

# NIGHT RHYTHM



CHARLENE  
TEGLIA

A FREE COMPANION TO NIGHT MUSIC

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A Charlene Teglia Publication

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# Night Rhythm

*Charlene Teglia*

# Dedication

For lovers of the night and things that go bump in it.

## **Chapter One**

A restless movement woke him. An elbow found his ribs and the fringed end of a thick braid tickled his nose. Valentine smiled, his eyes still closed. His arm tightened around the slight form bumping into his side, drawing her closer. "Having trouble sleeping? I have the cure for that malady."

The cure he spoke of was thick and full. It jutted forward when a bare thigh brushed against it, as if eager to volunteer.

A musical giggle answered him. "I wonder which of us has a malady. You seem to suffer from a great swelling this night."

One hand splayed against his chest while another closed around his cock in a bold grip. Valentine felt himself growing even thicker in her hand, swelling with lust and need that never fully slept and woke easily to her lightest touch. If he was honest, it took less than that to rouse the slumbering beast inside him. The scent of her perfume, the sound of her skirts rustling when she moved, the sight of her.

The most innocent gesture she made aroused him, and when she deliberately inflamed him, running her tongue along her lower lip when she knew he was watching her, or stretching to display herself for him with her eyes full of mischief and daring, she was likely to find herself with her skirts tossed up and her legs spread at any hour of the day and in any opportune place.

"A great malady," Valentine agreed solemnly. "You torment me all day and then all night, waking me from a sound sleep because you must have more of me. I am never safe from your demands."

She let out a soft snort. "You were the one lunging about in this bed like a rutting beast. I was having the most wonderful dream." Her hand slipped up and down the length of him in a slow caress as she spoke.

"A better dream than this?" Valentine asked.

"Nothing is better than this."

She slid onto him, all satin skin and heat, thighs parting for him, lips reaching for his kiss. Hunger leapt like a flame and roared through him. The scent of her desire told him she was flushed and eager, her heartbeat increased, rich blood pulsing through her veins just beneath the surface of that delicate skin. His fangs lengthened as his cock throbbed, all of him ready to take all of her...

The doorbell rang again. More insistently this time.

He wanted to roar with rage as the phantom memory slipped away, the past shattered by the intrusion of the present.

Valentine was in a foul mood. This was nothing new. His mood had been black for decades, but it was worse today. On All Hallows' Eve his friend and partner, Romney, had gone to claim the woman he loved. Valentine knew the effort succeeded, because two pairs of footsteps had entered the top floor that served as the home of the software firm VR Inc. as well as the home of the owners in the last hour of the night, just ahead of the sunrise.

He had fallen into his daytime sleep with the reminder of what he had lost uppermost in his mind. He'd woken alone and frustrated. And now there was somebody at the door. A stranger.

The interruption was not welcome. He hungered and he wanted to feed, not play at being human to protect his cover. But it seemed he had no choice. His friend and partner was in love, something Valentine didn't begrudge Rom but also didn't particularly want to witness. Being all too

well acquainted with the distractions love presented, Val didn't expect Rom or his lady to stir so early in the evening. Which left him to answer the door.

He opened it with a snarl ready, that died in his throat when a woman came through the opening as if she expected to be welcome and nearly plowed into him.

"Meghan?" The stranger managed to stop short of collision and stared at him, hazel eyes gone wide in surprise. "Hello."

Val stared back at her for a long moment before he spoke. What he saw was impossible to the mind of the man he'd once been. And yet he'd spent every day since he'd heard the gypsy woman's prophecy hoping and praying for the impossible. Now here she stood before him. Today, on Samhain, the dead had returned. "Lisette."

"Lisa," she corrected.

He took a step forward, one hand moving up to touch her hair and then tuck a strand behind one ear. It was the same sable brown he remembered, the same silken texture. But the style, that was new. "You've cut your hair."

She gave him an odd look. "No, I always keep it short. It gets in the way enough as it is."

He shrugged. "Let it grow and I'll braid it for you." They'd both enjoyed that once. She'd sit between his legs at the end of the day to rest against his chest while he drew the brush through the curtain of her hair, massaging her scalp, then winding the length of her hair around his fist as one intimacy led to more.

The woman who now called herself Lisa snorted. "What is that, a pick-up line? I don't date Goths."

“You don’t like my clothes?” Val leaned towards her and gave her a heated look. “They come off.”

“I thought you said he didn’t like women,” he heard Meghan say from behind him.

“He doesn’t. He likes this one, though.” Rom answered. “This should be interesting.”

Val ignored them. He heeded only for the woman before him and he devoured her with his eyes. It had been so long and he was as hungry for the sight of her as he was for the sound of her voice and the clasp of her body.

“It’s rude to stare.” Lisa stepped around him and turned her attention to Romney’s woman. “Hi, Meghan. The movers won’t be here until the end of the week with your stuff, so I came to see if you needed anything else in the meantime.”

The redhead who was leaning into Romney laughed. “You mean you came to check out the reason for the move.”

“That, too.” Lisa grinned, not at all put out at being seen through.

“Well, meet Romney. And you’ve already met Valentine.”

Val watched as she greeted his friend, then turned back to him. “Valentine. Romney. Interesting names. Is that what VR Inc. stands for?”

“Yes,” Val answered. “We write custom software programs.”

“You’re programmers?” She blinked. “You don’t look like programmers.”

“What do we look like?” Val asked her, wondering how he looked to her now. He was not the man he had once been. More than years had changed him.

“Well.” She shrugged and spread her hands. “Most computer geeks don’t look like movie stars, for starters.”

She saw him as a movie star and not a monster. That was promising. Although Val knew how easily he could cloud her mind, make her see or not see anything he chose. He didn’t want to interfere with her perceptions. He wanted her to see him, to remember him.

