

Contract in Blood
Madeleine Oh

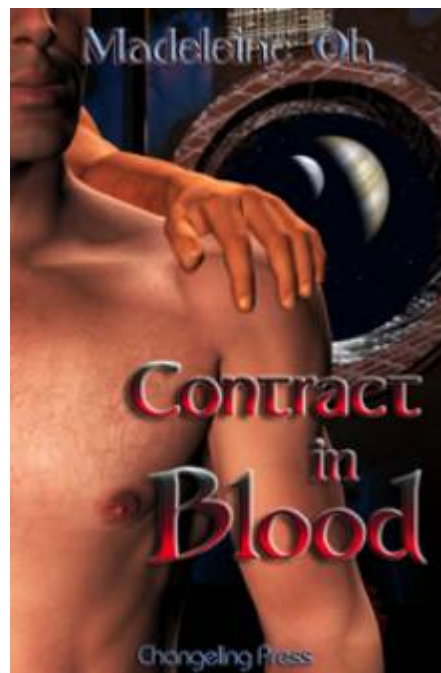
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Chapter 1

He'd been in some low places in his time, but this seedy space bar beat them all. Rand Faràr stared at the bottle of ale between his hands and made a conscious effort not to catch the eye of the bar's other customers.

A contract of death from Bryn Gorlan was bad enough, but at least the bounty hunter would be fast and professional. These specimens looked as if they'd drag out his demise for their own entertainment. Rand took another sip. Why in the name of sanity had he agreed to meet Drake in a dive like this?

Because he was desperate.

Rand figured only a Vampire could protect him from Bryn Gorlan -- assuming the bloodsucker would accept Rand's payment. Assuming Rand lived long enough to actually meet the Vamp-for-hire. By the looks that pair of Grebs over at the bar were tossing his way, Rand wasn't sure he should count on living through the night.

Rand shifted in his seat to make his laser-knife more accessible. He took another sip of the tepid ale, grimacing as he studied the ingredients listed in small print in all thirty-three commonly accepted languages. Rand was fluent in twenty of them and could cuss in another nine. With the Vampire's help he just might live long enough to pick up a smattering of the remaining four.

"Is the ale *that* bad?"

Rand almost jumped. Hell, he knew he was on edge but... He stared at the man now sitting opposite him. "You're Drake?" He had to be. No mortal moved that fast.

The man nodded and smiled, just a slow curl of his wide mouth, but it held a suspicion of friendliness. "You were expecting more than one Vamp?"

"No, but I've learned caution."

The Vampire leaned forward, his carbon-dark hair falling over his high forehead. "Pity you didn't learn that before pissing off Harel Larg. Yes, I am Drake Varna."

The last four words sounded like a threat -- or a warning not to waste his time. "Thanks for coming."

"I understand you're looking for a good assassin."

“More like a bodyguard. I already have a good assassin -- on my arse.”

Drake’s teeth were very white and the canines just a little more pointed than a mortal’s. “Bryn Gorlan is good -- for a mortal.”

“He’s ruthless, determined, and he wants my balls for his collection.”

“And your skin for a new pair of gloves, I imagine.”

Rand shuddered. Hoping he’d be dead first was no doubt asking too much. He looked up at the hot, dark eyes and the slightly-parted full lips. He swallowed. “I need you.”

Drake Varna chuckled. “I presume that was a request for professional services, not a proposition. I’m looking for work. Let’s talk terms.” He leaned back in his seat. “Negotiations always progress better over a drink. How’s the ale? As bad as ever?”

“I’ve had worse.” But not often.

“Haven’t we all.” Drake turned his head toward the bar. The two Grebs seemed fascinated with their fingernails. Drake looked over their bent heads to catch the barkeep’s eye.

Immediately, two mist-chilled bottles appeared, along with a large dish of illishels. Seemed Vamps got respect, and good service. Did they give it as readily?

Drake pushed a bottle to Rand. “Drink up, and have one.” He nodded toward the curled pink shapes piled in the dish.

Rand had never felt less hungry in his life, but Drake seemed insistent, and keeping the Vampire by his side was Rand’s prime goal right now. He took an illishel and bit it in two, chewing slowly, almost gagging when Drake took a handful and tossed them down his throat one by one. The taut muscles under the pale skin undulated as Drake swallowed.

Rand shivered, suddenly aware that Drake knew he was watching. *Watching?* He was *ogling* like a new-tapped midshipman. Hell. This was the man he wanted to save his skin -- to keep him alive until Harel Larg’s contract expired -- the Vamp Rand hoped to hire to protect him -- not a fresh-for-sale bath boy.

All Drake seemed to notice was the shiver. “Cold?” he asked. “Or scared?”

“Wouldn’t you be scared if Bryn Gorlan had a contract on you?” If the killer was a fourth as good as interstellar gossip suggested, without protection Rand was a goner.

“Not in the least,” Drake replied with a chuckle. “I respect him, yes. He is vicious and seldom unsuccessful.” Great. Nothing like reassurance. “*What did* you do to convince Harel Larg you merited the services of Gorlan?”

Hadn’t Drake heard on the cyber-gossip lines? Or was he testing Rand’s truthfulness? Rand took a quick sip of ale to wet his dry mouth. “I’ve done a fair bit of business with Larg over the years. Unfortunately, on the last run a month ago, I was intercepted by a Union Excise freighter. Not wanting to spend time in a Union Penal Colony, I evaporated my cargo.”

