

"Marionette Meets the Vampire"

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She slipped into a supple leather skirt that just covered her hips and a turquoise chemise-style shirt. Tall silver heels graced her feet moments later. She pulled her dark hair up in sparkling chopsticks, letting the ends dangle in the back and pulling a few choice strands to frame her face. A knock sounded on her door and she quickly slipped onto her terrace balcony adjoining her room and dropped down to the street. There was no one in the house that would have let her out of the house in the outfit she was wearing without an argument. Arguments were the last thing she wanted to deal with at the moment.

"Marie!" The voice calling her nickname was one of her best friends.

"Hey, Sara," Marionette returned amiably. Her recent fight with her parents had nothing to do with her blonde friend.

"Ready to hit the clubs?" the blonde asked. Marionette nodded.

"Always," she added with a smile. They sped up to reach the clubs, fixing their make-up as they went: dark sangria lipstick and light turquoise eye-shadow for Marionette and a pale pink gloss and startlingly scarlet eye-shadow for Sara. The girls quickly reached Bourbon Street, the warehouse district, and noticed a guy walking a few steps behind.

"Sorry to bother you lovely ladies," he drawled just as they noticed him, his voice a smooth bass, "But I gathered that you're locals and I was wondering if you knew of any good clubs."

"Well, just about any door on this street leads to a good club," Sara answered. Marionette gave her a quick questioning look and turned back to the guy.

"You're welcome to join us if you wish," she offered, discreetly looking him over. His eyes likewise traveled quickly down her frame and back up to her eyes. Sara noticed the exchange and made her phone ring.

"Excuse me," she opened the phone, "That's my mom. Hello? Yes... I know... What happened?... Yes, I'm coming... Bye. Marie,

you don't mind if I leave, do you? One of mom's friends is in the hospital again and she wants me to come comfort her."

"Of course not," she replied with a smile, "Call me tomorrow with the news."

"Of course, sweetheart," Sara replied and hurried off in the other direction.

"In the hospital again?" The guy questioned. Marie nodded.

"Her friends are often there," Marionnette shrugged, brushing off the comment, "Mostly due to alcohol," she added in a low tone.

"I'm so sorry... Oh, forgive me for being so remiss in introducing myself. My name is Devlin Cornick."

"I'm Marionnette de Lancret," she replied as he took her hand and kissed it. He didn't let go as he lowered her hand from his lips, his eyes burning into hers. Marionnette blinked and gently tugged her hand from his. She turned back towards the street, still slightly confused and led the way into the nearest club.

Devlin her hand again and led her out to the dance floor. Marionnette fit perfectly in his arms as he spun in a quick waltz circle to get the timing of the music. Then he let his arms fall lower and sent her into a dip, circling her around to his other side. She smiled as he pulled her close again, swaying slightly before dropping her into a ragdoll. Her upper body fell backwards, head falling last and then rolled slowly back up to press against his. He suppressed the low groan forming in his throat and gently pushed her into a spin, catching and dipping her as she completed the turn. They danced for over an hour, stopping only because Marionnette stumbled in his embrace. Devlin led her to a table at the perimeter of the dance floor and settled her in a chair.

"Are you alright?" he asked, moving the other chair nearer to her.

"I'm fine, just a little tired. A drink would be lovely..." the last was obviously an unconsciously spoken thought, because she started to stand.

"I'll get you a drink, you just sit, precious. What do you normally have?"

"A pina colada," she answered truthfully, settling back into her seat. Devlin stood with a smile and made his way to the bar, quickly returning with a drink for both her and him.

"One pina colada for the beautiful lady," he said, placing the glass in front of her.

"Thank you," she replied with a smile. Devlin inclined his head in response, sinking into the empty chair. He took a sip of his drink, smiling as the warm liquid slid down his throat. Marionnette sipped at her drink, crossing her tired legs. Devlin's eyes were drawn to the motion and he placed a hand on her thigh. Marionnette blushed and looked down. His fingers found her chin, gently tilting her face back up.

"Don't hide your beautiful face," he chided softly, "It's a crime to deny such beauty to the world." The words were familiar, but she had no idea why she felt as though the words had been spoken to her before.

"As you wish," the words fell from her lips without thought. She had seen the movie, but meant it not in the same way. For some reason, though, she wished to please him, a virtual stranger.

"Good," he murmured, "You should finish your drink, my sweetheart." She raised her glass and finished the last of her drink, noticing his was already gone. A vague wonder of when he had even taken a drink floated through her brain, quickly forgotten as he took her hand and led her back out to the dance floor.

They continued the routine of dancing followed by drinks for several more hours, before Devlin insisted on taking her home. Marionnette had no logical arguments to dissuade him, so she led him to a random apartment building, leaving him at the building's door. She knew better than to show a virtual stranger her real address. After hiding in the hallway for a few minutes, to ascertain his departure, she made her way out the back and hurried back towards her house.

She felt as though someone was watching as she ran back home, unmindful of her expensive heels. She took shortcuts to get back home quicker, hurrying through people's yards to avoid going all the way to the corner to get onto the next street. The eerie feeling never left, until she let herself in the back door and slipped off her heels. The wood floors throughout the entire house would quickly betray her if she left the heels on, creaking beneath her every step. Marionnette made certain the locks were all closed and then hurried up the back stairs and into her room.

The doll she'd left to appear as though she was in bed had not been touched. Marionnette dragged it from her bed and secreted it back behind the false wall in her closet. Then she quickly divested herself and dropped into her bed. Devlin filled her thoughts as she fell asleep, but her last waking image was of another guy, one she knew better, who she rarely truly saw.