid the thread will break and leave me bleeding. Our thread's already been tested. And it will hold up. I'm asking you to make the link permanent. Please, marry me."

I smiled as the ring slid into my hand. I can't say this was a surprise. After the passing of the Federal Undead Marriage Act a few months before, Gabriel had officially proposed with this very tasteful solitaire. And I'd said no. We'd agreed to move in together because I'd told Gabriel that I wasn't ready to be engaged yet. I was still adjusting to being a vampire. I was still recovering from Zeb and Jolene's wedding from hell. And oh, yeah, Gabriel's childe had just tried to murder me in my own home. I needed a breather.

Gabriel had proposed again a few weeks later, and I wasn't ready. And then again on my birthday, and I still wasn't ready. Then he'd promised not to ask me again until I was ready. And when he'd said that, I'd suddenly felt ready. And then I'd felt like an idiot, because by then, he'd stopped proposing.

This was no ballpark Jumbotron, no ring hidden in a soufflé. It was the right way for Gabriel to ask me to marry him. And this was the right time.

I nodded, mute, and the tension seemed to drain out of Gabriel. He grinned, slid his hands in my hair, and pulled me close. "I struggled with the right passage, you know," he said, sliding the ring over my knuckle and kissing the web of skin between my fingers. "I tried all of Austen's works, but the proposals are all so formal. I thought you would appreciate Edward's passion. And it still involves a Jane, after all. The ring is a copy of my mother's. I took the stone from her engagement ring and had a jeweler place it in a titanium setting."

"Titanium?" I asked.

"Dick knew a guy," he said.

“Of course he did.”

“You’re a bit rough-and-tumble with jewelry, and I knew it would have to be able to stand up to . . .”

“Nuclear winter?”

His eyebrow lifted. “I never know with you.”

I laughed, throwing my arms around him and knocking him back on the seat and straddling his hips. Hovering over him, I nuzzled his neck, kissing and nipping before my fangs extended. I scraped them along his jugular, making him shudder and snake his hands around my waist, pulling me closer. I threaded my fingers through his coal-black hair and tugged his head back. His own fangs snicked out as he grinned up at me. He cupped my cheeks in his palms and gave me my first “betrothed” kiss.

I have to say that if I’d known that was what I had to look forward to as a married woman, I probably would have agreed to the engagement a lot sooner.

He chuckled, pressing his thumb over my right canine, letting it pierce the skin. I nibbled at it as he twisted under me, a sweet little trickle of my sire’s blood lending to an equally wet and pleasant sensation elsewhere. Pushing the scoop neck of my blouse away, he trailed his lips over the edge of my bra and snapped the left strap with his razor-sharp fangs.

Your underwear budget triples when you’re dating the undead.

“You haven’t said yes, by the way,” he murmured, snapping the other bra strap with his teeth.

I gasped, and his thumb fell away from my mouth. “I’m sorry! Yes, yes, yes!”

“Should I find it disturbing that it took jewelry to make you cry ‘yes, yes, yes’ in my presence for the first time?” he asked, nuzzling my throat.

“Nice.” I snickered.

“So, who do you want to call first?” he asked. “Your mother? Jenny? Zeb and Jolene? Oh, or I can call Dick, act like I’m sobbing, and tell him you said no. Make him think that he has to take me out for an evening of drinking and not talking about our feelings.”

“That’s your idea of a joke?” I asked, arching my eyebrow.

He smirked, pulling my blouse over my head. My ruined bra fell to pieces and dropped to the floor. “I find Dick’s squirming in the face of emotional vulnerability to be the height of hilarity.”

“This is why Dick wins all of your prank wars,” I told him, as he pulled me back onto the chaise, my weight settled on his chest.

“Do you want to call your mother first or Zeb?”

I shook my head, cradling my face into his neck. “No.”

“No?”

“Neither. First, because I’d like to wait until I can tell Aunt Jettie.” I sighed, thinking fondly of my ghostly great-aunt and her equally deceased beau, Gilbert Wainwright. “And I don’t know when she’ll be back from whatever astral jaunt she and Mr. Wainwright are taking. And second, because I want to lie here with you and enjoy being engaged without being squealed at or hug-strangled or told that I don’t want to get married in the spring because it’s impossible to get the right mix of seasonal tulips. I just want to . . .” I sighed and rubbed my bare chest against his shirt in a distinctly non-virginal-bride manner. “Bask.”