Rand shrugged. "One of the risks of the biz. Other times I've worked off the lost freight for the owners or come to some other agreement. Harel, the bastard, offered to accept my ship in lieu of his cargo. I got the hell off his planet. I was almost home when I got the cyber-word via the networks that I had a bounty hunter on my tail. Since I didn't fancy my cock and balls adorning anyone's trophy wall, I made myself scarce and came looking for you."

Did that sound pathetic? Irresponsible? Dear stars and planets, surely not whiny.

Drake swallowed another handful of illishels. "How do you plan to cover my fee?"

This was it. "I can pay you a thousand universal space credits today and another four thousand if I'm alive when the contract expires in three Terran days."

Dark eyebrows rose in Drake's otherwise impassive face. "If you have five thousand credits, why pay me? Why not just repay Larg?"

He'd anticipated that. "That's my savings, against disaster or old age. I'd hoped to work off the debt with Harel Larg -- as I have with other traders by carrying other freight for free. After I heard about the bounty on me, I offered to pay. Penury in my old age seemed preferable to no old age at all, but he refused. Message was he wanted to make an example out of me."

Rand shuddered and tilted his bottle to his lips. He needed a long, cold swig, but he also needed his wits about him. He set the bottle down. "I'm offering you the money to keep Bryn Gorlan off my back."

"Kill him, you mean."

"Not necessarily. I..."

"Gorlan took on the commission. He'll complete it -- unless he's dead."

Cold panic gnawed the places Rand rather preferred to keep attached. "Does it have to come to that?"

Drake leaned across the table and grabbed the front of Rand's zipsuit. "Don't play the rat-brained idiot. You're no naive farm boy off the Ravine deserts. You knew what you wanted when you called me." The strength of Drake's grasp pulling him across the table sent cold chills down Rand's spine. One look into the Vamp's dark eyes sent a warm rush of excitement straight to his cock. "Do you want me to do the job or not?"

"Yes!" Drake released Rand suddenly. Rand hit the back of the seat hard. He ignored the hurt to his shoulders. "I want to know he can't kill me."

"It'll cost you seven thousand. Can you offer a lien on your freighter?"

"To you?" He'd end up indebted for life -- but he'd have a life to look forward to.

"No, thickhead. I'm not a moneylender. From a bank."

Rand shook his head as hope seeped away. Wasn't his life savings enough? "I already have a lien on the freighter. I can't borrow more."

“Damn shame that. We could have done business, but...” With a shrug, Drake placed his hands flat on the black pseudo-marble table and leaned forward as if to stand.

Rand wasn't giving up when he'd come so close. Hell. This was his life they were haggling over. “Wait!” He grabbed Drake's wrist, the flesh firm and cold. “I can't pay in credits. Five thousand is all I have, but I can offer payment in kind.”

“What sort of kind?” Drake's dark eyes watched like a hunter cat sizing up his prey.

“The use of my ship if ever needed.”

“I can get transport easily.”

“Rapid transport without the inconvenience of excise regulations?”

“I make my own regulations, smuggler-boy. Come on. Is that your best offer?”

“My ship...” It was the price of penury, but he'd be alive.

Drake chuckled. “A beat-up smuggler's freighter? No deal.” He stood up and reached for a last handful of illishels. “Make me a better offer.”

Luck, don't fail me now. “I'm AB negative.”

Drake's long fingers closed over the pink crustaceans. He stared at Rand as if he'd discovered gold in a pile of dog shit. Rand barely breathed. He'd caught Drake's interest all right. “Do you have any idea what you're offering, mortal?”

He was tempted to lie, but what was the point? When it came to Vamps he *was* as ignorant as a farm boy off the Ravine desert. “No, but if it means we have a deal, I'll do it.”

“No, lad. I'll do *you* .”

Rand's stomach pitched and roiled, finally settling several inches lower than it started. Damn good thing he'd let Drake munch on most of the illishels. What in Hades had he agreed to? Saving his hide, that's what, but...

“Having second thoughts?” Drake sounded amused.

“No, just thanking the powers of the universe for my unusual genes.”

Drake's dark eyebrows rose as his mouth twisted in a wry smile. “Or satisfying your adolescent fantasies of being fucked by a Vamp.”

“I'd rather be fucked by you than Bryn Gorlan and his boys.”

Drake's laugh echoed in the smoky air. He threw back his head, his broad chest vibrating with laughter from deep in his gut. “Perish the thought.” He chuckled several seconds before finally getting control, reaching to rest a cool hand on Rand's sweaty one. “I think, lad, you will be as sweet as the rare AB negative I haven't tasted in years.”

Rand shifted his fingers, relishing the sensation of Drake's cool skin. Would all his body be this cool? Was his cock cold? Or did the heat of sex warm him? He'd be finding out damn soon. And he couldn't wait. Sheesh. Despite Drake's jibe, this was no adolescent fancy. This was *man* need. Rand's heart raced at the prospect of Drake's hard cock. Had it been that long? Not really, but instinct told him fucking Drake would be like nothing else. Hades help him. He was hard and aching and ready to step out and find the nearest rest house, while Drake was sitting back down and slowly sipping an ale.

"Out of the way, Offlander! You're blocking my aim."

How in all the seven Hades had Bryn found him so fast?