“I don’t think these guys are typical,” Meghan said, and then drew Lisa into conversation, giving Valentine the opportunity to study her while her attention was focused elsewhere.

Different, and yet so very much the same. The energy in her movements, as if her body was too small a container for so much spirit. She had always been so, feet tapping even at rest, as if some part of her always heard a distant rhythm and wanted to dance to it. She had not been a peaceful bed partner. She had scooted and rolled and flopped and cuddled, waking him repeatedly. And once awake, Val had often given her another outlet for her need to move, moving in time with her to a rhythm they both knew well and that belonged only to the two of them.

He missed seeing her hair spread across his pillow when he freed it from her braid. He missed her voice saying his name. Missed the scent of her. Missed the light in her eyes and the smile that had always been just for him, like a secret they shared.

And now she was back. Almost within his grasp. But no longer his love or his wife. The need to cross that gulf, to touch her, to make her his again without and within roared inside him.

Val knew better than to act on impulse, to rush. He was too powerful, his need to great. He had to temper it with caution, control himself. If he overwhelmed her, she might pull so far away he could



never reach her again. This one chance he had been granted. There might not be another opportunity, another lifetime to win her in.

So he held himself in check, paid attention to the way she stood and moved and spoke and what that told him about the woman she had become. He let her leave even though the urge to stop her was almost more than he could withstand. He wasn't losing her. Their conversation told him Romney's woman knew where to find her and knew far more about her now than he did. So he would learn. And then he would pursue her and Lisette would again be his.

He had to believe she would be his again in time. Failure was unthinkable.

## **Chapter Two**

After she'd gone, Val followed Meghan into the kitchen. "Tell me how to win her."

Meghan poured a cup of the coffee she'd made for Lisa, took a sip, made a face and set it back on the counter. "Ugh. What's wrong with this stuff?"

Valentine inspected the contents of the cup. "You made it too strong."

"I made it the way I always make it." She frowned, perplexed.

How to tactfully remind her that she was no longer human? "Things have changed."

"That's the truth. This vampire gig is full of surprises." Meghan turned away from the coffee, leaning her hip into the cabinet as she considered him. "I take it you believe Lisa is the reincarnation of your dead wife. Rom told me you were looking for her. How did you win her the first time?"

He didn't simply believe, he knew it was true to the depths of his being. But Valentine let that pass and answered the question. "I was an aristocrat. She was the daughter of a neighbor of good family. I saw her. I wanted her. I told my father to arrange the marriage and then she was mine."

Meghan arched a brow at him. "Well, that was difficult. What about after the wedding?"

"She adored me." The memory swept over him and the dual emotions of love and loss tore him in two. "I showered her with jewelry and attention."

“And sex,” Meghan guessed.

“And sex,” Val agreed.

“What happened?”

“She became pregnant in the fifth year of our marriage.” Val gazed off into space, seeing the past and not the present. “I had duties at court. I went to attend to them and left her at home. That might sound neglectful but travel then was nothing like it is now. It was dangerous and grueling and I didn’t want her subjected to any ordeal in her condition. I wanted her safe and comfortable and surrounded by family and servants. I should have been home in plenty of time.”

“But?” Meghan prompted him, her tone soft.

“But something went wrong. The child came far too early and I lost them both.”

“It probably would have happened sooner if you’d taken her with you.”

“I know that.” Val’s hands tightened into fists and he forced them to relax, to open. “But I wasn’t with her. I should have been with her.”

“You didn’t get to say goodbye.”

“I didn’t want to say goodbye.” The old anger had never died and it rose up in him again. “I wanted her back. I still want her back. After I received word of her death, a gypsy woman came to me. She told me that my wife would be reborn, that love would return to me in the Emerald City.”

“So that’s why you’re in Seattle.”

“Yes, after it was established and I heard the name. It seemed like a likely place, and it didn’t have too many sunny days. So Romney and I came here.” Val shoved his hands into the front pockets of his jeans and

scowled at the floor. “I should have gone with him to all those concerts of yours. I would have seen her sooner.”

The knowledge that his Lisette was now Lisa Atkins of the Seattle-based band Meghan played bass for, The Sirens, and that she had been so close for the past several years made him want to drive his fist through a wall. She’d been just under his nose and he hadn’t looked in the right place. But how could he have guessed she’d become a drummer for a rock band? It suited her energy and her drive. He’d just never thought to look for her in the spotlight.

She’d won a place for herself in this time, earned fame and fortune, found friends. She was well and happy. But alone. He’d noted the flash of yearning in her eyes when she saw the way Meghan and Rom stood together, the bond between them nearly palpable. She had everything she could want or need, with one exception. She’d known love once. Somewhere inside her he had to believe the memory lingered. The woman he’d known would never have been content without a passion to match her own and a love worthy of her heart.

Meghan interrupted his thoughts. “And somewhere in there you decided to become a vampire so you wouldn’t die before you found her again.”

“I didn’t want to forget her.” Val paced around the kitchen, too restless to remain still as decades upon decades of need welled up. “She deserved to be remembered. What if I died and was reborn and let her slip away from me because I didn’t know her any longer? Worse, what if we never found each other again because I’d forgotten where to look? I met a vampire and I saw my opportunity. The same vampire who made Romney, as it happens.”

“So you guys did the undead male bonding thing and here you are.”

That did sum it up fairly well. Val waited for Meghan to tell him what he wanted to know as he paced the room.

“I haven’t known Lisa as long as I’ve known the rest of the band,” she said. “She joined us when our drummer retired and we held auditions. All of us knew she was the one. She has rhythm in her blood and bones and she meshed with us right away. There’s chemistry in a band, a mix of personalities and styles. It’s not all about being good enough and dedicated enough as a musician. If somebody clashes too much, there’s too much conflict and it gets in the way of work. If somebody blends in too thoroughly, they don’t add that extra dimension to the whole.”

