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DARK ANGEL

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Cover art by Stephanie Vaughan

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“Stop telling me I am not human.”

“Daniel,” Jayden admonished, “Don’t be angry.”

“Get away from me.” Daniel held up his hand to halt Jayden’s words. He couldn’t stand the sight of him, his pale skin, his searing eyes.

Feeling a gust of air, Daniel looked around the cobbled streets of Cambridge. He was alone.

As he walked, head down, hands knotted behind his back, he gazed at his leather buckle shoes and smelled horse dung rotting in the damp. Gaslights did little to beat back the gloomy night, but Daniel Wolf knew the darkness was coming from within him, not without.

He was hungry. He was always hungry.

Even as a boy, before the change, Daniel never felt full. The orphanage was overcrowded, and he wasn’t the biggest boy. That meant getting mean for your bowl of gruel. Daniel had never considered himself mean, until now.

His heels scraped the shining, wet lane echoing like a drum in his ears. He couldn’t get use to the intensity of noise, scent, sight, it was overwhelming. *No, Master, it’s not intriguing, it’s horrifying.*

It’d been a year but it felt like a minute.

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All he had to know, his master had taught him. Daniel didn't need anyone to mentor him. He'd had enough of people attempting to 'guide' him.

When he didn't perform up to standard, he was beaten. Pulled from the orphanage to the church, Daniel became an altar boy but even the sight of the Holy God on a cross did nothing to inspire him. He was lost and empty, before and after the 'change'.

And now? An eternity of this? This shallow existence of solitude and hell?

Daniel caught mocking laughter in the wind.

He moved to stand outside a pub and looked in. Tankards were elevated as men toasted each other in the candlelight. Hunger got the best of him. He entered the pub.

The fire in the hearth was the first overpowering smell to smack him. After that it was unwashed Englishmen. Though serving girls gave him a flirtatious eye, Daniel wanted men.

That was something that did not 'change' when he changed.

Scanning the occupants quickly, Daniel looked for the prettiest of the group. Even in Cambridge with its pristine schools and cathedral, men of every class were drawn to ale.

One caught his eye.

One always did.

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Standing behind the man, Daniel filled his nostrils with his scent.

The man turned around and jumped in fright at seeing Daniel so close. "Sorry, mate." He steadied his sloshing beer.

"No apology needed." Daniel guessed the man was twenty, and judging by his clothing, going to university. He was also drunk.

"I'll step back from the bar so you can get a pint."

Daniel almost told him it wasn't necessary, but that wouldn't make sense. As the handsome young man moved to get out of the way, Daniel made sure they brushed up against each other. On contact the young man met Daniel's eyes with a more intense gaze.

The veins began to pull in Daniel's body. His cock hardened in his britches. He had no time for courting or romance. He thought he was incapable of love and never hoped to aspire to it.

Unloved boys became men unable to give love.

"I didn't come here for a drink."

"Oh?"

"I came here for you."

"Me?" The young man pointed to his chest. "Do I know you?"

"No. And you'll never know me."

"What?" The man appeared confused.

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“I’m looking for some assistance. Outside.” Daniel’s demand was growing to the point where he was about to kill where he was.

“All right.” The man finished his drink and set down the empty vessel. He nodded as if to follow Daniel.

As Daniel made his way out, he muttered, “Too easy.”

The chilly air made the man’s exhaled breath a puff of smoke. “What can I do for you?” He closed his coat around his chest.

Daniel gripped the man by the nape of his neck and drew him near. Hands pushed at Daniel’s chest as the man resisted. “Oy? What’s the bloody idea?”

Drawing back the man’s collar, Daniel lunged for him. He sank his teeth into the man’s neck and immediately tasted blood.

The man began to moan in pleasure.

Yes, my lovely, I know what my bite can do to a man.

He glided, while the man was connected to his mouth, to a hidden alley alongside the tavern. In the pitch darkness Daniel was able to savor his meal. The man fumbled to open Daniel’s britches. It only made Daniel laugh. Sex. This is why I prefer men. *What a delight to watch them attempting to sate their dicks whilst they are dying.*

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The man closed his eyes and grunted. Daniel knew he had come in his pants. He always knew, he could smell their semen. Now he had a choice. Life or death?

There is no choice.

The man slid downward. His heart stopped.

With heat boiling in his limbs, Daniel released his bite and licked his lips. The satisfaction was mutual. He tossed the body over his shoulder and carried it to the Cam, dumping it into the river.

Sniffing the air, Daniel spun around to see Jayden. “Go away.”

“A colder killer I have never met.”

“What do you want from me?”

“Why Blake chose you is beyond me.”

“Me as well. You must ask him why he makes dreadful choices.” Daniel walked across the wet grass, away from the river bank. “Why do you not leave me alone?”

“One day you will come back here. You will need something and you will come here.”