The entire bar went silent. Every eye was on the nasty pantomime 'round the table. What now? Rand thanked the heavens he hadn't crapped in his zipsuit. But give him time. Already he felt a tightening in his bowels and a sickening twist in his gut. He'd heard what Bryn did to his victims...

"Move? By all means." Drake set his half-finished ale on the table. "You have business with Captain Faràr?"

"A little demolition," Bryn replied unholstering his stunner.

Drake stood up. "I'm in your way?"

"Right the first time, Offlander."

Rand's chest tightened. He couldn't believe it. They'd made an agreement, hadn't they? Not yet sealed in the blood he'd promised, but... Hell. "Drake..." he began but never finished.

Drake moved. Bryn's stunner sailed across the room, its path traceable by an arc of short flashes. Bryn followed, hitting the crowd near the gaming table. Rand never saw what happened next. The room spun as he was yanked from his seat. There was a rush of wind, then warm air and he was on his feet leaning against a wall with Drake standing over him, steadying Rand's shaking shoulders.

"What the hell happened?"

"I saved your arse, lad." Drake grinned. "That makes it mine."

Rand felt the hot air on his tonsils as he gasped. He'd heard tell of Vamp speed, but to experience it. Shit almighty! Was Drake's last comment a threat or a promise? Either way...

"I started earning that blood payment."

Rand wasn't about to argue. "What happened back there?"

"You haven't figured it out?"

"I think so. I'm just having trouble believing it."

"Believe it lad, and believe this." He smiled down at Rand. "Moving fast takes strength. I need to restore myself." As he spoke he opened Rand's zipsuit. Rand gasped as Drake's cool fingers grasped his hard cock.

“Hush, lad. No point in bringing attention to yourself. I just need a little sustenance to replace the energy I burned getting us both out of Bryn’s reach.”

Drake knelt. Rand stared. Was he hallucinating from stress, shock, or too much brew? Drake’s soft lips made up his mind. No dream or hallucination could match this. Wild thrills snaked through his body and spiraled across his mind.

Rand forgot where he was and why. His entire mind and being concentrated on Drake’s lips as they worked him from need to frenzy. Rand dug his fingernails into the wall behind as he leaned back, angled his hips forward, and bit his lips to keep from crying out. He’d expected to be bent over and plowed, but instead Drake was on his knees sucking him off expertly and completely.

With final pressure from Drake’s tongue as he slid his lips up and down his cock Rand came -- almost choking in the effort to restrain his cries. He sagged against the wall, letting the pseudo-stone and Drake’s arms ‘round his thighs support him.

In the aftershocks of his climax, as the Vampire milked Rand dry of every last trace of seed, Drake bit. The pain in the base of his cock made Rand scream, but in the midst of pain came a wild rush of extreme sensation. Rand’s head buzzed, his skin broke out in goose bumps, and his eyes watered with the sheer heat of the sensation that rode the crest of the pain, obliterating the hurt with white-hot pleasure.

Rand’s knees gave out but Drake caught him as he crumpled. “Steady, lad.” Drake was standing now, supporting him as he slumped.

“What happened?” Dumb question, again. He sounded like a goddamn virgin, but...

“I restored myself, lad. I got the impression it was no hardship on your part.”

Rand nodded, saving his breath to keep his chest heaving. “Wow!” Bloody inadequate that. “I thought,” he managed between gasps, “you Vamps went for the neck.”

Drake grinned. “Only in stories told to children. Jism fortifies, and blood from the cock is the sweetest of all. I took only the minimum. When I need more, I’ll go for your neck. You’ll be right as rain by the time I need you again.”

Other than a little lingering wobbliness, Rand felt a hell of a lot better than rain, even if he had just survived a cyclone. “I’m fine.”

“Good, lad. Now if you’ve caught your breath, I suggest we hightail it out of here. You do have transport?”

“My ship’s in the eastern spaceport.”

“You think it’s secure?”

“Since it’s registered as docked in the western port, I think so.”

“Smuggler’s tricks, eh?”

“They’ve kept me alive so far.” That and a lot of luck. Rand just hoped he could stay that way.

Drake's hands cupped the curve of Rand's shoulders holding him against the wall. Cool fingertips eased inside the neck of Rand's zipsuit and stroked the base of his neck, sending nerve endings tingling right down to his cock. Hell, he was getting hard again.

"I think, lad, it's time I started collecting my fee." Drake's hand eased up the back of Rand's neck and cupped his head, pulling it forward.

Rand's lips were open even before their mouths met. He let out a groan and Drake pressing home, forced his lips wider. Rand felt his own heat against the cool moist touch of Drake's tongue. Drake's other hand skimmed down Rand's chest. His cock was straining against the nylo-fabric before Drake reached him.

"Well, well." Drake sounded amused -- and as aroused as Rand. "What do you have in mind, mortal?"

"Same thing as you."

"Lad, you've a pro bounty hunter on your tail, and the first thought in your mind is offering me that self-same tail."

"That's mortals for you."

Drake threw back his head and laughed. "What fools these mortals be." He squeezed Rand's cock. "And what a fool I'd be to refuse. How long is the hunt on you?"

"Seventy-two Terran hours. It started midnight last night."

"Then boy, let's get you to your ship, find ourselves a nice little out-of-the-system hide away, and lay low while I take what I'm owed."

It couldn't be that simple, could it?

Chapter 2

Escaping was almost as simple as Drake had said it would be.

Almost.