Meghan picked up her abandoned cup of coffee again and took a wary sip, made another face. “Damn. This is going to take getting used to.” She gave Valentine a long look. “I have to ask you something. Five years of married life followed by a few hundred years of distance, how can you be sure you’re not romanticizing things? Maybe the past seems rosier than it actually was. You look at Lisa and you see the wife who loved you however many centuries ago and you want what you used to have. But what you used to have is gone and Lisa is human. You’re not.”

“I am aware of that.” Valentine let his next circuit around the kitchen bring him past Meghan. He plucked the cup out of her hand, dumped half the contents into the sink and refilled it with water before handing it back. “Try it now.”

She sipped cautiously, then smiled. “Hey. That’s better.”

Valentine nodded and continued on his way. “Were either of us perfect? No. Was our marriage perfect? No. Was it the best thing I’ve

experienced in my life and beyond? Yes. I know the value of what we had. I know that love is far too rare. And I know it's the only thing that makes the heartbeat of all the worlds go on."

"Well. That's poetic. And convincing." Meghan set the cup down again and started keeping pace with him. "You're making me dizzy so I'm going to walk with you. I don't really think you need any tips on modern courtship. Lisa can handle herself and she can decide how to handle you. I'll give you her address and phone number, not that you couldn't find out for yourself where she lives. If she wants to boff you in your coffin, who am I to object? For whatever it's worth, I'll wish you luck. But if you hurt her, I'll sharpen a stake with your name on it."

"Fair enough."

Valentine memorized the address and phone number, retrieved a box from his personal safe, and went out into the night. It wasn't too soon to begin. If any memory of the past slept deep within her mind or heart, he meant to wake it.

## Chapter Three

Lisa hummed under her breath while she rapped out a staccato beat with the handle of her hairbrush, temporarily distracted from the task of brushing by the complex rhythm she'd been practicing earlier that evening when Meghan called.

Lorelei's latest composition had a catchy beat and an even catchier melody with a rhythmic structure that challenged her abilities. Lisa wanted to run through it with Meghan on bass, just the two of them, but Meghan had moved in with her boyfriend. That would have to wait for the next scheduled practice session now.

She ran the brush through her hair in an indifferent stroke, thinking of Meghan's love life and the man who'd flirted so outrageously with her. Dressed in theatrical black with long hair streaked gold and amber and silver and those arresting blue eyes, he'd looked like a man who'd be more at home with rock musicians than programmers. Especially with that name.

"Valentine." Lisa said the name out loud and ran the bristles through her hair again. Then she let the brush clatter to the bathroom counter, impatient with herself. *Some guy who dresses like he's on his way to a Bauhaus tribute offers to braid your hair and you suddenly start fussing with it, imagining it longer. Imagining those hands winding through it, making intricate knots. Tugging at your scalp, making tingles run down your spine, and then fisting into the length of it to drag your mouth up to meet his...*

Time to shake off this mood and do something constructive. Her hair was fine. Her life was fine. Okay, so her friends kept getting hooked up and settling down into the kind of domestic bliss that was probably

illegal in certain southern states while she remained unattached, but that was her choice.

She was busy, that was all. She had a demanding career that required travel and crazy hours. Her schedule didn't leave her a lot of time to date. No big deal. Plenty of time to meet the right man and maybe explore this hair brushing fantasy a little. If she wanted her roots massaged or some erotic teasing with soft bristles in sensitive places, she could meet a guy who was into that.

Lisa found herself eyeing the brush speculatively and that's when she knew it was time to get out of the house again. Go somewhere, anywhere. Fast. Before she found herself on the internet searching for hairbrush fetish sites.

It was a good plan, but when she opened the door to find Valentine on the steps, it almost seemed inevitable.

"We have to stop meeting like this," she said.

"We could try naked," Valentine offered.

"Naked would be an improvement over that outfit, but I don't think so." Lisa stood there in the doorway, hand on the knob, hesitating between going forward or stepping back.

"Are you going to invite me in?"

"I haven't decided." Lisa studied his face for a minute, then looked down at the box in his hands. The shape, size and velvet exterior told her it contained jewelry. "What's that?"

"A present for you." He smiled at her and Lisa felt her breath catch at the way it transformed his face from forbidding to so sexy it should come with a warning label. "I'm pursuing you. A man pursuing a woman brings gifts. It's traditional."



“Pursuing me.” Lisa felt her fingers drumming on the door and forced herself to stop. “Why?”

“Because I want you.” He held up the box, shaking it gently. “Do you want this?”

“Yes.” Her mouth curved up in a smile of its own accord and she held her hand out. “I’m mercenary.”

“No, you’re not. But you like beautiful things.” Valentine placed the box in her hand and closed her fingers around it. His hand felt warm and the touch of his bare fingers against hers somehow felt more intimate than such innocent contact merited. “Will you invite me in now?”

“Not yet.” Lisa drew her hand away from his, bringing the box against her chest. “How did you get to the front door? There’s a gate.”

“Meghan.”

“Oh.” She found herself looking into his eyes, and then she couldn’t look away. Didn’t want to look away. She liked looking at him, liked the warmth she felt spreading through her body, liked the way everything around them faded into the distance. Her heartbeat seemed to reverberate, the rush of her own blood filling her ears.

“Open it.” His voice slid over her skin like a caress and Lisa found herself obeying. Her fingers were clumsy as she opened the box. The light caught the glow of pearls.

“Oh,” she said again. It was beautiful. And she wanted it. Lisa touched the strand once, then lifted it out of the box to admire the length.

Valentine took it from her and let the tips of his fingers play along the hollows of her collar bone. “Let me.”

She bent her head forward while he wound the pearl necklace once around her throat and let the rest fall to her waist.

“It’s very old, isn’t it?” Lisa heard herself ask.

“Yes. The clasp has been repaired and it’s been restrung. You won’t need to worry about it breaking.”