“No. Stop haunting me.” Daniel didn’t want to look at Jayden. In him he only found a reflection of himself and it sickened him.

“Why don’t you find one of those pretty boys and make him your companion?”

“I need no one. And I don’t need you.”

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“Man cannot live by blood alone.”

Jayden’s voice echoed in the cold emptiness.

Daniel was drawn to the cemetery. Planting himself down below a stone carving of an angel of mercy, he waited for the dawn. His life was meaningless.

If it didn’t cause him unbearable pain, Daniel would force himself to disintegrate in the sun. But he couldn’t.

As the wee hours of morning approached and the clouds coated the horizon, Daniel entered a tomb and slept.

Four hundred years was too long to roam the earth.

Continent hopping had lost its thrill. Or did it ever bring excitement to him? No.

Crouching beside his latest kill, Daniel scrubbed at his eyes in weariness. An endless series of hollow days turning to years turning to centuries. He was tired.

In the modern world Daniel didn’t bother to clean up his mess. New York City’s alleyways were the perfect dumping ground. Street people died all the time and no one took notice.

Walking through the crowded avenues, Daniel caught whiffs of cologne, perfume, exhaled alcohol, tobacco, and an odd occasional scent of fruity berries he never could place.

A line of well-dressed men caught his eye.

What's this?

It was as if someone had laid a menu before him of handsome males. Booming noise, rhythmic drums and bass, vibrated the very bricks of the building. A man was attending a rope at the entrance, collecting money.

Daniel slipped inside unseen. Young men were dancing in elevated cages wearing only enough to cover their crotches.

Closing his eyes, Daniel inhaled deeply, filling himself with the aroma of men. The madness of flashing lights and gyrating bodies astounded him. In all his four hundred and fifty three years he had not witnessed this.

Daniel maneuvered effortlessly between the dancing hoard of men. He positioned himself behind a muscular, shirtless god and licked his sweaty skin. The man glanced at him and gave him a sexy smile.

No. I must be asleep. This cannot be real.

But Daniel did not dream when he slept.

His usual method of choosing the prettiest boy suddenly yielded too many choices.

He allowed his hungry leer to sweep over the naked dancing boys, to the flesh undulating on the wooden floor, around the perimeter where men as pretty as models relaxed, drinking alcohol.

Instantly aroused, Daniel took his time as he hunted. So many to enjoy...so much time to enjoy them.

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To his surprise, someone bumped him.

“Hey.”

“Hey.” Daniel didn’t know why something you fed cows was considered a greeting. He had stopped trying to understand humans in the fourteenth century.

“You’re amazing.”

“Am I?” Daniel couldn’t believe the simplicity. Here, men wanted him.

“Yeah.”

The man glanced down at Daniel’s slacks.

“Yes. I am hard.” Daniel assumed that was what he was looking for.

“Want to go to the men’s room?”

Confused at the query, Daniel said, “No. Come with me.” He tucked the young man against him and in a blink they were outside, in a dark alley.

The young man gasped and appeared breathless. “What the hell?”

Daniel didn’t care for small talk. He dove on the man, pinned him against the wall and drained him. As the man slumped to the street, Daniel wiped his chin and felt nothing. His emotions were a vacuum and he wished he could stop searching for the missing puzzle piece.

“Daniel.”

Daniel spun around in surprise. No one knew his name but two vampires. “Who are you?”

“Come here.”

Approaching the dark skinned, heavy set woman, Daniel asked, “How do you know my name?”

“Daniel Wolf. I know your name.”

Shocked, Daniel gave this woman another inspection. Her clothing was bright and colorful, her hair covered by a fiery pink cloth. “What are you?” He could not get a scent from her.

“You will find it here.”

“Find what here?” As he approached he found she was not standing, merely hovering.

“Hart.”

“Heart?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t understand. You say I will find a heart here?” Daniel gestured to the corpse. “Haven’t I?”

“Daniel,” she said, shaking her head like a disapproving mother. “He is here.”

“Who is here?” Daniel drew closer and the woman appeared to float back.

“Hart.”

“I do not understand. What heart?”

“Brock Hart. The person you seek.”

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“I seek no one.”

She smiled. “Don’t you?”

“Do you mean for my next meal?” Daniel grew furious.

“You have waited a long time to find him.”

“Who are you?” Daniel tried to catch her but came up empty handed.

“Everyone needs a guardian angel, Daniel.”

He roared with laughter at the absurdity. “My angel?”

“Yes, Daniel. And you will become Brock’s.”

“I will feed on this man called Brock Hart.” He snarled and showed his teeth.

“You may.” She smiled knowingly.

Creeping up slowly, Daniel tried to close in on her, to catch a scent to figure out what she was. “Why are you here?”

“Because it is time.”

“Time for what?” He wanted to catch her and kill her.

“Time for you.”