They reached the neck of the alley, just in time to witness the arrival of two militia wagons in front of the bar. "Hold tight," Drake whispered. "This will be further than just around the corner." Before Rand had a chance to nod, Drake had him by the waist and hoisted him over his shoulder. Just as Rand became aware of the Drake's muscled body beneath his clothes, the world slipped into a blur. Rand was aware of light and noise and the air around as they sliced through it, but knew neither the direction they traveled, nor what they passed.

He was, however, very much aware of Drake's firm hand on his arse. At some point in the wild maelstrom of passing sounds and light, he could have sworn a cool finger traced the crease of his butt. Or perhaps it was the rush of air past his ears that kept him hard and aching.

Rand wobbled as Drake set him on his feet, just meters from the main hangar of the eastern spaceport. Without Drake's hand steadying him, he'd have toppled. "What the hell did you do?" Rand asked.

Drake raised his eyebrows. "I ran. We're faster than you lot. But the speed does disorient you mortals. Something to do with balance, I think. Or perhaps mortality." He grinned, but kept his grip on Rand's upper arm. "Ready to move on, lad?"

Rand nodded. "It's not in the main hangar."

"Then, lead on, Macduff."

Drake followed as readily as he led, showing neither surprise nor distaste on entering the hangar via the fuel egress, or climbing the maintenance platforms to reach the ship's hold.

"Here we are." Rand opened the hatch and motioned Drake ahead. "She may not be beautiful, but she's mine."

Drake nodded and proceeded to examine the hold, listening at each entry hatch and testing locks and seals, before asking for the Rand's help. "Can you run a security scan?"

"Of course. Standard procedure." Did the Vamp think just because he had a contract put on him, he'd lost all caution? "Come into the cockpit."

"You fly it on your own?"

"I can. Usually I fly with my First Mate, Raff Marl. He's a Saturnaite."

"And where is he?"

"Bryn found him last night."

Drake reached out with his arms as the memory of Raff's seared, mutilated carcass had Rand shaking all over again. "Hush, lad," Drake said, holding him close, rocking him as if he were a baby. "Life in the space lanes can be hard as Plutoan tundra. Mourn him later. Right now, let's get the hell out of here."

Sound advice. Raff was dead. Rand wished he'd had a chance to gather his ashes, but he'd been too damn busy running to save his own hide. Brushing those thoughts aside, Rand went through the necessary checks for take off. He'd never had trouble leaving Eastport before, but he'd never had a price on his head before either.

"Have you checked the ship for stowaways?"

"Not yet," Rand replied. "Thought I'd get the jets fired up first."

"Why not run the body heat sensors, now? Bryn isn't likely to give up just because I disarmed him."

True. "Okay." Rand pressed two buttons to his right. "I've set it going. Want to monitor it while I fire up the rear jets and ask for clearance?" He wasn't sure if Vamp bodyguards did odd jobs around the bridge, but hell...

"Fine." Ten minutes later, after the navicomputer gave clearance to launch, Drake said, "Just one heated-emitting life form -- you, my lad, and one presence -- me. We're alone in this rattletrap. Let's go."

It was the first time Rand ever launched with a strong hand on his thigh and a rock-hard erection. Took some concentrating, but in minutes they were cruising the primary exit lane.

"Set course for space sector Epsilon Ten," Drake suggested.

"I don't know that area."

"I do. Barren. Seldom visited. We can cruise there undisturbed. Set the auto-guide as soon as you feel comfortable, then show me where the showers are. I hope it's big enough for two."

"Sorry." He was. Sincerely. The prospect of Drake's damp body close to his was one worth savoring. "Never got 'round to updating. Facilities are basic in the extreme."

"Unfortunate. In that case I'll take precedence, and wait in the aft cabin for you. Get on course and then join me."

"I'll be there." The prospect sent his throat tight and his suit tighter.

"Don't take too long. The night's half over."

He'd heard talk of Vamps and daylight but... "We're heading for open space. There will be no dawn."

"I came from the Earth. Unfortunately, my body still keeps Earth rhythms. We need to be safe in the far space lanes by Earth dawn. Then, I'm afraid, I'll be of little use to you. But until then..." He smiled and ran his fingers through Rand's hair. "We have plenty of time once you set our course."

Setting the auto-guide seemed to take forever. For some reason the stabilizers wanted to overcompensate. Did Drake weigh more than he looked? Rand set the balance manually to account for two average mortals. Vamps had to be more dense. It took several minutes to adjust before the ship rolled free. When Rand had everything on course, he set the drive to auto and went aft.

Drake was waiting in the cabin, naked, his dark hair rough and spiked from rubbing. Stray beads of moisture shone on his shoulders. Rand stepped inside and hesitated. This was a Vampire, not a casual lover. An aroused Vampire who was looking at his next meal. Rand had promised blood payment and now it was time to keep his promise.

Drake held out his hand. "I presume the ship can now take care of itself."

"Barring unforeseen crises, yes." It was hard to speak with a dry throat. "I need a shower."

"I won't deny that, lad. You still smell of that seedy bar."

"You asked me to meet you in that 'seedy' bar."

Drake smiled, his mouth crinkling at the corners, dark lights dancing in his eyes. "I did, didn't I?" He stepped closer, grasping the zip of Rand's suit between his finger and thumb. "And now you smell of cheap ale." With a quiet brr, Rand's suit opened, then Drake's cool hands pushed it off his shoulders, his fingers trembling as they trailed down Rand's chest. Cool lips brushed his nipple as Rand grasped Drake's head and held him close. Drake gently licked his nipple hard.