“You never do what I expect you to,” he said, kissing the ring on my finger.

“Admit it, that’s part of the attraction.”

“Yes. Yes, it is.” He sighed. “But you will be the one to tell your mother, right? I asked your father for his blessing. But I think you should be the one to deliver the news to your mother.”

I snorted. Mama’s reaction to our premarital cohabiting included screaming and yelling and threatening us with grounding. Considering that the worst that his own mother had ever done to him was call for her smelling salts, Gabriel was permanently scarred. He had flashbacks for weeks.

“So, I’m thinking . . . Vegas Strip next Friday? We could gamble a little, get married, bail Dick out of jail, and be home by Monday,” I suggested.

“We are not going to get married in some dingy chapel by an Elvis impersonator.”

“We could get a Streisand impersonator if it would make you more comfortable.”

“Jane.” He chuckled, exasperated. “Is that really how you want to get married? Skulking off like we’re ashamed of ourselves? Was that what little Jane dreamed and hoped for?”

“Little Jane thought she would marry Mark-Paul Gosselaar from *Saved by the Bell* in an English castle. Little Jane was an idiot.”

“If you want the English castle, you shall have it . . . minus this Mark-Paul person,” he said. “And if you really want the Vegas Strip, you shall have that. I want you to have the sort of wedding that will make you happy.”

I countered, “What about the kind of wedding that makes *you* happy?”

“I want to show up in a tux and be told where to stand. That would make me very happy.”

I groaned.

“What about wedding planning scares you?”

“All of it. Picking out flowers. The dress. The bridesmaids’ dresses . . . no, wait, I’m looking forward to that. Vengeance will be mine. But making all the choices . . . and then having those choices subtly criticized by every woman in my family. And the fact that each of those choices will probably ‘ruin the wedding’ for someone.”

“Ruin the wedding?”

“When my sister wanted to get married at the country club, Grandma Ruthie said the wedding would be ruined for her if Jenny got married anywhere but the Baptist church. Several cousins threatened to boycott if Jenny didn’t allow children to attend. Our great-uncle said he wouldn’t come to the reception unless she served Pabst Blue Ribbon. People just seem to lose their minds when it comes to weddings. You can’t make everybody happy.”

“So we won’t try,” Gabriel said. “We’ll do what makes us happy. It’s our wedding, after all.”

I chuckled, pressing my lips to his throat, the curve of his jaw, as I rolled over him and slipped my fingers around his belt buckle, sliding it open. “Oh, you’re so naive. It’s cute, really.”

We stayed in that happy (naked) secret-engagement bubble until I had to open the shop the next evening. Things had been progressing very nicely at Specialty Books since I’d reopened earlier that year. While we initially depended on special efforts such as the “Bump in the Night” Book Club and meetings of the local chapter of the Friends and Family of the Undead to keep in the black, online sales and increasingly healthy in-store traffic made opening the electric bills and supplier invoices a lot less painful every month.

There were times when I felt like a failure for never leaving the Hollow. I mean, I lived just a few miles from the house where I’d grown up. But there were good reasons for me to stay when I was human—my family, Aunt Jettie, the Half-Moon Hollow Public Library, where I’d devoted most of my adult years to helping kids find books to love. And if I’d left, I might never have met Gabriel. I would probably still be human. And clearly, this was the life I’d been intended for. Big-city life, babies, and aging just weren’t my style.

Still, Half-Moon Hollow is a strange place for a vampire to spend her days. The small-town stereotype in which everybody knows everybody, or is at least related to them by marriage, holds true in a lot of places, such as the Hollow. Newspapers and telephones are kept around for convenience, but the real flow of information runs through the kitchens, beauty parlors, and grocery aisles. A visit to town on Saturday morning means the difference between community ignorance and knowing who’s in jail, who’s knocked up, and whose marriage is teetering on the brink of disaster.

As one of the few “out” vampires living in the Hollow, I was still occasionally the subject of gossip. My neighbors seemed torn between fearing me and remembering me as the goofy band geek who’d babysat their children. You could see it in their eyes sometimes, the initial rush of familiarity and affection, just before they remembered that I was no longer that girl, no longer human. The light in their eyes quickly extinguished, and the outstretched arms that had meant to hug me were extended into a timid handshake—if I was lucky.

But I’d made enough friends in the supernatural community to make up for it. Friends like Andrea and Dick, who’d already arrived at the shop by the time I opened the door. But, considering the noises I heard from the storeroom, I decided to give them a few minutes.