The necklace felt old. And something else. It felt as if it carried its history in the luster of the pearls, the memory of somebody who had worn them often against nothing but skin.

“Why did you give this to me?”

“Because it’s yours.” Valentine bent his head and brushed his lips across her forehead. “Don’t you think you should have it?”

Lisa closed her eyes and saw herself lying in a pool of ivory satin, wearing nothing but the necklace. A nice image, but her hair was too long. It reached her hips, and she’d always cut it when it started to brush the tops of her shoulders.

She opened her eyes and shook her head, trying to clear it. “Do I think I should accept jewelry from a strange man? No. Am I going to let you have it back? Again, no.”

She should, she knew that. But she wanted to keep it. Wanted to wear it.

“Will you ask me in now, Lisa?” The question was murmured against the curve of her cheek as he brushed another kiss there.

She didn’t know this man. Maybe Meghan did, maybe she trusted him, but Lisa had no reason to.

“Not yet.”

“Invite me into your dreams, then.” Valentine kissed the corner of her mouth, the tiniest contact, but it made her tremble.

“All right.” That was safe enough to agree to. Dreams weren’t real. “Consider yourself invited.”

“I do.” He straightened and looked down at her for a long minute. “Sleep well.” He touched the pearls at the base of her throat and then he was gone. Lisa blinked and rubbed at her eyes, trying to figure out how he’d moved so quickly or what trick of the light made it seem like the night swallowed him.

If she hadn’t still been holding the jeweler’s box and wearing the necklace, Lisa would have found it very easy to believe she was dreaming now. Maybe going out wasn’t such a good plan, after all. In fact, she felt so sleepy, it was hard to imagine why she’d wanted to leave. Time for a nap, she decided, and went back inside.

## **Chapter Four**

“I see you like your present.”

His voice made her shiver in pleasurable anticipation. The first time she'd met him, everything about him had seemed wicked. The look in his eyes, the little smile that played around the corners of his mouth, his sun-streaked hair. His voice.

She let her eyes open halfway and felt her mouth curve from happiness and a little wicked streak of her own. “I do. Do you like how it looks on me?”

She stretched, displaying herself and the necklace to advantage as she lay naked on their bed. The strand of pearls, worn without being looped, hung low enough to rest against her sex as she lay with one knee raised and one bent to the side.

“Beautiful.” His hand settled on her bare thigh and stroked up until his fingertips rested just short of her bared sex, almost but not quite touching her in that most intimate of places. “I should have you painted like this.”

“It would be a scandal.” But the idea thrilled her.

“You, my love, are a scandal.” He ran his finger over the pearl that laid against a sensitive bud of flesh between her legs, pressing it lightly into her.

“If I am, the fault lies with you for corrupting me. I was pure and innocent when I fell into your hands.” She let her other leg drop so that her thighs were splayed open for him.

“Ah. That explains why you couldn't wait to have your wicked way with me on our wedding night.” He rolled the pearl over her clitoris and then covered her sex with his hand.

“It is a wife’s duty.” She gave him a solemn look. “I would not give you cause to complain that I shirk my duties.”

“I’m fortunate to have so dutiful a wife.” He ground the heel of his hand into her swollen flesh and she gasped in pleasurable reaction. “I want to take you on your knees. Turn over for me.”

She laughed and did as he asked, rolling onto her knees. She looped the necklace around her throat in a triple strand that fell over her breasts and stretched upright, twisting to the side to show him. “Perhaps it would be better if I wore it like this?”

He used the strands to caress her nipples, rolling the pearls under his hands so that they massaged the sensitive skin of her breast, making the peaks swell into taut rosebuds. “I think you are a wicked wanton.”

His lips followed the arcs the looped pearls made over the curves of her breasts, tasted the valley between, and then drew her nipples into his mouth, sucking and laving them with his tongue by turns until she felt as wicked and wanton as he claimed she was, aching for him to take her.

“Valentine,” she whispered.

“Yes, my sweet?” He raised his head and pinched her nipples lightly. The stimulation made her sex clench between her legs. She was liquid and hot, swollen and needy.

“Take me. Take me now.”

He pushed her down onto her hands and knees and settled behind her. His hands shaped her buttocks, gave them a squeeze, then a sudden stinging slap, followed by a gentle caress. She felt more blood rush between her legs in response, her sex swelling further in readiness.

“You are wicked, but I know what to do with such a wicked creature. You will serve my cock until your thighs ache.”

She giggled at the sensual threat and then gasped as he thrust into her. “Valentine.”

“Mine.” His voice was a fierce growl behind her. “You are mine, only mine. Always and forever.”

“Yes.” She belonged to him. She knew it and admitted it readily. She was his, as he was hers.

Her body stretched to take him, enclosed him. He withdrew and then thrust back into her in hard, fierce strokes, sheathing himself so fully that the head of his cock probed the entrance of her womb. Then there were no words at all, only sighs and moans and gasps as sensation and emotion overwhelmed her and she shattered.

Lisa opened her eyes and sat upright on the couch where she’d curled up, too tired to go further, once she’d reentered the house. “What the hell?”

She looked down and saw the necklace still around her throat. Not triple looped, but looped just once around her throat. The way Valentine had put it on her. She wasn’t naked and she didn’t have company. But the dream had felt so vivid, so intense. So real. As if she’d been there, done that. With him.

She actually felt her sex throbbing in reaction to the dream, and knew she was going to have to change her underwear.

A wet dream. How adolescent. How ridiculous. She was too old to have some sort of teenage crush complete with fantasies. She was an adult. If she wanted to be with him, all she had to do was ask. He’d made it clear he was interested and available.

Clearly her body was interested and available, too. So why hadn’t she invited Valentine in? How long had it been since any man had

caught her eye? What was she waiting for? Not every man had to be *the* man. Maybe she'd fantasized they were married as a sort of moral dodge, making her unexpected attack of lust more acceptable. But that kind of thinking was as old-fashioned as the setting she'd imagined them in.