Rand let out a quiet groan and Drake raised his head, dark eyes glowing. "Definitely an aroma of cheap ale. Come."

Rand gasped as his clothes dropped to the floor. Faster than he could see, Drake lifted him and placed him in the shower. Holding him against the metal wall with one hand, Drake turned on the water.

As Drake released his hold, Rand leaned back so the warm cascade washed over his head and face and ran down his body to pool by his feet. He closed his eyes and Drake's moist hands rubbed skinwash down Rand's chest to his already hard cock and his shaking thighs.

How they both fit into the minuscule service shower, Rand would never know and cared even less. Nothing mattered but Drake's hands on his arse and the gentle suction of his cool lips on Rand's almost-burning cock.

After forever -- or maybe just seconds -- Rand had lost all sense of time -- Drake stood and with a firm grip on Rand's shoulders pressed him to kneeling.

While Drake's swiftly moving hands shampooed the last vestiges of the stench from the seedy bar from Rand's dusty blond hair, Rand eyed with increasing lust the magnificent sight of Drake's erect cock mere centimeters from his face.

But as he leaned closer to taste the sweet skin encasing that fantastic cock, Drake resisted holding Rand's head steady and stepping back. "Later, lad. After those two sprints to save your skin I need your strength more than you need mine."

"Let me at least taste you, feel you against my tongue."

Drake relented. "All right, lad, but restrain yourself. The wait will be worth it."

Rand parted his lips and gently enclosed the steel-smooth tip of Drake's cock. He couldn't hold back the shudder as he eased his lips down the solid shaft of aroused Vampire flesh. He didn't even try. His mind was occupied with the wild pleasure rippling through every nerve and cell as Drake's magnificent cock nudged the back of his throat. Rand relaxed his muscles and swallowed him down, barely moving as he relished the wild delight flooding his mind.

"Easy, lad. I don't aim to hurry this time," Drake said and withdrew.

Rand whimpered with disappointment but it soon faded. Drake lifted him by the waist and carried him out of the shower, stepping over to the drying compartment. He held Rand's face and kissed him slowly, completely, standing in the gusts of warm air.

Between the balmy air of the dryer and the heat stirred by Drake's kisses, Rand was close to the edge. With an incredible show of strength, Drake grabbed Rand by the waist and lifted him over his head, holding him aloft as his tongue found Rand's cock. Rand groaned as Drake's mouth brought him to the

brink of coming. The Vampire eased his lips away, lowering Rand so his feet touched the ground.

“So much for the appetizer. Time for the main course.” He carried Rand into the adjacent sleeping quarters and spread him on his back on the narrow bunk. “Tight quarters you allot yourself.”

“Sorry. I don’t usually bring guests aboard and never in here.”

“Wise of you.” Drake leaned up on one elbow, his legs alongside Rand’s so their skin brushed from hip to ankle. “By the time morning comes none of your mortal lovers will matter much. It’s different with a Vamp.”

Rand had already figured that out for himself.

“‘Practice makes perfect,’ I believe is the Terran aphorism applicable here.”

Yes, well... “How old are you really?”

Drake brushed a still damp lock of hair from Rand’s forehead. “Vampire age is not something we discuss -- except to establish biting order. Let’s just say I remember a world where only witches and birds of the air flew.”

Rand had read of those days in space history classes in his cadet days. “You remember Sputnik? The first moon landing?”

“Lad, I was long a Vampire when they happened.” His hand stroked the side of Rand’s face and neck, his fingers lingering over the soft spot beside his collarbone. Wild thrills of anticipation snaked down Rand’s spine. His hips rocked as his cock hardened even more. “Never had it with a Vamp before, have you?”

“No.” His voice came tight and hoarse. “Never.” Should he tell him how few encounters he’d enjoyed over the year? The hurried fumbblings after fast sex in bars, only marginally less depressing than the one he’d left before. The ill-fated love for his long-mourned, one-time Second Mate, who’d been destroyed by a Brellian grenade? Rand’s long-lost, but never-forgotten first love. A dark-haired cadet, a year senior to Rand at the academy -- now a wing-commander of the interspace fleet, unconcerned with the life and death problems of contrabandists. “Drake...” Rand began, “I...”

Drake raised his eyebrows. “What?”

Rand bit his lip. “You’re gonna take my blood, right?”

Drake nodded.

“Will I become a Vamp?” He should have thought of that earlier, but then survival was foremost in his mind. He hadn’t stopped to think about repercussions.

Drake flopped a kiss on Rand’s forehead, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. “It’s not that easy. I’m going to suck the jism from your cock, lad. That I need for my life, then I’ll take your blood. AB negative is a rare treat. After I finish, I’ll give you my cock where you really want it.”

Rand shivered at the thought, his fingers closing around Drake’s erection. Soon, he’d feel that beautiful cock deep in his arse...

“The turn can’t happen accidentally. You have to drink my blood just hours after I take yours. It’s the mingling that causes the change and it has to be blood -- jism alone doesn’t do it.”

Rand wasn’t sure if he was disappointed or not. Running at Drake’s speed would come in handy in tight situations but a lifetime of blood-sucking...

“Don’t fancy it, lad?”

“I don’t know if I do or not.”