Seriously, I once walked into the office without knocking . . . I was scarred for life. And I’m going to live forever.

I sorted through that day’s mail, shelved some newly arrived selections, and replenished the sweeteners in the coffee bar. I fired up the cappuccino machine and found that we were out of two-percent, which meant that my mochaccino had a little less -ccino. I improvised with a little Faux Type O and prayed that Andrea

wouldn't hear me messing with her "baby."

"Jane!"

No such luck.

Andrea came rushing into the room, straightening her mussed Titian hair. I cringed. The last time she'd found me turning on the cappuccino maker, she'd thrown a Mayan quartz skull at my head—which, if you think about it, is sort of in poor taste.

"Remember, I am your boss," I said, raising my hands and my bloodyccino in a defensive position.

"What the hell is that?" Andrea demanded, pointing at my hands. Even in her angry, rumpled state, Andrea was one of the most poised and elegant women I knew. I often said she was what Grace Kelly would have looked like if Grace had reddish hair and a propensity for dating redneck scoundrels. And I was going to put her in the ugliest bridesmaid dress I could find.

"Look, I get it. I'm not as good at running the machine as you are. There's no reason to be all snotty about it. Are you going after a raise or something?"

"Not the coffee, you ninny, the rock on your left hand! Did Gabriel finally break you down and convince you to say yes?"

"Did you just call me a ninny? What are you, seventy?"

She huffed, a tendril of her deep red hair fluttering in her face. "Don't ignore the question."

"Yes, OK? I said yes. We're getting married."

I prepared for squealing and a girlie-girlie bonding moment. Instead, she yelled, "Dick! I owe you five bucks!"

I heard a loud "whoop" from the back room as Andrea hugged me.

"You know, you should be a little more considerate of my standing wagers when you make major life decisions."

"You made a bet on whether I would agree to marry Gabriel?" I exclaimed, slapping her shoulder. "And you only bet five dollars?"

Dick walked in and grinned evilly at the sight of us hugging and talking practically nose-to-nose. "Dear *Penthouse*, I never believed something like this could happen to me, but when my super-hot wife asked me what I wanted more than anything else for my birthday . . ."

Andrea sighed and dropped her head to my shoulder in defeat.

"Hey, you married him."

"I have no one to blame but myself," she muttered as Dick left to rummage around in the storeroom.

A mind-boggling mix of fierce loyalty and moral flexibility, Dick used to be the local go-to guy for under-the-table commerce. If you needed an iPod that would only work on European adapters, he was your guy. He lived this way for more than a century, before he fell hard for Andrea, the first woman actually to turn him down in all that time. Andrea didn't find any of Dick's roguish ways remotely charming, which apparently was what he was looking for all along. He managed to make the leap from dating to cohabiting by slowly but surely moving his vaguely obscene T-shirts and *Dukes of Hazzard* memorabilia into her swanky townhouse condo. It was by far the sneakiest thing I'd ever seen him do, and that's saying something.

"Tell her about the other part of the bet." Dick snickered as he reemerged, carrying a bottle of champagne and three glasses.

"How do you always happen to have champagne handy for special occasions?" I asked.

"I hide it in your break-room fridge," he said, popping the cork and pouring generous splashes into each of our glasses, mixing it with synthetic blood for a disturbing mimosa. "None of your employees eats, so it's a safe spot. Now, my dearest wife, tell our Jane the other part of the bet. I'll even help you start off. If Jane said yes to Gabriel before March Madness, you owed me five dollars and . . ."

Andrea sighed. "And . . . you get to decorate the den with your *Dukes of Hazzard* memorabilia."

I winced at the burn of champagne bubbles being channeled up my nose. Dick and Andrea had been battling over the renovations to Dick's family home ever since Gabriel had given the deed back to Dick months before. Gabriel hadn't left the house to rot while it was under his care for the last century or so, but he hadn't exactly kept it move-in ready, either. Using every illicit contact at his disposal, Dick was gathering the manpower and materials to completely modernize the place—indoor plumbing, electrical wiring, lightproofing the bedroom, and adding a "shower big enough for eight" to the master bath.

I chose not to think about why they might need a shower that big.

