



"Romance and
suspense that is
simply irresistible."
-- Chicago Tribune

FEARLESS IN HIGH HEELS

GEMMA HALLIDAY

NATIONAL READERS' CHOICE AWARD WINNER

**Here's what critics are saying about
The High Heels Mysteries:**

"A saucy combination of romance and suspense that is simply irresistible."

- Chicago Tribune

"Stylish... nonstop action...guaranteed to keep chick lit and mystery fans happy!"

- Publishers' Weekly, starred review

"Smart, funny and snappy...the perfect beach read!"

- Fresh Fiction

"A roller coaster ride full of fun and excitement!"

- Romance Reviews Today

"Gemma Halliday writes like a seasoned author leaving the reader hanging on to every word, every clue, every delicious scene of the book. It's a fun and intriguing mystery full of laughs and suspense."

- Once Upon A Romance

* * * * *

FEARLESS IN HIGH HEELS

by

GEMMA HALLIDAY

* * * * *

ebook Edition

Copyright © 2011 by Gemma Halliday

<http://www.gemmahalliday.com>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Gemma-Halliday/285144192552>

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, media, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of various products referenced in this work of fiction, which have been used without permission. The publication/use of these

trademarks is not authorized, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return to your online retailer and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the author's work.

* * * * *

FEARLESS IN HIGH HEELS

* * * * *

Chapter One

I watched as the dark figure moved through the forest. Mist swirled at his feet, the glow of the full moon above casting shadows across his beautifully sculpted face, his black hair curling over his ears in the damp night air as he stalked his prey. She stood, unsuspecting, on the other side of the clearing. A dark-haired woman, her back to him, her slim, pale neck exposed to the chilling night.

He spotted her. Then he smiled, showing off a pair of sharp, white fangs against his full lips.

I sucked in a breath, pulling my feet up to my chest.

Then I watched in horror as, in an instant, he was hurtling through the darkness toward the woman.

I covered my eyes with both hands. “I can’t look. He’s gonna bite her, isn’t he?”

Dana sighed next to me. “Yes. Again.”

I pulled my Snuggie up over my head. “Tell me when it’s over.” I burrowed into the pillows on my sofa where my best friend, Dana, and I were indulging in chocolate covered popcorn and hot cocoa while watching *Moonlight*, last summer’s biggest blockbuster movie. I’d read all the *Moonlight* books but had made myself wait to see the movie until I’d finished the last one in the series. Which, as of this morning, I had. And I had to admit, it was worth the wait. The actress playing Lila was totally convincing as the naïve teenager who inadvertently falls in love with a local vampire.

Dana shifted beside me. “God, I hate this part, Maddie,” she whined.

I peeked over the edge of my pink Snuggie at the screen. Lila was falling into the arms of her vampire would-be lover, Daniel, as his lips gently grazed her neck.

“Know what? I don’t think he’s biting her. I think it’s just a kiss,” I pointed out.

“Yeah, that’s the problem.” Dana crunched down hard on a piece of chocolate covered popcorn. Which was a sure sign she was upset. Dana never ate chocolate. Ever. Her body was a temple that ran on wheat grass, tofu, and mass amounts of exercise. She’d worked as an aerobics instructor, a Pilates instructor and a CrossFit trainer. Chocolate was to Dana was like garlic to Daniel and Lila.

“You okay?” I asked.

“Peachy. I love watching my boyfriend kiss other women,” she said, heavy on the sarcasm.

“Sorry.” I put a hand on her arm. “But you know it’s just acting, right?”

Dana didn’t answer, instead grabbing another handful of popcorn.

While I was caught up in the fantasy of the *Moonlight* world, Dana was stuck in the reality of it. Namely the fact that the sexy vampire currently caressing Lila's neck was actually Ricky Montgomery, Dana's boyfriend of the last two and a half years. While Ricky was no stranger to Hollywood, having begun his career as the hunky gardener on TV's prime time soap, *Magnolia Lane*, "Daniel" was the biggest part he'd landed yet, the *Moonlight* phenomenon launching him from TV hottie to teen idol overnight. Something Dana was not overly thrilled with. Not only had reviewers commented numerous times on the undeniable chemistry between Daniel and Lila - who was actually played by Ava Martinez, the sultry new member of the young Hollywood elite - but the last time Dana had gone to Starbucks with Ricky, no less than three women had asked Ricky to sign their boobs.

