Music filled the club, pumping, pulsing, as bodies on the dance floor writhed like snakes in a basket. Alcohol flowed from the bar to cups to flat, undulating stomachs to curly, teased-up heads. Juliet, one sardine in the beating, wriggling can, felt immersed in the smell of male sweat, cologne, and alcohol. Adrenaline pumped hot through her veins; her short, loose red dress clung to her skin, damp from the exertion of the dance. Strong hands grabbed her shoulders, her hips, her hands, then let go, as she moved through the crowd from partner to partner, challenging each to keep up with her.

Juliet came face to face with a man near the edge of the crowd. He wore leather shoes with gold buckles, a suit with faint blue pin-stripes, and a robin’s egg blue shirt to match. He had a thick head of blonde hair, long enough to get a hand through, and textured, like it would have curled into Shirley Temple ringlets if allowed to grow long enough. When Juliet moved in close and fell in sync with him, she glanced up to see his blue eyes watching her brown ones, an unusual move. Usually, her ass got checked out before her eyes.

The sapphire-eyed man kept Juliet’s attention longer than anyone else had that evening. He held her waist and her eyes, and kept in step, twisting and turning her until he was her only ground in the dim, pulsating room. Time was lost in their physical and kinetic connection, until Juliet suddenly noticed the pounding in her feet. The punishingly-high heels pinched her toes, and the balls of her feet were on fire. She felt a tug on her arm, a tug that pulled her from the throbbing mob and brought her to a barstool. With a sigh of relief, Juliet pulled herself up and felt the pressure dissipate.

“I’m Juliet,” she said simply, pulling her long brown curls off her neck and over her shoulder, the breeze from the air conditioning cooling her hot skin.

He chuckled a bit, standing close beside her seat since all the others were full. He laid his hand over hers on the bar. “If I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand, to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.”

“What’ll you have?” the bartender interrupted.

“The rest of the sonnet, please!”
Juliet laughed aloud, looking between Sapphire and the bartender, then pointed jokingly at the intruder. “On the rocks.”

“Sonnet on the rocks coming up,” the bartender replied playing along.

“So, what can I call you besides just ‘Romeo’?” Juliet asked, turning back to her poetic partner.

Sapphire laughed. “‘What’s in a name? That which we call a rose—’”

“Touche,” Juliet interrupted, waving a halting hand, her laughter loud enough to impede her hearing the poetry anyhow. “You’re not a bad dancer, Romeo. I’m an instructor, and I own my own studio. You should come by and dance with me sometime.”

He nodded in response, and both of their gazes returned to the dance floor for a moment, drawn by the electric ferocity and pumping blood of the dancers there.

“Dancing, the connection between two bodies and two souls... It’s the only time I feel alive,” he said, his eyes fixed on the crowd, who, between the alcohol and the music, had let go of the world and become one massive, primal mob. Juliet watched his profile intently, a magnetic pulse pulling her heart to him. She felt the same way about dance, as though he had plucked the words from her mind and the emotion from her gut. Sapphire Romeo leaned in, whispering in Juliet’s ear. “Why don’t you take me to that studio now? You can take those shoes off, and we can dance until daylight. We can be alive together.”

A drink sat untouched on the bar as Romeo swept Juliet off her seat. The pain in her feet seemed miles away as the pair passed the burly men with shaved heads and t-shirts printed with “SECURITY.” The cooled Arizona desert air brushed across Juliet’s skin as they crossed the door’s threshold into the open night. The moon was out of sight. The blinking lights from inside the club and the stars above were all that lit the path as they walked, and it seemed a fog had passed over the darkened, empty street.

Juliet became aware of hands on her hips, and breath, cold breath, on her ear. Her eyelids grew heavy. A kiss was placed on her neck. Then pain. Like the pain of a shark attack in a dream, tearing flesh and creating terror, but without vivid realism.