Except it hadn't been a purely sexual fantasy. She'd felt like there was a bond between them, a connection that went far beyond the physical. She'd felt happy. Secure. Loved. She'd felt confident and relaxed, as if she could trust Valentine with anything, and that level of trust had led to the freedom to enjoy the physical without any reservations.

For God's sake, she'd fantasized about him spanking her and it had been a turn-on. When had she ever experimented with anything like that? What man had she ever trusted enough to play kinky games with instead of sticking to basics? This man unlocked her fantasies, apparently, and not just the physical ones. It was the emotional component along with the sense of pure sexual freedom that made her wonder if she'd done the right thing in accepting the necklace.

Lisa toyed with it and leaned back into the couch cushions, debating with herself. Take it off and put it away? Give it back? Pretend she wasn't having these ideas about Valentine and hope they went away, or invite him in the next time he asked to see what it led to?

A buzzer rang, telling her somebody waited at the gate outside. The sound made her look at the clock. It was only 10:30, although it seemed later.

It wouldn't be him again, Lisa thought, although she wanted it to be Valentine with an irrational yearning. Probably just somebody looking for Paige, who'd gone to Port Townsend for a few days. It occurred to her that the four of them were going their separate ways and leaving the

house The Sirens shared on Queen Anne Hill one by one. First Lorelei, then Meghan. There was only Paige and herself left now.

The buzzer rang again. Lisa stood, one hand still playing with the pearls as absently as she'd brushed at her hair earlier, and went to the intercom to find out who was at the gate.

When Valentine answered her, "Yes?" with, "My favorite word. Does that mean I can come in?", Lisa leaned her forehead against the wall and closed her eyes.

A kaleidoscope of images filled her mind. Valentine wearing the strangest suit, holding her hand in a chapel made of stone while a man in robes chanted over them. Valentine sitting at the far end of a table from her that was ridiculously long and lit only by candles. Valentine leaning on one elbow in a great bed, patting the empty space beside him in wordless invitation. Valentine on her doorstep, asking her to invite him in.

She didn't know what any of it meant, but she wanted to find out. "Yes. Come in."

Lisa pressed the button that made the gate open and then went to open the front door.



## Chapter Five

“Did you know many people consider today the first day of the new year?” Valentine asked her when he crossed the threshold and joined her inside.

“No.”

“It’s true. November first, Samhain. An appropriate time for a new beginning.”

“Is that what this is?” Lisa asked. She met his eyes and felt everything else fall away again.

“This is what we make it.” He bent his head towards hers, slowly, giving her plenty of time to understand the movement would end in a kiss and to move away if she didn’t want it.

But she did want it, as fiercely and unexpectedly as she’d wanted the necklace as soon as she’d opened the box and seen it. She wanted his lips on hers, his body against hers, and then she wanted a lot more.

She leaned into him as his mouth settled over hers, raising her hands to rest against his chest. Not to keep space between them, but to reach out to him. His hands gripped her waist in a firm hold that was also surprisingly gentle, while he kissed her without any of the usual awkwardness that came with a first kiss.

It felt practiced, familiar. Their lips met and clung as if guided by the kind of intuition that comes with repetition. Lisa knew just which way to angle her head to invite a deeper kiss, how to turn into him as he drew her closer so that their bodies touched, then melded, in a movement almost like a dance she’d known once and forgotten.

Heat flared and spread through her limbs while jolts of electric awareness sizzled along her nerve endings. The pressure of his thighs

against hers, his hands on her waist, his mouth moving on hers felt so good, so right. Lisa gave a little hum of pleasure and curled her fingers into the soft black sweater he wore as if inviting him to come closer.

He answered the silent signal, guiding her by his hold on her waist and moving with her until she felt her back meet the wall, his body pressing hard into hers. She could feel his erection against her belly and the answering slickness between her thighs. Her sex clenched in anticipation. His tongue tangled with hers as she rocked her pelvis into his, wanting more.

Valentine broke the kiss and lifted his head. Dazed, Lisa opened her eyes and met his. “Why did you stop?”

“Because if we go much further, I might not be able to.” He flexed his hands on her waist but didn’t let go. “I want you, but I’m willing to wait longer for you if I have to.”

“Longer than a few hours after you first met me?” Lisa tried to smile and found she couldn’t, because that brought back the dream and the series of vivid images, all Valentine at different times. Which was impossible. Wasn’t it? She’d never seen him before tonight.

“I’ve waited longer than that.” His eyes burned into hers. “Remember.”

The word was a command, not just continuing the conversation. *Remember*. It reverberated in her mind, pushed into the farthest reaches of her memories and then further. It unlocked something inside her and emotions rushed out. Happiness, so much of it, so bright. Desire, hot and urgent. Love that made her heart ache with its intensity. Contentment. Security. Peace that broke into pain. Fear. And then cold and dark and endless separation.

Lisa collapsed into him and felt tears sliding down her cheeks.

“Lisette.” Valentine lifted her into his arms, cradled her, carried her to the couch and sat with her. He brushed the tears from her cheek with one hand. “I never meant to make you cry.”

“It doesn’t make sense.” She turned her face into his shoulder, burrowing into his strength, his warmth. “Those feelings. Those pictures in my head. I’d say it started when you gave me the necklace, but that isn’t true. It started when I saw you, the first time you spoke to me. What’s going on?”

“Past life regression.” Valentine hugged her closer.

“That’s ridiculous.”

“Is it?” He smoothed back her hair and murmured something in French. And without thinking, Lisa answered. The sound of her own voice shocked her. Those words coming from her mouth, in a language she didn’t know, were impossible.

