Chapter Two: The Vampire Danielle

The Sheriff of Narvaez County, Donna Parker-McCready, stood at her tile kitchen counter and looked into the blackness beyond the wide window. There were no blinds. Privacy was not a concern here. Her house was an enormous structure perched on tall stilts facing the Gulf of Mexico on its west, and on its east a tall gray wall that kept out intruders and blocked voyeurs. In the day, the kitchen window overlooked a carefully landscaped quasi-forest of mown grass and saplings in planters and, two hundred feet distant, the parking lot, done in river gravel with plastic edging retaining the stone. But her husband, Paul McCready had decided to light the parking lot with motion sensor lamps, so that at night it was as dark as one could still be in the light-polluted twenty-first century. Even with the kitchen illuminated only by the light in the oven hood, the window over the sink was a glossy blackness.

Donna was sipping wine, a cheap Chablis.

She was naked, as she always was at home, except for those occasions when they had guests who were not privy to her lifestyle. She could see her reflection in the window, and stared at it critically. She was, by all accounts, stunningly beautiful with an athletic body honed by a regular exercise program, enhanced sometimes when her husband ordered her to do pushups or to swim some laps. Her breasts were large, incongruous on such a body. Her eyes were crystal blue and she had naturally blonde hair that fell below her shoulders, as her husband wanted. She had creamy skin and a deep all over tan.

She wasn’t sure about her body sometimes. The attorney, Sharon Becker, and her boyfriend, Dave Leeper, would visit sometimes to relax in the nude and sip wine and hang around the enormous pool. Sharon was also a natural blonde, and curvy. Donna compared herself to Sharon and felt that maybe she, Donna, had too much muscle or was maybe too skinny. Such insecurity would be baffling to any man, who would find both women dizzyingly attractive.

Donna’s life so far had been a story of amazing fortuitous success. As a young girl she had formed a vision of the man that she must have, a strong potent man who would keep a firm hold over her. Her young life had been devoted to finding such a man, and she had gone from one affair to another looking for him. She had been friendly and cute and very good at her job as a deputy, and so had been loved by the men she knew, and the women took vicarious joy in Donna’s sexual adventures. Finally she had found Captain Paul McCready.

McCready was moody and distant, but he had the commanding presence Donna had been seeking. She had set her sights on him and finally, with the help of the old Sheriff, Tommy Watson, had been placed in McCready’s division.

On her first date with him, he had wordlessly compelled her to take off her clothes by simply staring at her with his fierce, hungry stare. He hadn’t hesitated to put her in handcuffs and give her the hottest sex she’d ever experienced. After that, in a darkened restaurant, Donna had explicitly offered to place herself and her body at his disposal.

For a long time, Paul had been amused by Donna’s kinks and cravings. She had developed a set of rules under which she would, in tribute to him, remain nude when they were at home together, and would remain in ritual poses, generally on her knees, when she was in his presence.

He had tolerated that, and sometimes played with her, making her do pushups, or tying her up. But one day, he had talked with her alone and told her that he was building a wall around their property. She would not be allowed to wear clothing while on the property (except when they had guests) and she would be in chains when they were home alone.

That had been one of the happiest days of her life.

So she stood in her kitchen sipping wine, wishing that Paul were home instead of off in Seattle. She craved the chains and the rough sex, and afterward lying exhausted in bed beside him.

She heard the puppies scurrying around, and went into the laundry room. Sure enough, they had spilled their water dish. She toweled it up and refilled the dish and returned to the kitchen automatically, her train of thought unbroken.

She should have been completely happy and satisfied, and she was. But she was thirty-one years old. Next would come thirty-two. The corroding winds of age were swirling around her. Soon there would be wrinkles, and gray hair. Her knees would give out, and her slave concubine lifestyle would go away. She tried not to think about it. I think too much. Enjoy the now.

The buzzer sounded. Someone was at the front gate.

There was an intercom mounted in the wall at the end of the long sink counter. She pressed the switch. “Who is it?” she asked.

“Danielle Travis,” came the reply. “I’m here to see Paul McCready.”

“Paul’s away right now,” Donna replied. “Is there anything I can help you with?”

A long silence, then: “I’m not sure. You’re the Sheriff, right?”

“Yes,” Donna said, amused.

“I think you might could help me, then.”

Donna sighed. She looked up at the wall clock. It was 9:15, and darker than…fill in the appropriate metaphor.