Having just overseen the completion of his own home, my human best friend, Zeb, was helping Dick with some of the work. Andrea sat back and prayed that their version of rewiring wouldn't burn the house down while they slept for the day. Other than occasionally suggesting a wall color or picking out tile, Andrea had left the renovations to Dick . . . until he showed her his decorating plans for the den, apparently.

"And this means it is no longer a den," Dick said, nudging her. "It is now a . . ."

"Man cave," she said, wrinkling up her face as if saying the words pained her.

I covered my giggles with another sip of the bubbly. Dick put his arm around my shoulders. "Here's looking at you, Stretch. If Gabriel doesn't make you deliriously happy, I'll kick his ass."

"Be sure to include that in your toast at the wedding." I chuckled.

"Oh, my gosh! The wedding!" Andrea squealed. "When is it? Where will it be? What about your dress?"

I groaned. Andrea considered herself to be the authority on undead matrimony. She and Dick were the first vampire couple to marry legally in McClure County. There'd been an outdoor, nighttime ceremony, the first party Gabriel had hosted at his home in more than a hundred years—and the last one he hosted before officially handing the keys to my sister, Jenny. His gift served two purposes: soothing Jenny's chronically

tender feelings after being denied our ancestral home, River Oaks, and giving me a good reason to invite Gabriel to come live with me.

Andrea had worn a vintage confection she'd found online. I'd barely managed to talk Dick out of wearing his "tuxedo" T-shirt, for which I'd been rewarded by not having to wear another damned bridesmaid dress. And now, thanks to her acquired "expertise," Andrea was going to give Mama a run for her money in terms of annoying me.

"Well, Gabriel shot down my Vegas plan, so I haven't a clue," I said.

"You mean, he had a woman *offer* to skip all the wedding crap and marry him in Vegas and he turned it down? I need to talk some sense into that boy," Dick said, shaking his head. When Andrea glared at him, he quickly added, "Not that I didn't absolutely love all of *our* wedding crap, baby. Happiest day of my life. Really."

Andrea sniffed and turned on her heel toward the ritual-candle section. I snickered and taunted Dick. "So much trouble!"

"Shut it, you," he grumbled before pitching his voice into an apologetic whine. "Andrea, baby! I didn't mean it like that!"

Realizing that I'd left my cell phone in Big Bertha, my trusty, weathered station wagon, I made my way out of the shop with a little skip in my step and a tune on my lips. Dick had managed to distract Andrea from her "Our wedding was *special*" tirade with more good news. After reviewing last quarter's sales, he'd found that Specialty Books was actually showing a profit for the first time since my former boss, Mr. Wainwright, opened it sixty years before. Even with the stuff destroyed when his nephew, Emery, repeatedly broke into the shop, we were ahead of our projections for the quarter. Most of the increase was rooted in online sales, a result of Zeb's redesigning the shop's Web site.

And yes, I was letting Dick handle the bookkeeping. It turns out that ruthlessly calculating profits from underhanded back-alley deals actually makes one pretty good with math. And now that I knew where he slept on a permanent basis, I trusted him not to steal from me.

I danced around the front of my decades-old Ford station wagon and saw that Jamie Lanier, our dairy delivery guy, was pulling up to the curb in his Half-Moon Dairy truck. I smiled and waved as I opened my driver's-side door.

"Hey, Miss Jane!" he hollered over the blaring of his earbuds as he unloaded his hand truck.

I cringed at his use of "Miss," which clearly indicated that Jamie still thought of me as the old lady who used to babysit him every summer. Again I say, this is the drawback of living in your hometown. Local hunks have to start off somewhere, and generally, it's as the kid who would only eat smiley-face pancakes from ages five to seven.

And good Lord, Jamie was a hunk. He had the all-American, apple-pie look that they probably used as a template when they made GI Joe dolls. And the color palette wasn't bad, either—warm, tanned skin and olive-green eyes that twinkled at me from under the fringe of his wavy dark blond hair. He loomed four inches over even my tall frame, and I found myself stammering and blushing like a schoolgirl every time he stood less than an arm's length from me.

Did I mention that he was just about to graduate? From high school? Which would make me the dirtiest old lady in the world.

Andrea enjoyed my discomfort each week when Jamie delivered dairy products for the coffee bar, which, again, made me question the value of having girlfriends.

I leaned into my car, searching for the charger cord that tethered my phone. Honestly, it was the only way I could find the damn thing most days.