A noise made him spin to the front of the alley. When he turned back, she was gone.

Daniel rubbed his eyes and searched the alley for her. Nothing. Not a trace.

Seeing the corpse, Daniel picked it up and buried it under crates in a dumpster, walking back to the front of the club.

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The line still snaked around the corner. Men.

Brock Hart?

How will I find one man among hundreds? And why do I want to find this one?

Too preoccupied to continue the hunt, Daniel joined the evening strollers and merry-makers in mid-town Manhattan.

Though they were of every color and size, Daniel paid them no heed. He was preoccupied with the apparition and its message.

Slouched against a headstone in New York City's Marble Cemetery, Daniel had avoided deep thinking for ages. It did him no good. What good were thoughts when you had no one to share them with? What good were they when they frustrated you? Angered you? And gave you no reward?

But tonight he had to think.

Guardian Angel? Blake didn't tell me about an angel. How could a creature as evil as I am have someone watching over them? No. I hallucinated because I am hungry.

Daniel paused. *No. I have just fed.*

He rested his head against the marble behind him, staring at the black sky through the trees and tall buildings. Barely a star was visible from the island's ambient glow.

And now I am to assume a human will somehow complete me? No. I have met...

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Daniel corrected himself. He had *devoured*, not met, hundreds of men. How could one change who he was?

“Even as a human I had no one.” Daniel inhaled deeply. The scent of a rat made its way to his nose. “She can’t be right. How could a man do anything to change who I am now?”

The next night Daniel returned to the club.

His curiosity drove him back, that, and the easy prey.

Behind the bouncer’s back, Daniel crept in and was instantly surrounded with men’s aroma. Intoxicating.

He lurked in the corners, listening to each conversation, quiet, judging their appeal and their sexual prowess.

From across a room he heard the name. Brock.

“No!” Daniel’s pulse quickened like it hadn’t in centuries. He is here?

He searched for the source of that name. Someone said that man’s name.

A tall blond man was laughing, leaning against the bar. He was the one who said the name.

Immediately Daniel inspected this man’s companion. Daniel instantly knew Brock was a sexual predator of men, like he was. Though Brock was not a killer, he was indeed a wolf among sheep.

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So, we have that in common.

Daniel watched every move this man made. Put simply, Brock Hart was a prince of men. His looks and charm radiated out of his body as if he were on fire.

You are indeed spectacular.

But what will I do with you but play? I need no one.

Do I?

Daniel caught Brock's eye. The sexual aura surrounding him was intense. And Brock was looking at *him* as if he were the snack! What on earth?

Brock set his drink behind him and began making a straight line through the dancing bodies towards him.

Look at you! Stalking me? Daniel couldn't be more amused.

"I am not that easy." Daniel moved to another spot. "Come get me, Hart."

Watching Brock scan the crowd was exciting Daniel to a new pique. Indeed, Brock Hart was not your average male. Something powerful emanated from him. And Daniel knew it was pure sexual demand. "You are a man-eater." Daniel laughed. "Like me."

How badly do you want me, man-eater? Daniel exited the club and leaned against a sooty wall in the drizzle.

Brock emerged.

Daniel was so hot for him, he wondered if he ever felt like this before. No. Never. Who is this man?

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When Brock stood before Daniel, Daniel caught the scent of sex on him. This man-eater had already had an encounter. That made him even more desirable.

Expecting the trite, ‘hey’ or ‘what’s your name’, Daniel waited to see just when this man would ruin the mystique and he could kill him.

Brock didn’t utter those lines. Instead, he lunged for Daniel and kissed him.

Kissed him!

Daniel hadn’t been kissed...ever!

Smacked, beaten, shoved, that contact Daniel was familiar with. Kisses?

The passion from Brock nearly knocked Daniel off his feet. It was as if Daniel had been bitten by one of his own. His cock throbbed like a pulsating heart in his pants and the tongue in his mouth was aggressive. Brock knew what he wanted.

“You’re coming home with me.”

Daniel could only gasp in awe at Brock’s confidence and skill. As Brock hailed a cab, holding Daniel’s hand tightly, Daniel choked up with emotion.

Never in his life did he anticipate finding his equal, and certainly not a human one.

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“Get in, you gorgeous demon.” Brock appeared rabid in his sexual hunger.

Feeling a presence, Daniel spun around to the darkness before he climbed into the cab.

The woman was watching, a smile on her lips. She mouthed, “Yes. He is.”

Daniel actually had to bite back his tears.

Brock persuaded him into the cab, pushing Daniel backwards on the seat and consuming him with his passion.

While his body was assaulted in delicious ways, Daniel imagined perhaps he did have a human side after all. One that craved love and companionship. Could Brock Hart fill that void?

Daniel knew there was one way to find out.

Allow Brock in.

And Daniel would. Allow him into his body, and into his soul.

The End