“Okay,” Donna said, “I’ll buzz you in. Park in the lot and take the sidewalk on your right. It’s dark as hell, but there are motion sensor lights, so the walk will light up as you go along.”

Donna couldn’t place the name “Danielle Travis,” and was simply curious. Besides, she was home alone and could use some company. So she opened the gate and watched as the female figure came striding up the walk.

Oops! thought Donna. If I can see her, she can see me. Donna scurried out of the kitchen and across the living room, to the stairway door where she kept her “emergency” bathrobe. On impulse, she stalked the sixty feet or so to the big wood panel that Paul had installed to enclose a large desk and office. She opened his desk drawer, found one of his guns, a Glock 17 in its holster, and stuck it in the pocket of her robe.

So, Donna was ready for anything when the dramatic doorbell chimed.

When she recognized Danielle Travis, it was a punch in her solar plexus. She gasped in terror and her heart began racing. Danielle smiled at her wide-eyed, open jawed fear.

“Come on, Donna, it’s just me. I won’t hurt you.”

Donna took a few deep breaths, calmed down, and motioned the vampire inside.

“What do you want here?” Donna asked, unafraid but heart still pounding.

“I’m a lawyer, you know,” Danielle told her. “I had litigation in Miami, and decided to do a little driving afterward. I thought maybe Paul McCready might help me find more work in this state. I’m a member of the Florida bar, you know.”

She stopped to appraise her surroundings. “Besides, since the incident with Arianne, I’ve been overcome with curiosity. You might almost say that I’m on a religious quest.”

“Wine?” Donna offered.

“Thank you, yes.”

Donna motioned her to sit, and she took a seat on the sofa.

Donna returned with a tray holding the bottle of wine and two glasses.

“The wine is dirt cheap,” she apologized. “But it does the job for me.”

“It will be fine,” Danielle assured her. “Nobody can really taste the difference. It’s all posing and snobbery.”

“So, a religious quest, you were saying?”

“Before we go further, Donna, I think it’s only fair to tell you that I’ve charmed you. I could see that you were terrified of me, and I know that you have moral objections to what I am and what I’ve done. So, I’ve put a little spell on you and now you find that you like me. Do you find that fair?”

Donna was still standing, wine glass in her right hand, the left arm across her chest, holding her robe closed against the weight of the gun. “I don’t know that it’s fair,” she said, “but I can’t do anything about it.”

Danielle smiled. “Realistic? I’m glad. So, let’s have a little talk. Just us girls.”

Donna regarded her with suspicion. “About what?”

“You’re nationally famous, you know,” Danielle said. “That syndicated story about the naked Sheriff was reprinted in San Francisco. I’m surprised that you can admit to being a nudist in someplace as backward as rural Florida.”

Donna shrugged. “There are a bunch of nudist camps right next door in Pasco County. It isn’t that radical. We’re just a husband and wife behind a ten foot wall, and a few close friends. Who could object? We’ll see if it makes a difference in the next election.”

“Was copping to it early a political move?”

“No. I was doing an interview and this reporter, Susan Muller, asked about the rumors. I confirmed them and I said, sure, I go naked for my husband. What’s the problem?”

“That’s brave,” Danielle said. She had drained the wineglass and set it down on the coffee table. Donna leaned forward to pick it up, and her robe fell open.

“Oops,” Donna said, “I didn’t mean to flash you like that.”

“It’s quite all right,” Danielle replied easily. “I got to see your tan. I wish I could get a tan.”

Donna, for the first time tonight, noticed Danielle’s extreme pallor. “What does happen when you’re caught out in the sun?”

“Sunburn,” Danielle said. “Extreme sunburn and peeling. It doesn’t last long, not like a human sunburn. We heal from injuries right away. But it’s painful and annoying at the time.”

“How about indoor lighting?”

“It doesn’t bother us.”

Donna refilled Danielle’s wine glass.

“You don’t have to wait on me,” Danielle told her. “I can pour my own wine. I didn’t come here to impose.”

“It’s a habit,” Donna said. “When Paul is home, I wait on him hand and foot. And on our guests, when we have any.”

Danielle regarded her. “Really? I took you for a modern, liberated woman.”

Donna giggled. “In the outside world, yes. At home, I’m Paul’s slave concubine.”

Danielle had a puzzled look.