“Then let’s stick to our deal. Your luscious AB negative for my protection.”

Rand reached up and pulled Drake’s head down. “Yes,” he whispered against Drake’s open lips.

The kiss was long, sweet and wild, with arms locked, legs twined and bracing against each other in the close quarters. Rand was gasping when they finally broke the kiss, but once he caught his breath he kissed again, slowly easing his mouth off Drake’s to run soft kisses across his broad chest and suck his cool nipples. He made his way down past Drake’s naval when Drake shifted. One minute Rand was twisting Drake’s dark pubic hair between his fingers and the next he was flat on his back, legs dangling over the side of the narrow bunk.

“My turn, lad,” Drake said, pushing Rand’s thighs apart. “We have a deal, after all.”

How could lips bring cool and heat at the same time? How could fingers’ touch be cold, yet all but singe his nerve endings? The hasty encounter in the alley left Rand stunned. This brought him back to reason, but flung him straight into a wild frenzy of need, wanting, and sexual ache.

Could he ever find a mortal lover to equal this? Would he ever need, or even worse, want to? He’d remember this when he was old and withered and out to pasture. Rand chuckled. As if a contrabandist ever lived that long. Drake would keep him safe from Bryn, but sooner or later there would be another, maybe not so skilled or threatening, but right now, Rand didn’t give a scavenger’s damn.

Nothing mattered but the moist caress of Drake’s mouth as he slowly swallowed Rand’s cock. Consigning bounty hunters and the life and death concerns of a smuggler’s life to the heavens, Rand sagged back on the rough blanket and freed his mind for sublime pleasure, soft lips, and the wild sensations pouring through his body. He grasped Drake’s head and held him close, but Drake was stronger than Rand’s tightest embrace. He moved to his own rhythm, withdrawing as he wished, easing down deep as he chose. Drake might be on his knees on the gray vyno-covered floor, but there was no question who dominated. Utterly.

Who cared? Whimpers and soft groans echoed the Vampire’s kiss. Rand’s arms lay limp by his sides, his mind floating on a vast ocean of pleasure as a soft sheen of perspiration gradually spread across his shoulders, soaking into the blanket beneath him. As his arousal peaked, Rand tossed his head from side to side, groaning with need and the desire to climax and the urge to never climax, but to lie here, forever on the edge, while Drake pleased him. Rand’s fingers clutched the rough blankets as Drake played him, now easing off, now speeding his tongue, but always driving sensations upwards, higher. At last Rand screamed aloud and came, pouring his human life into Drake’s open and needy throat.

Rand was sliding off the summit, floating with heady fulfillment when Drake bit, yanking Rand up fast, hauling him as if by sex and force to another, even higher climax. Rand’s shouts echoed in his own ears,

bouncing off the walls as his mind and body soared in a wild parabola of pleasure before he collapsed, sweaty and gasping, a loose tangle of satisfied body and fulfilled mind. “Ye Gods of the universe! That was even better than last time.”

“Each time is better than the one before.”

If that was true, why ever bother with a mortal mate again? “Could it be better?” Rand asked sleepily.

“You question me, mortal?” Drake asked, a rough note in his voice.

“Just myself.” And his entire life to this point. “I foolishly thought *I* was doing *you* a favor offering my blood.”

Drake sat beside him, stretching his legs out toward the end of the bunk. “You were. AB negative is rare, heady, and delicious. You mortals savor ancient wines and real meat from Earth. We Vampires savor the finest blood.”

“Want more? Say beyond the bounty period? I need a First Mate. Mine died.”

Drake chuckled. “You think I won’t have that problem?”

“I think you’d be a damn good advantage in a fight.”

“I would, but I’m not indestructible. At times I’m completely vulnerable.”

“When you’re asleep?”

Drake nodded.

“But you’ll trust me then.”

“Why not? You need me alive the next night.”

Was that all there was between them?

“My lovers seldom do me harm, and never wittingly.”

Was that all he was? One of the legions of lovers Drake had savored over the centuries? “I couldn’t. To harm you would kill the greatest pleasure I’ve ever known.”

“So,” Drake chuckled. “It comes down to sex.”

“No. It all comes down to mind-numbing, incredible sex.” Rand leaned into Drake’s hard-muscled side. “It has been, you know. Fantastic.”

“It’s not over yet. I want a little more.” Rand watched, licking suddenly dry lips, as Drake slid his hand up his own still hard cock, easing the foreskin back and forth over the smooth, pale head. “I need to fuck you, contrabandist. Are you ready?”

Would he ever be? Drake’s cock was immense and looked as hard as the ship’s hull surrounding them. But how could Rand ever refuse? Not only had he given word, but there were the fierce sensations

already gathering as Rand clenched and unclenched the tight opening to his arse. He wanted, needed, longed for, Drake's vast cock stretching and filling him to capacity and more.

"I think," replied Rand as he bent over and gently brushed his lips over Drake's cock, "I'm as ready as I'll ever be." He looked up. "Is that all you'll do?" He knew it wasn't, but wanted to hear the promise from Drake's lips.

"No way, lad. As I come I'll bite your neck. As my jism spurts into you, your blood will flow to me. Fair exchange?"

"You bet!" Rand shifted to kneeling, but Drake moved faster, placing Rand onto all fours on the floor as he knelt behind him. The floor was cold. Rand barely noticed. He was aware of nothing but Drake's hands holding him firmly, the brush of cool thighs against his, and the gentle pressure of Drake's cock against his puckered arse hole.