“I should have known it would be a shock to you. I’m sorry. I didn’t think.” He stroked her hair, her back, comforting her. “I thought you’d remember love, happiness, laughter. I didn’t stop to think you’d remember how it ended, too.”

Lisa pulled back from the storm of emotions she didn’t understand, especially that last one, pushing it away. When she felt nothing but stillness and quiet, she asked, “How did it end?”

“I lost you.” Valentine’s voice broke and took Lisa’s heart with it in a wrenching pain she didn’t anticipate. Then he drew a deep breath and went on steadily, “I lost you, but it didn’t end there. I waited until I found you again. And here we are.”

“Where exactly is here?”

“Right now? This couch.” Valentine shifted under her as if testing the cushions. “Comfortable, but I don’t think I’d want to sleep here.”

“I did.” Lisa rubbed her cheek against his sweater. “I had a very interesting dream. Do you know anything about that?”

“You did invite me into your dreams.”

“That’s not exactly an answer.”

“Yes.” Valentine turned and stretched his legs out on the couch, putting his back to the arm, reclining them both with her resting on top of him. “I know what you dreamed after I told you to sleep. I gave you both the sleep and the dream.”

“That’s not possible.”

“Maybe not humanly possible,” he agreed.

Lisa considered the implications of that statement. Then she placed them against a few other bits and pieces and the puzzle took on a shape that made a sort of lunatic sense.

Past life regression could happen under hypnosis. A hypnotic command could cause a subject to fall asleep, and maybe somebody with other advanced mental abilities could even manipulate a dream. Say somebody who had been waiting around since this past life happened, still alive because that somebody wasn’t human but something else. Something with a much longer life span, that couldn’t enter a house without an invitation.

“Possible for a vampire,” she suggested.

“You always were quick.” Valentine wound his fingers through her hair, toying with the strands. “It didn’t take you long at all to figure that out.”

“I think I’ve just gotten used to dealing with impossible things.” Lisa closed her eyes and let herself enjoy being held, the softness of cashmere pillowing her cheek, Valentine cupping the back of her head in a gesture

that was possessive, protective and comforting all in one. “I heard the rumors about The Sirens and their psychic leader before I ever joined the band. When you live day in and day out with somebody who sees a bigger version of reality backed up by the fact that she always turns out to be right, you eventually just accept that there’s more to life than what you see.” She left unsaid, *And then there’s the Viking.*

“No wonder you and Meghan both accepted the idea that vampires exist so readily.”

“So Romney’s one, too,” Lisa stated. “I wasn’t sure.” It didn’t surprise her, though.

“Then memories of a past life can’t seem all that out of the question to you, can they?”

Lisa traced her hand over his chest, feeling the soft wool sweater overlying the hard planes of his muscles. “No, I guess having memories of living in a French castle sometime in the past doesn’t seem too hard to believe. Just tell me you weren’t a count, because that would be too absurd.”

Valentine laughed. “I won’t tell you, then.”

Lisa groaned. “It’s like a bad joke.” It lightened the moment, though, and helped put the more uncomfortable feelings into perspective. “Valentine.”

“Yes?”

“How do you know I’m the one you want?”

“Besides the fact that I remember it literally as if it was yesterday?” He shifted her to the side a little and tucked her closer against him. Their legs tangled together in a comfortable sprawl. “There’s a theory that souls are whole sometime before birth, and then they get split in half. The two halves are born and go looking for each other. When they find each other

again, they fit together in a way nothing else can. They become whole again.” His lips touched the hair at the top of her head. “You’re my other half. When I found you, I knew.”

“Even if I accept that all this is true, that was another lifetime. I was a different woman.”

“Not so different.” His body rocked into hers with sensual intent. “You’re still my other half. I recognize it even if you don’t.”

She did, though. She’d recognized him from the beginning, in a way. Starting with the odd mood and her obsession with the hairbrush that had distracted her from practicing when nothing ever distracted her. It was a wild explanation, but one that fit the facts.

Would it feel the same, here and now, to love him again? Had she ever really stopped? Or had she just forgotten on the surface while underneath she remembered, the way her hands remembered what staccato was and what to do with a snare and a high-hat without her brain having to direct them?

“Tell me something about who you are now.” Valentine’s voice rumbled deep in his chest, under her cheek. “Tell me how you became a rock star.”

That was safer ground than thinking about fate and love and whether she could trust either one. Lisa relaxed a little more in relief.

“The usual. I got a drum set as a teenager, and the sticks in my hands felt right. I loved it. I learned, I practiced, I played. After high school I went to Musicians Institute, PIT. Thought about being a studio musician and did a little of that work, but I wanted to perform. I wanted to be in a band. So, I kept playing, kept doing gigs, kept working. And then one day I got my lucky break. The Sirens audition. I was ready for it. I wanted it so much I could taste it. And the rest is history.”

“It suits you. I didn’t expect it, but it’s perfect for you.” Valentine’s voice was warm, full of pride. The tone as well as the words told her he approved of her choices and understood the effort it had taken to pursue a dream.

Until he said it, Lisa hadn’t even known she wanted his approval. The warm glow inside told her she did, that it meant something to her to know he was proud of what she’d made out of herself in this life. “Thank you.”

“I’m perfect for you, too.” His voice was full of teasing and seductive male confidence.

She couldn’t stop herself from smiling in response. “Are you? Maybe you should show me.”

## **Chapter Six**

“I’d be happy to,” Valentine said. “But not on this couch. However comfortable it may be, it’s no substitute for a bed.”

“Very true,” Lisa agreed. Her memories of the past might be hazy and incomplete but she was pretty sure the couch would never accommodate the kind of activity Valentine preferred.

He sat up, then stood with her cradled against his chest as if it wasn’t any more difficult than holding a cat. Stronger than human, Lisa realized. The differences in him weren’t limited to the hypnosis and mind tricks. “That’s kind of a turn-on,” she informed him. “Big, strong vampire carrying me off to have his inhuman way with me.”