“I’m turned on sexually by submissiveness,” Donna explained. “From the time I was a little girl. All my life I looked for that commanding man, that warlord, who could put me to use…order me around and control me the way I wanted. I almost thought that I’d missed out, and then I found Paul.”

“That’s surprising. You don’t seem to be that way in your public persona.”

“I am, though, in private,” Donna assured her. “Paul forbids me to wear clothes while I’m on the property, keeps me in chains in the evening, and doesn’t allow me to sit or use furniture when we’re alone. I kneel, knees spread and hands behind my back. I can’t conceal anything.”

“I wouldn’t have thought Paul was like that.”

“He wasn’t, at first. I introduced all that stuff and insisted on practicing it. Last fall, something changed his mind and he jumped right on it. I’m completely his prisoner when we’re home alone.”

“His familiar,” Danielle said.

“No, his slave concubine, his sex toy.”

“Tomato, tomahto.”

Donna shrugged. “Whatever. He’s what I need and he keeps me busy.”

Danielle took her meaning. “Sex?”

“Yes, several times a day.”

Danielle smiled tolerantly. “You mean you’re not exhausted?”

Donna laughed. “Oh, no. I’m a horny girl. I’m ready any time.”

“Maybe he charms you, too,” Danielle suggested.

“You could say that,” Donna laughed, but then caught her meaning. “Oh, no! Not that way. He’s not a vampire.”

“He has the blood of the most powerful vampire there is,” Danielle pointed out. “Charm is very basic. His success in business…from a police bureaucrat two years ago to millionaire CEO...well, let’s just say he’s got something going for him.”

“The McLaurys let him buy in to all their deals, now,” Donna objected.

“And they do that, why?”

Donna’s certainty began to crumble. “Even if he has the power, I would know. I could fight it.”

“Not really, Donna. Charm is subtle, and charm used for love would be powerfully addictive. If he uses charm, he really does own you.”

“No,” Donna insisted. “I don’t believe that.”

Suddenly, Donna noticed Danielle. The vampire was beautiful, even dressed as she was in a casual button shirt, shorts, and boat shoes. She had shapely, muscled legs and a face that seemed made of porcelain, framed in soft dark hair that reached her shoulders. Donna felt herself blush, as she realized that she found Danielle very attractive. She found her attention focused on Danielle’s breasts, they were of the size and shape people called “perky.” Donna found them tremendously alluring and was consumed by an almost overwhelming desire to take off Danielle’s shirt and get her mouth on one of those perky breasts. Then, the area between Danielle’s legs became mesmerizing. To pull those shorts down her legs, and get my tongue on…oh my God!

Danielle held out her hand and said, “Stay right there, Donna.”

Donna, her womb wet and hot with lust, was near to screaming in frustration. She slipped off the tiny bathrobe and there was a dull clunk as it hit the floor. Helpless, she let her hand slip to her groin, and began to massage herself, letting the edge of her hand rub against her clitoris with furious speed.

Suddenly the lust was gone, and she was standing naked in front of Danielle, hand on her crotch. The overwhelming humiliation brought her to tears, and she dropped to her knees.

“It’s just that easy,” Danielle said. “There is a little sex involved in every social transaction. I just leverage it. I simply have to spread out my charm and let it hum in your brain, and you find me likeable. Just slightly more intense and I can have you irresistibly, lustfully, drawn to me.”

Donna, indignant, bent down to pick up the bathrobe.

“Don’t bother,” Danielle said. “If your master wants you naked, you should stay that way. Show me around.”

Donna was still red with embarrassment but she found Danielle’s command irresistible. “What would you like to see?”

“Show me your chains,” Danielle said. “Show me what Paul McCready makes you wear.”

Donna nodded and padded to the closet, where she produced her chains from the cedar trunk. She demonstrated the waist chain with its threaded split link, and the complex wrist and ankle cuffs that needed special tools to lock and unlock. Finally she showed her the heavy steel collar.

Danielle held the collar in her hands. “This is quite nice. He had you measured and fitted for these, didn’t he?”

Donna gave a bitter laugh. “He spares no expense for his little blonde slave.”

“What else is in the box?”

“More chains. More devices.”

“Let’s look,” Danielle said. She effortlessly pulled the heavy trunk from the closet and opened it.

“Lots of lengths of chain,” Danielle noted. “Lots of those pretty round padlocks.” She moved some chain out of the way. “Spreader bars.” She rummaged some more. “Ooh, look at these!” She held up two curved steel shafts, one long and thick, and one smaller. “These look uncomfortable. Does he put them inside you often?”