Rand instinctively wanted to tighten, but instead he forced his muscles to relax. He wanted this. Yearned for it.

"Hang on, lad," Drake whispered, patting him gently on the rump as he moved away. Rand whimpered with disappointment. "Easy, lad. I'll be back."

He was, almost before Rand processed the reassurance. Drake was back, squirting cool lubricant into Rand's tight hole. As the gel warmed Rand relaxed, pushing back against the cool fingers that probed and stretched him. "Need it bad, don't you? Want my cock, lad? Want it in deep and hard?"

"Please..." Rand groaned as desire flared like a fire in his gut, and a wild storm in his mind. Need superseded reason. He felt pressure, a pinching tightness as Drake pressed forward, a stab of pain and a wild rush of intense pleasure as Drake eased deep.

Rand gasped, panting for breath and control. He'd never been so completely taken, so utterly possessed, so totally filled and stretched. Nothing in the universe could equal this -- until a few seconds later when Drake withdrew slightly and pressed back. He pulled out almost completely and surged deep, forcing a strangled gasp of joy from Rand. Mewls of pleasure became shouts of fulfillment, as Drake pumped and Rand rocked in rhythm. They were locked, like two wild creatures of the heavens kneeling on the worn gray floor of the cabin.

How long Drake lasted, Rand never knew. He lost track of time, distance -- even his own breathing, joined, as he was, one with the Vampire. Rand was close to coming. His cock aching with arousal and pleasure, as if all sense, all knowledge, all wisdom was centered on his cock, his arse and the hard pulse inside his arse hole. "God, I'm so close!" he cried.

"Good." Drake bit. Hard. His fangs pierced the skin high on Rand's neck.

As the first wild rush hit Rand's mind his body zapped out. He came in great, pearly bursts, shooting across the cabin, jerking in strange rhythm with the movement of Drake's jaws.

Slowly the sweet suction eased. Drake lifted his mouth to drop a gentle kiss on the base of Rand's spine. Rand would have collapsed without Drake's hands on his hips. Drake steadied him -- just barely. Rand leaned into his lover, his body still thrumming with pleasure.

"You were right, there was more," Rand whispered, his eyes still misty and his mind too fogged to think

straight.

“I aim to please, mortal,” Drake replied. “And now, if you will pardon me, Earth sun rises and I must rest.” He took two steps back toward the bunk, stretched out, and immediately went cold and still.

Chapter 3

Rand gaped in complete shock, touching the lifeless hand and kneeling on the edge of the mattress to stroke the still-as-marble face. Was it possible? Moments ago, they’d been locked in the wildest carnal embrace, but now, his passionate lover lay lifeless...literally.

In a flash of clarity, Rand understood the rift between mortal and Vampire -- and vast trust Drake bestowed on him. The Vampire lay helpless -- completely vulnerable. Rand would watch over him until dusk. After he checked the naviputer. Rand bent over and kissed Drake’s still mouth and brushed the dark hair clear of the stone-cold forehead.

“How touching.”

Only one voice in the universe held that vicious edge. “Bryn Gorlan!” Rand spun around. *It was* Bryn, flanked by two henchmen.

“Yes. Were you expecting another bounty hunter? I’m the only one with a contract on you...so far.”

“The only one likely. Harel didn’t lose that much.” It was hard to be dignified nude, with the scent of sex in the air, but Rand did his best.

“He needed to make an example of you, Rand.” Bryn fingered the stunner on his belt. Rand’s was back in the cockpit. “Did I interrupt a tender moment?”

At a signal from Bryn, the man on the right stepped toward the bunk. Rand moved to block him and got a sharp stunner zap in the thigh. “Stay where you are. Or I’ll aim at your crotch. Mag, wake the lover. He might as well witness what happens to carriers who jettison cargo.”

“Hell, Bryn, if I’d not dumped it, the revenueurs would have impounded it.”

Bryn nodded in agreement. “And clapped you in some brig somewhere, where you’d rot while Harel negotiated for release of his property. Carriers are disposable. Refined selsenite isn’t.”

Nice to learn that now at the point of a gun...

“Hell.” That came from the man behind Rand. “It’s a Vampire!”

Despite the blaster Rand turned, but Bryn was at his back, blaster to his ribs. “Stay where you are,

sweet arse.” He looked toward his second. “You sure?”

“Look for yourself.” He lifted Drake’s dead hand and let it drop. Slapped his face and finally shot a blaster charge into his upper arm. Drake never moved.

“Well, I never. Talk about scented shit.” A nasty laugh echoed in Rand’s ear and rank, hot breath caught him across the back of his neck. “Interesting. So, you hired a Vamp to protect you. That’s money you’ll never see back. Not that value for money will matter much when we’re through with you.” He gave Rand a shove in the back of the knees and a push sideways. “Restrain him.”

As Rand hit the ground, a knee hit his lower back. Hands grabbed his wrists and fastened a flexiband. Tight. The one on his ankles went on even faster. Wonderful. He was naked, trussed, and useless on the chilly floor of his own transport while Drake lay helpless and three jerks had possession of his ship. “How the hell did you get in here?”

“The same way you’re leaving. Via your hidey holes in the hull. You should have check them before take-off, but I imagine the naviputer only scanned the standard fittings. I was right. And now, time to toss you out the same hidey holes. You’ll drop just like that load of selsenite -- like lost property.”