“I think you’ll like my way.”

She thought so, too. The heat and awareness that flared from every point of contact with his body told her that the physical chemistry between them was off the scale. He’d seduced her with a kiss. With a look. He’d given her an erotic dream as foreplay, and it had been highly effective. Undead nookie obviously held some interesting possibilities if he could do things like that.

“That dream, that really was us then, wasn’t it?” Lisa asked as he followed her hand pointing the way.

“Yes. The first time I gave you the necklace.” Valentine made his way to her bed and lowered her onto it. “One of my favorite memories.” He followed her down to lay on top of her, pinning her beneath him.

“I can see why.” Her mouth was going dry and her body was turning liquid as she lay under him. He felt so warm, so good. His legs nudged hers apart and she shifted until his hips were cradled by her



pelvis and her open thighs. The weight of him was both a tease and a promise as he rested there. “You’re wearing too many clothes.”

“I can change that.” Valentine nipped at her lower lip, then stood and stripped to the waist.

Lisa watched him through half-lidded eyes, enjoying the play of indirect light from the hallway over his body. His muscles were well-defined from his broad shoulders to his sculpted abs. Her gaze dropped to his hands on the zipper of his jeans. Her breath caught as she waited for him to lower it and show her the rest.

He drew the zipper down, worked the jeans over his hips, kicked away his shoes and stood naked in front of her. “Better?”

*Oh, yeah.* Valentine was obviously ready for action, his fully engorged cock jutting towards her. She licked her lips and had a sudden urge to lick him like a lollipop. “Better,” she agreed. The word came out low and husky.

“Now you’re wearing too many clothes.”

He was right about that. She was too hot and her clothes were too tight, too constraining. She ripped her shirt off, then her pants, fought free of her bra and panties with impatient hands and flung them away. Lisa hesitated, then took the necklace off, too. She leaned over to lay the pearl strand on her bedside table where it probably wouldn’t get knocked off.

She felt the mattress dip as Valentine joined her on it a bare second before his hands closed over her waist and pulled her back against him. His chest made a support for her to lean against as they kneeled together on the bed, his hands moving from her waist up her ribcage to cup her breasts. They felt swollen, aching for his touch, her nipples forming two hard buds. Lisa let out a groan as he squeezed and

kneaded her soft flesh. Her head fell back against his shoulder and he nuzzled her neck as he tugged on her nipples, the joint stimulation making her sex clench.

One hand moved down to cup her sex and Lisa arched into his hold in a silent plea for more. His palm pressed into her, but not enough to provide relief or put pressure where she wanted it. While he toyed with her nipples with one hand, he squeezed between her legs, then stroked one finger along the length of her slick nether lips before finding the swollen bud of her clitoris. He circled it, then flicked at it while he nipped along the curve of her neck in a series of teasing bites. His teeth grazed the sensitive flesh that lay exposed to him, making her shudder. She could feel his cock, hard and warm, pressing into the cleft of her ass. She felt so much, and not nearly enough.

“Valentine,” she gasped out.

“Hmmm?” He plunged a finger into her and Lisa groaned again. “Did you want something, my sweet?”

She wanted something, all right. Her body was tight and ready and he was killing her by inches. Frustrated, she rocked into his hand, driving his finger deeper. He slid a second on in to join the first, then twisted them inside her, finding a hidden spot that made her gasp. “Valentine. Now.”

He let out a low laugh as he played with her, sliding his fingers in and out in a lazy rhythm that was far too slow. When he withdrew them, she wanted to scream in protest. Before she could, he pushed her down onto her hands and knees. She felt the head of his cock nudge against her sex. “Is this what you want?”

“Yes.” She pushed her hips back as he thrust forward, piercing her, filling her, until he was all the way in and she could feel the head of

his cock at her cervix. It felt almost unbearably good. She was so aroused that the pressure there, so deep inside her, made her vaginal muscles tremor in an involuntary tightening and she knew orgasm wasn't far off. "Fuck me."

"My pleasure." He held her hips in a firm grip and used the hold to brace her for his thrusts. He drove into her, hard, fast, deep. With each stroke the tremors continued, building until she teetered on the knife-edge of release. And then she went over the edge, taking him with her. The joint sensations of his cock throbbing and the hot, liquid jet of his orgasm as he came deep inside her pushed her farther, drawing out her pleasure. When they collapsed together on the bed, her sex was still quivering from the aftershocks.

When he withdrew, Lisa made a low sound of protest. "I wasn't finished with that."

"Good, because it's not finished with you." Valentine rolled onto his back and pulled her into his arms. "I have a lot of lost time to make up for."

"Lost time, my ass." She slid one leg over his and trailed a hand down his chest. "You've probably spent the last few centuries perfecting your technique."

"Are you offering your ass? How interesting." He palmed one bare cheek and gave an experimental squeeze. "I wouldn't say no."

Lisa thought of taking him that way and felt curiously interested. Then she thought of him taking her in the ass from behind while his fingers pleased her in front and felt a lot more than curious. His fingertip stroked her anus and the surprisingly pleasurable sensation clinched it. "We are so doing that later." Then she shook her head. "Did you sidetrack me on purpose?"

“Yes.” His fingertip probed at delicate tissue. “Is it working?”

“I’ll get back to you on that.” Lisa closed her eyes and wiggled to make herself more accessible as he did indecent things to her that made her body hum with delight. “It’s probably best if we don’t talk about it, anyway. I’m not sure I want to know how many women you’ve banged over the years.”

“None, since I met you.”

That made her eyes open wide. “Why?”

“You have to ask?” He pulled her up to lay on top of him, his arms hugging her close. “I wasn’t celibate before I met you. I know the difference between sex for the sake of sex, and sex that means more. Anything less would have been...less.”