“He never does,” Donna said. “But sometimes he bends me over like he’s going to. He likes to pretend scare me. He used to tell me that I was going to work in chains doing landscaping, but when spring came, he hired a landscaping company. I spent a couple of months expecting to be buck naked in chains doing hard labor.”

Danielle laughed. “What would you do if he did plug you up with these?”

“I’d put up with them as long as he wanted.”

“Wow, Donna, he really does have you under his thumb.”

“I love it, though. It’s what I’ve wanted ever since we first went out.”

“Does he beat you?”

“No. I’d like him to whip me. I bought him an expensive riding crop for Christmas. He gave me half a dozen light swats on the ass but he’s never used it on me again.”

Danielle was delighted by that. “He won’t beat you?” she said with a laugh. “The bastard!”

“In my fantasies, he beats me until my body is covered with welts and I’m screaming in pain.”

“Some fantasies are best left unfulfilled,” Danielle observed.

“I fantasize about being kept in a cage, too. Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve longed for it. Kept naked in chains, whipped, displayed in a cage. So far, I’ve got one out of three.”

“I’ve spent time naked in a cage,” Danielle said. “It’s uncomfortable, boring, filthy, and terrifying. You don’t want that.”

“Maybe for a couple of days?” Donna persisted, chastened.

Danielle said nothing.

“What else would you like to see?”

“What’s upstairs?”

“Bedrooms.”

“Show me.”

Donna started toward the stairs.

“What’s wrong with the elevator?” Danielle asked.

“I’m not allowed to use it. The slave thing, you know.”

“Of course,” Danielle said, and followed her up the steps.

“Damn!” Danielle exclaimed when she saw the master bedroom, which took up the entire third floor, “You could house half a dozen San Francisco lawyers in this space.”

Donna was alert. “That’s where you live? San Francisco?”

“Yes,” said Danielle, an edge to her voice. “I live and work in San Francisco and my real name is Travis. I’m not your enemy, Donna. I’m just curious, that’s all.”

“But you’ve charmed me, so I can’t fight your orders.”

“I’m not the one who keeps you in chains, Donna. I’m just keeping things pleasant between us.”

“Pleasant!” Donna grumped.

Danielle smiled. Then she saw it. “Ohmigod, there it is!” She walked over to where Donna’s antique chess set was displayed on a small table.

“What?” Donna asked, lagging behind.

“I am the beauty who lives to be ravaged,” Danielle quoted, “the slave who owns her master,” Danielle quoted.

“What are you talking about?” Donna demanded.

“I am anthropomorphic Death,” Danielle continued, “and I feel like playing a game of chess.”

Donna was silent, puzzled.

“A dream, of Michael’s,” Danielle explained. “He dreamed about you before he ever saw you, you know. You were always naked, your pubis shaved…like it really is. You told him that you were anthropomorphic death…He described your chess set. Here it is. Here I am with you, and you are naked, just like he saw. And you’re living as a slave – the slave who owns her master.”

“What do you think the significance is?” Donna asked. “It was a dream.”

“Michael and your husband think that some objects that exist in the real world are symbols, and also exist in the Miasma.”

Donna sighed. “What else in the dream was real?”

“He said that the dream took place on a huge marble surrounded by a carved stone balustrade, and you were at an immense height. Ohmigod!”

“What?” Donna asked, growing impatient with this crazy vampire woman, charm or no charm.

“Your house, Donna. Your house is a great height…it’s three stories tall and up on stilts besides. Your house…this bedroom…is that stone island in the air in the Miasma.”

“Maybe,” Donna allowed, not believing it.

“Let’s look outside,” Danielle said eagerly, pulling Donna to the big glass doors. They went out onto the deck and looked out over the black ocean. There were no lights on the water, and it was a view into an infinite darkness, lit only by the tiny pinprick stars.

Donna stood, nervously shifting her weight from one leg to the other, scratching the scars on her arm which had started itching.

“The owl on the dresser,” Danielle asked. “Does that have any significance?”

Donna turned her face away from the sea and looked back into the room. “The owl is an aspect of Antala, the Mother Goddess,” Donna said. “The ceramic piece is an altar. I kneel there to pray to the Goddess, my mother. I write my prayer on a slip of paper, and burn it with the incense.”

“I want to understand it,” Danielle said. “I want to understand it all.”