My head cocked toward the sound of tires screeching. I straightened up to see an old rusted-out black sedan with dark-tinted windows barreling down the street, heading straight for Jamie's truck. Backing out of the rear gate, his hand truck loaded with crates, Jamie had no clue that he was walking right into the path of the oncoming car.

“Jamie!” I screamed.

Jamie froze and whipped around just as the car struck him. The force of the chrome bumper striking his knees slammed him to the pavement. Jamie barely let out a yelp as his head made a sick cracking noise against the pavement. I screamed again at the wet thump of the tires rolling over his torso, the snap of breaking ribs.

The car swerved toward me. I felt paralyzed, unable to help myself as Jamie lay bleeding on the street. I stared through the darkened windows, trying to make out any shape or feature behind the tinted glass. But the rapid approach of the car's grille caught my attention. I shoved my palms against the top of Big Bertha's doorframe and launched myself onto the roof, just before the black car smashed into my driver's side. The open door snapped off, flying toward the shop's display window. I landed on my feet as the glass shattered behind me. My heels screeched on the metal roof as I pivoted to watch the strange car speed away.

It fishtailed as it turned the corner to Hesler Street, and although grease and dirt were caked over the plate in a way far too effective to be coincidental, I could just make out a Y and a 7 at the end of the license-plate number.

Dick and Andrea bolted outside, with Dick protectively shoving Andrea behind him as they ran. “Stretch?” Dick yelled.

“Call nine-one-one!” I shouted, leaping off the car and landing near Jamie's crumpled body. His eyes were wild, unfocused. A scarlet slick flowed from his mouth as he gave weak, gasping coughs. His legs were bent all wrong. A thick pool of blood spread beneath him, soaking through my jeans as I knelt on the pavement.

“Jane? Hurts,” he whimpered.

“Jamie,” I whispered. “Just hold on, OK? We'll get an ambulance here. You're going to be just fine.”

Dick, who was kneeling on Jamie's left side, shook his head. “He's lost too much blood. Feel his pulse. Listen to his breath. You hear that wet, sucking sound? There's a lot of internal damage. Even if the ambulance was here already . . . he won't make it.”

Dick gave me a meaningful look, and his fangs descended with a soft snick. I snarled and mouthed so only he could hear, “We are not feeding on him!”

“We’re going to turn him, Stretch,” Dick said, exasperated.

“But—”

“Turn me,” Jamie murmured, his voice wet and rough over the crimson bubbles that kept forming under his lips. “Please. Don’t want to die.”

Turn him? I’d never even seen it done, except in my hazy memories of my own crossover into the world of the undead. I looked to the older vampire. “Dick?”

“No, you,” Jamie said, his voice fading with every word. “I trust you. I know you.”

“Should I call?” Andrea asked, holding up the shop’s cordless phone.

His fingers pressed against Jamie’s pulse point, Dick shook his head. He turned to me. “Jane, we need to do something quick.”

“I’ve never turned anyone. I don’t know what to do!”

Dick grabbed my wrist and sank his fangs into my flesh. I yowled as the blood poured from the wound. I glared at him as he pressed the gaping wound to Jamie’s slack mouth. A cascade of red rolled past his chin onto the pavement with little pattering noises. My eyes popped wide when Jamie latched onto my wrist and drew strong swallows of my blood. I brushed his matted, damp hair away from his forehead and slid my legs under his back to let him rest against me.

I was thankful that Jamie seemed less conflicted than I had been when I was turned. Not the least bit hesitant, he was taking blood from me as if he’d been born a vampire. With every draw of my blood, Jamie relaxed a bit more, his strength ebbing from his limbs. He was reaching the last phase, the death of his human body.

Hoarse wheezing sounds filled the street as Jamie struggled to draw breath through his nose. He was suffocating, drowning on dry land as his lungs stopped functioning. He broke away from my wrist, gasping, desperately trying to fill them with air. I remembered that feeling. You can’t think. You’re barely even aware of the pain. All you can focus on is the crushing emptiness in your chest.

“Shh,” I whispered, cupping my free hand to his cheek. His fading green eyes searched mine, for assurance, for answers. I gave him a shaky smile. “This part is never easy, but it will be over soon. And when you wake up, you’ll be like us.”

I pushed my healing wrist against his mouth, letting him take one last weak pull before his eyes fluttered closed. His arms went slack at his sides. His head lolled back against my arm.

Dick squeezed my shoulder gently as we knelt there on the cold pavement and listened to Jamie’s young heart beat its last.

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Users Review

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