Not that Dana had anything to worry about, as far as I could tell. She was herself now an actress slash model slash Lover Girl cosmetics spokeswoman (her latest gig) who was blonde, stacked, and toned from head to toe. If Barbie ever needed a body double, Dana was your gal.

But I guess even Barbie might have issues with watching Ken smooch another girl.

"I don't get all this vampire fascination," Dana mumbled, crossing her arms over her chest and scowling at the screen as Daniel sunk his teeth into Lila, giving her "the eternal kiss" of night.

"You're kidding, right?" I responded, looking away as I grabbed a handful of popcorn. "Are we watching the same movie? Vampires are sexy."

"What's so sexy about drinking blood?"

I paused. Okay, she had me there. "It's not the blood thing," I countered. "It's that they're mysterious. Dark. Forbidden. The ultimate bad boys. Besides," I said gesturing at the screen, "you have to admit that Ricky looks hot in pale make-up."

Dana sighed. “Yeah. I know. Too hot.”

“You know, there are worse things in the world than dating the guy every woman in America is lusting over,” I teased her.

She threw a piece of popcorn at me, but smiled at least. “Well, with any luck, after he finishes shooting the sequel there won’t be any more *Moonlight* movies.”

“Aww,” I whined before I could stop myself. “Why not?”

“Ricky’s invested in this new club, and if it does well he said he’ll be able to slow down a bit with the acting. Which,” she clarified, “means more time with moi and less time with *her*.”

“Tell me about the club,” I said to cover my disappointment at losing my new favorite film series.

Dana perked up, crossing her legs under her on the sofa. “It’s called Crush, and it’s got this totally chic little spot on Sunset. Apparently Ricky’s business manager suggested investing in it, so Ricky’s now something like a one-sixteenth owner. I’m going to check it out tomorrow night. Oh! You should totally come with!”

I bit my lip. “Me? At a nightclub?” Okay, a few months ago, I would have jumped at the chance to check out a hot new club from the cushy VIP section reserved for one-sixteenth owners. As a fashion designer, people-watching among Hollywood’s nightlife was one of my favorite hobbies. Some of my best inspirations had come from the dance floors of L.A.’s most fashionable clubs.

But recently something had come along to change all that. Okay, I guess you could say two somethings.

Number one: My husband, Detective Jack Ramirez, L.A.P.D. homicide. He was tall, broad shouldered, and built with all solid muscle. His hair was dark and always a week past needing a cut, his skin was a warm honey color year round, and his eyes were a soft brown when they crinkled with

laughter at the corners and a deep, rich chocolate when he was in the mood for something a little more naughty. When a girl had a guy like that at home, what did she want to go out for?

And clearly we'd been spending a lot of time "in" together as I now had a reason number two to stay home: The Bump. In about twenty-two weeks I was told that said growth would actually become a living breathing human, but at the moment, it was just The Bump, a basketball shaped growth under my favorite T-shirt. (Which, even though it was stretched to the max I refused to give up in favor of the tents that passed as maternity clothes. Whoever said that maternity wear was "so much cuter" now than in the past clearly had a very loose interpretation of the word "cute".)

My first reaction to the two little lines on the pee stick had been surprise, then elation, then horror at the idea I was soon to be responsible for an entire life. Horror had settled into a dull sense of panic that I could most of the time smother with chocolate covered popcorn and hot cocoa, but it was still bubbling just below the surface enough that a nightclub wasn't high on my list of to-do's lately.

Dana must have seen the hesitation in my eyes as she looked down at The Bump too.

"Come on, it would be good for you to get out," she said.

"I don't know. It sounds like a normal person thing not a pregnant person thing."

Dana shot me a look. "You *are* a normal person."

"I'm a whale."

"You're not *that* big."

My turn to shoot the look. "I appreciate your dishonestly for my benefit, but I have mirrors. I know how big I am."