Rand went cold. Hell, he was petrified. Okay, he was a goner, but what about Drake? If they just left him on the bunk when he woke, he’d at least have a chance. Rand didn’t much mind Drake inheriting the old crate. He glanced toward the lifeless figure in the bunk. Might as well say goodbye, at least in his thoughts. If he had to choose to die -- better after than before all that wild love. If only they’d leave Drake alone until he woke, strengthened with Rand’s blood and jism.

“Taking your time about it, aren’t you Bryn? Thought you’d put me in the hidey hole by now.”

“In a hurry, Rand? You’ll be there soon enough. Just thinking...”

“Hard work, is it?”

A mistake, that. Space boots on bare ribs hurt. For several minutes Rand gasped for breath and longed to be able to clutch his hurt side. When he recovered, he looked up to see the two sidekicks lifting Drake by the shoulders and legs, half-dragging him off the bunk and toward the door. “For Hades’ sakes, leave him alone.”

“What do you think I am? An executioner?” Bryn threw back his head and roared with manic amusement at his own wit.

Rand fought back tears at the thought of his now helpless lover in those thugs’ embrace as they carried Drake out of sight.

His fate was no better. They dragged him the length of the ship to the hidden compartment in the wall of the hold. He knew what was coming. He’d be shoved in, the hatch sealed and then jettisoned. Could be worse. Death shouldn’t be too slow. It took how many minutes to suffocate in space?

He doubted he’d bother to count.

“Have any last words, Faràr?” Bryn asked. “A final message? A heartfelt apology? A desperate plea for mercy?”

“Go to hell.”

“You’ll be there to greet me.” Bryn nodded at the other two. They rolled Rand over until he dropped into the open locker.

Instead of unfinished metal and struts, Rand landed on cold flesh. Drake! “What the hell, Bryn. Let him go. You have no quarrel with him.”

“Surprise! Didn’t want to part you two. You make such a tender pair.”

Shit personified was too nice a term for Bryn Golan. “Let him go. He’s not part of the contract with Larg. Do you want word going around you killed a Vamp?” They were reputed to take hard vengeance over harm to their kind.

“I’m not going to kill him. You are.”

“In your demented dreams.”

Bryn squatted down on the rim of the open hatch. “Much sooner than that.” He took a knife and slit Drake’s left arm from elbow to wrist. Blood flowed sluggishly, slowed, Rand presumed, by Drake’s daylight stupor, but still it flowed slowly, dripping on Rand’s thigh.

“He’ll go on bleeding like that until dusk. When he wakes, he’ll be crazed with hunger, and rip your throat out. Your only chance will be to kill him while he’s sleeping. I’ll even make it easy for you.”

What next? A soft metallic ding as a narrow-bladed knife dropped into the compartment grazing Rand’s thigh.

“I’ll even give you an edge, and release your wrists before I batten down the hatch. Not your ankles, you understand, but enough to make it interesting.”

“It’ll be better with you lot out of sight.”

“Soon. Listen, bare butt boy. That knife is sharp and if you work fast, you might manage to slice him open -- hack through his ribs and cut out his heart. Better that than having your own throat ripped out. And don’t try any heroic sacrifices. If you don’t take care of him, we’ll jettison you both into deep space. This way you have a chance.”

This way he had nothing. But, he’d be damned if he’d even think that, much less acknowledge it to this thug. “Go to hell and take your pathetic sidekicks with you.”

That earned Rand another kick in the head. His brain zinged inside his skull. A knife flashed. Rand braced for the thrust, but a rough hand pulled his wrists back and seconds later, they were free -- stinging and throbbing as circulation returned, but free.

“Pick up the knife while you can still see,” Bryn suggested and slammed the hatch closed.

In the dark, Rand fumbled for the knife to the sounds of bolts closing and echoing footsteps over head. His fingers closed over the blade and eased up to grasp the hilt. Kill Drake? He couldn’t. Not after what they’d shared. And besides, whether Drake was dead or not, Bryn would still open the hatches and dump them both. Last minute mercy wasn’t his style.

Rand's first priority was to save Drake. He owed the Vampire that much. Nice decision, but how? Drake was bleeding to death. Rand felt up Drake's slashed arm. The blood was warmer than he expected. Warm because it was his mortal blood flowing with Drake's. What had he said? For Rand to change they needed to exchange blood within a few hours of feeding.

How did it work? Rand had no way of knowing, and if he waited until Drake roused at Earthdusk, it would be too late. Rand moved closer, hard to do in the confines of the hatch but he managed, with his knees bent under him. Taking Drake's arm in both hands, Rand licked the long incision, then did it again. The blood was slowing but still continued flowing fastest at the wrist. There Rand pressed his lips and drank. It tasted strange -- sweet, metallic, and warm. It represented the mingling of their bodies, the sex they'd shared, and if he was successful, the fight they'd have on their hands when he and Drake forced open the upper hatches.

Two Vampires would be more than a match for a trio of bounty hunters. He'd bet his life on it.

Madeleine Oh

More years ago than she cares to remember, Madeleine Oh left her native England to teach her way around the world. She didn't get very far. In Turkey she met the love of her life, a handsome US Air Force captain from South Carolina. Since then, she's raised three sons, taught regular and special education, worked as a tutor and educational assessor, moonlighted as a bookseller and somehow managed to get a master's degree in her spare time.

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