Juliet’s numb hands gripped at pinstriped fabric, pulling, tearing, rejecting, but her fingers refused to work, like she was wearing potholders. She felt herself falling, and the darkened glass window of a closed insurance agency caught her as she lost her balance and stumbled backward. Detail returned to Juliet’s vision as she shook off the strange hypnosis that had seized her mind. The street was no longer foggy, and Romeo was kneeling on the pavement several yards away. His blue eyes were trained on her, as though suddenly she had become the shark in his dream. Black-red dripped from his lips, and liquid cascaded down Juliet’s collarbone.

“Did you bite me?” Juliet asked, still reeling in confusion. “Who bites people?”

“What are you?” Romeo asked, getting back on his feet. His eyes narrowed warily, and he didn’t move closer.

“What am I?” Juliet returned, her voice
escalating to a shout. “Who picks up a girl while wearing gold-buckled dancing shoes, takes her outside, bites her, and then looks at her like she’s the freak?” Juliet pressed her hand against the wound on her throat. It was bleeding profusely, but the pain was dulled by the adrenaline pumping through her veins, fueled by anger, indignation, and the fact that her dry cleaning bill for this dress was going to be Everest high. “Who do you think you are? Edward Cullen?”

Romeo bared his fangs like an angry dog, as though Juliet had just insulted his manhood. He lunged, and Juliet ducked to the side, her dancer’s feet catching her before she could fall. She shoved her sharp stiletto into the vampire’s side, and pushed him back and away from her. Her kick held more force than she expected, for Sapphire fell hard enough against the Insurance Agency’s window to break it. Juliet’s eyes darted toward the street. She considered running for it while he struggled to get back on his feet, but her heart beat quickly, and the blood running down her neck infuriated her. She wanted his blood too.

Juliet’s shoes clicked against the pavement loudly in contrast to the night’s silence. Sapphire shifted inside the building, filling the air with the chimes of broken glass on hard ground. Suddenly, he was standing again, his suit ripped from the shards, and blood, both his and hers, staining the pale white of his face. He snarled, teeth bared once more.

“Oh, I am going to enjoy eating you,” the vampire said, his voice silky quiet and calm despite his gruesome appearance.

“Eat this!” Juliet replied, reaching the short distance between them. She felt him tug back against her grip, but she held on to his shoulders like they were the ledge upon which she dangled for her life. Juliet gave a primal shout and shoved Sapphire downward against the remnants of sharp glass that jutted out from the bottom of the window, severing his neck from his body. Killing, she thought as his head rolled onto the pavement, was not so different from dancing. They had already built a dance partner’s trust on the club floor, and this altercation, the fighting, the aggression, was not so unlike the physical and sexual connection they had shared earlier. Suddenly, the firm, muscular male form burst, and ash fell down around Juliet.

Silence returned so swiftly it felt as though Juliet had been alone all along. She coughed as the ash drifted down on her face and over her shoulders, catching on her dress. “Oh, ugh,” Juliet exclaimed, trying desperately to comb the ash and glass from her hair with her fingers. She spat, trying to get the taste from her mouth. “Oh, gross. My mouth was open!”

She touched her neck again. It was still sore, though the bloody river that ran down toward her cleavage had slowed significantly. When she looked up again to survey the damage, the broken glass, the blood, and the ash, another dark form caught Juliet’s eye.

The man stepped forward from the dark shadows cast by the dumpster. He wore a long black trench coat and a scowl. The moonlight revealed a scar that made its way across his
cheek...

"What the hell do you want?" Juliet demanded.

"I thought I would have to save you." He lifted a hand that had been out of view, his fingers gripping a machete the length of Juliet's whole arm. "But you handled it beautifully. We have been expecting you to come into yourself for a while—but I can see now that you're awake. You are Chosen, one of us, one who can kill the undead."

A bit of ash from the vampire's dead body tickled Juliet's nose. Juliet brushed it away as she broke his gaze. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said. The words she had intended to be a rejection came out rather as an invitation. The strangeness of the whole incident had her heart racing, a feeling of exhilaration she did not want to let go. She dropped her hand from her throat, the pain having ceased, and her jaw dropped. The wound was gone. The evidence that it had existed, the blood stained dress, her hand caked in her own blood, was still there, but her neck was as smooth as though it had never been touched. She looked up at the man, a smile spreading across her face. "Tell me more."