“God, that’s romantic.” She felt herself turning to mush and knew that whatever lay ahead, whatever challenges a relationship between vampire and human entailed, and whether she ever shared all the memories of the past that were so clear to him, loving him was ingrained in her. Whether it was muscle memory or heart memory, she knew him on some deep level.

“This is for keeps, you know,” she told him.

“I didn’t intend to let you get away.” He kissed the top of her head. “How dark are the drapes in here?”

Oh. Right. Sunlight would be a concern. “Dark,” Lisa told him. “And I pull them over blinds. I don’t usually get to bed before 3:00 a.m. so I need the light blocked out.”

“Good.”

It was a long time after that before either of them spoke again.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Six months later...*

“I’ve been thinking,” Lisa said.

“Sounds dangerous. I know what kinds of ideas you get.” Valentine gave her a knowing smile as he tugged her down to sit between his thighs.

“Yes, and you give me most of them.” She sighed in pleasure as he began to brush her hair. Who knew something so mundane could feel so good?

“Tell me what you’ve been thinking this time.”

“That inter-species relationships aren’t really best for the long haul.”

The brush came to an abrupt halt. “Really.” Valentine’s voice sounded like it was made from ground glass.

“Yeah. I mean, you have the whole immortality thing going on, barring an accident with a stake or some holy water. And I’m mortal. I also travel a lot and you know how dangerous that is these days with maniacs hijacking airplanes.” Lisa twisted around to look at him. “So I decided this just isn’t going to work out. You’re going to have to make me into one of the undead, too.”

“I see.” Valentine studied her face for a minute. “You’ve really thought about this, haven’t you?”

“Yes.” She’d given it a lot of thought as time went on and she understood how vital Valentine was to her and how much she meant to him. She’d discussed the changes with Meghan. She knew what she was giving up and what she’d gain. “I know what I’m getting into and I’m not

going to regret it later. I'll tell you what I would regret; if some stupid accident ended this and left you alone again. You can't tell me you haven't thought about that."

"It has crossed my mind."

"So, give me Dracula's kiss and we'll live happily ever after." Lisa settled back against him and waited for him to resume brushing her hair. He did, with slow, sensual strokes that massaged her scalp and relaxed her completely. When he finished, he set the brush aside and adjusted her head to one side so that her bared neck lay like an invitation.

"Happily ever after. I like the sound of that."

Then he took what she'd offered and gave her an immortal kiss.

The End

*Night Rhythm*

## About the Author

Charlene Teglia decided she wanted to earn a living writing fiction at age twelve. After piling up enough written pages to sink Atlantis again, she sat down to write a novel and find out if it would sell. The first novel was so much fun that she got carried away and kept going, although it took another eight years to make her first novel sale.

In between, she worked for various software and technology companies. She left HP when she realized she wanted to write printer repair instructions in iambic pentameter. They thought she was so funny, they left her name plate on her cube after she left like a shrine. Or maybe it was as a warning to others. She lives in Washington with her husband and two daughters.

Her first Ellora's Cave title released in February of 05. Since then her books have garnered several honors: 2005 Romantic Times Reviewer's Choice Award for Best Erotic Novel, 2005 CAPA nomination for Best Erotic Anthology, two Love Romance's Reviewer's Choice Golden Rose Awards, two Fallen Angels Reviews Recommended Reads and she is a three-time recipient of the 5 Blue Ribbon Award from Romance Junkies.

Charlene writes for St. Martin's Press, Ellora's Cave, and Samhain Publishing.

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Yule Be Mine, Dec. 7 2006

*When death had her marked, he offered her rebirth...*

## Night Music

© 2006 Charlene Teglia

Meghan Davies has been living a dream as the bass player for the all-female hit rock band, The Sirens. But the dream becomes a nightmare with the discovery that cancer, undetected and now too far gone, heralds the end of everything.

Romney Kearns has been watching the sharp-tongued, flame haired woman from afar, wanting, but never approaching because he can offer her nothing but death.

When he discovers that death already has her marked, he sets out on All Hallow's Eve to seduce her, claim her, and make her willing to accept his dark offer. An alternative. Not life as she's known it, but a kind of rebirth. Eternity with him and immortality for her to make night music.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Night Music from Samhain Publishing.

"Rom." She shifted under him, restless, impatient. What was he waiting for?

"I love seeing you under me like this." He smiled at her. "I love the feel of your flesh under mine, your sweet, hot cunt taking my cock. I can feel you opening for me, so wet, so ready for me." Rom rocked into her, giving her another inch.

"Rom. I need you now." She arched up into him.

"Dying for it, are you?" He lowered his head to her neck, kissing the pulse point at her throat.

He had no idea. He couldn't have any idea, the words were coincidence. And she was dying for it, aching for him, on fire for him. "Fuck me."

"Oh, I will." Rom's voice was a dark promise in the night.

She felt his teeth scrape over her skin and then his mouth closed over hers again, hard, hot, taking her breath while he drove inside her and took her body. He was relentless, holding her down while he thrust his length into her again and again, forcing her to take the slow pace he set, not letting her shift to get more pressure where she wanted it, not letting her come.

The need built inside her until she would have screamed with it but his mouth devoured hers, allowing no sound escape.

*Now. Now*, she urged him with her mind, as if he could hear her. She needed more, needed it now.

Maybe he was psychic as well as a hypnotist because he changed his rhythm and began to slam into her, fast and furious, driving deep into her, taking her. She felt her inner muscles begin to pulse and then spasm in an orgasm that seemed to build and build, stretching out forever as he fucked her, peaking when she felt the burst of liquid heat as he spilled himself inside her.

Her heart felt like it was going to explode inside her chest, beating too hard, too fast, as she lay gasping under him.

Finally, she managed to say through bruised, swollen lips, “So you came to kill me with sex tonight.”

“No.” His lips moved over hers in a kiss as light as the brush of butterfly wings. “I just came to kill you.”