Dana waved me off. "No one will notice. It's dark in clubs."

"It's also loud. What if it's too loud for her?"

“Her?” Dana asked, jumping on the word. “Do we know The Bump’s a girl?”

I shrugged. “Well, not technically. It’s too early to know for sure yet. But I saw this to-die-for pink tutu onesie the other day at Macy’s, so I’m hopeful.”

“Well, either way, I’m pretty sure that thing can’t hear yet,” Dana said, staring down at my belly.

“She might be able to. I read in *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* that she has ears now.”

“Even if she does, the layer of fat will insulate her.”

“See, you are calling me fat!”

Dana swatted me on the arm. “Look, if Crush gets too loud or too crowded or too anything, we can leave. But please come with me. It will be no fun without you.” Dana pouted and batted her eyelashes at me.

The effect was so comical that I couldn’t help the spurt of laughter that escaped me. “Okay, fine. I’ll drag my whale-sized self to a nightclub just for you.”

“Yay!” Dana said, bouncing up and down on the sofa cushion. “Trust me, we’ll have a blast. It’ll be like our last little club night before The Bump arrives.”

“Hmm,” I said, grabbing another handful of popcorn to cover the mild panic that always accompanied imagining my world post-Bump.

“K, so I just have one more teeny, tiny favor to ask,” Dana said.

I rolled my eyes. “What now?”

She glanced at the screen where “Daniel” was tongue kissing the newly vampireized Lila. “Any chance we could watch something else? *Anything* else?”

Chapter Two

The next night found me ditching my Snuggie for the first time in months and letting my sofa fend for itself as Dana drove me through the packed Hollywood streets in her brand new convertible Mustang. Cherry red. With the top down. I had to admit, I was digging this last hurrah already.

Crush was located on Sunset Boulevard between Highland and Vine, in a black, square building set between a posh Italian restaurant and a women's boutique that specialized in pumps in size 11 and up. A single blue neon sign above the door was the only indication anything interesting lay within. That is, if you didn't count the line of women in tiny skirts and guys in skinny jeans spanning the side of the building, hopefully eyeing the door. Guarding the unassuming entrance stood a guy who looked like a heavyweight champ, a pair of black sunglasses over his eyes despite the absence of sunlight.

Luckily, being that Dana and her plus one were on the list, we marched straight to the front of the line and were let in immediately. I thanked the gods for small favors. My shoes were already starting to bite into my feet as we entered the noisy room. In all honesty four-inch, pale pink, patent leather pumps probably weren't the most practical choice for when With Bump, but, my like my fav T, they were on the list of things I was not willing to give up, pain or no pain. Especially this pair. They were part of my new spring collection I was calling "Heaven in Heels." The entire collection was done in soft, ethereal colors, and I was just three shoes away from completing it. With any luck, they would be walking the runways in New York in a matter weeks, and hitting exclusive boutiques everywhere in just a few short months.

At Dana's suggestion, I had matched my Maddie originals with a pair of cropped, black stretch pants and a long sequined tank that used to be a dress, but with the basketball protruding from my mid-section, was now more of a long shirt. But the overall effect was sparkly and cute, and if you saw me from the back, you could hardly tell I'd put on fifteen pounds.

Dana, on the other hand, looked like she'd come right from the set of one of her Lover Girl cosmetics shoots. She was in a tight, red mini-dress and tall, spikey red heels, and she wore a pair of silver earrings that dangled all the way down to her shoulders. I sighed watching heads (both male and female) turn her way as we entered the club. Oh, to be slim, hot, and un-bloated again.

"Isn't this place great?" Dana yelled to me above the pounding bass.

I nodded. "Great," I agreed, meaning it.

The interior of the club more than made up for the lackluster exterior. Plush red velvet lined the walls, pairing with shiny chrome fixtures and pendant lights. One large glass bar sat in the center of the room, packed two and three deep as people jockeyed to get the attention of the dozen bartenders in tight black shirts behind it. A pair of staircases snaked along the two opposite walls, leading up to a second floor where a DJ was playing music at top volume, spinning remixes of pop songs while bright blue, red, and green lights flashed across a crowded dance floor.

I had to admit, it looked like Ricky's financial advisor was a good one. The place was packed. On the dance floor dozens of wanna-be starlets crushed up against each other as VIP's looked on from private booths lining the walls. I could only imagine how much Ricky was making off this place, even if he was only making it off one-sixteenth of it.

"Let's get a drink," Dana said, grabbing me by the hand and threading her way to the far side of the bar where there

seemed to be a small gap in the crowd waiting for drinks. After a minimum of elbowing, we finally made it to the front.

“What can I get you ladies?” yelled a bartender that was pierced in about fifteen different places. That I could see.

“Pom-tini,” Dana yelled back over the noise.

“And a cranberry juice,” I reluctantly added, really thinking a Pom-tini fit the atmosphere perfectly.

He nodded, then grabbed a couple of glasses.

“Excuse me,” I heard behind me.

I swiveled to find a girl with long dark hair wearing a lot of eye make-up and very little dress, scowling at me. Her feet were encased in black, satin pumps with heels that ended in deadly looking silver spikes, making her tower over my 5' 1½" frame. Behind her a redhead in an equally tiny dress, hers with a fashionable one-shoulder strap, and equally high heels did an equally ugly mirror image of the scowl thing.

“I'm trying to get a drink, here?” Dark-haired Girl said, her voice doing a bored-slash-annoyed thing.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, trying to shimmy to the left a bit in the tight space. “I'm just waiting for my cranberry juice.”

The girl did an exaggerated sigh, throwing her long hair over one pale shoulder, and she and her friend tried to squeeze past me. Which was a losing battle. The bar was packed with bodies, and there was nowhere left for me to get out of the way.

“I'm sorry, it's just really busy here-” I started.

But the girl ignored me, turning to her friend. And even through the crowded club I could hear her pseudo whisper, “Freaking whale's blocking the whole bar.”

I froze, feeling steam gather between my ears. “What did you just say?”

“What?” she asked, blinking at me in mock innocence.

“Did you just call me a whale?”

“Did I?” she asked, still playing dumb.

“Yes. You called me a whale.”

She shrugged. “Well, you’re taking up way too much room, and you’re not even drinking,” she said, waving a manicured finger at me. “That is, like, way not cool.”

“Uh oh,” I vaguely heard Dana say beside me. But my full being was focused on Skinny Bitch Chick at the moment.

I clenched my teeth together. “For your information, I *am* drinking. A cranberry juice. So there.”

She rolled her eyes at me. “Whatever, Shamu.”

For a full second the world turned red, my face was filled with lava, and my tongue got stuck somewhere between my throat and my toes.

“*What* did you just call me,” I hissed through my teeth, feeling all three tons of my weight clenching for a fight.

“Maddie,” I heard Dana behind me. I felt her hand on my arm, tugging me in the opposite direction. “Honey, let’s just go.”

“I think this stick figure just called me a whale,” I said. “I’m gonna kill her. I’m gonna sit on her. I’ll suffocate her,” I yelled even as I felt Dana drag me away from the bar. “How do you like that, Stick Figure? Ever been suffocated by a whale before?!”

Skinny Bitch Chick just shrugged again, sent me a look that said I was clearly the pathetic one, and slipped her emaciated little self toward the bar.

“You okay?” Dana asked, handing me my cranberry juice.

“Did you hear her? Did you hear what she called me?”

Dana nodded. “She’s a twit. Ignore it.”

Easy for her to say. She was still a size two. I sipped at my cranberry juice, willing the cool drink to cool me down even as I watched the Skinny Bitch walk triumphantly away from the bar, a red and blue cocktail in one hand and her equally smug sidekick a step behind.

“Come on,” Dana said, watching my eye line nervously. “She’s not worth spoiling our evening over. Let’s go dance.”

Normally The Bump and dancing don't mix well, but considering the anger still seething through me, I had some extra energy to burn off, so I let Dana lead me up a flight of stairs to the main dance floor.

* * *

As with downstairs, up on the dance floor it felt like everyone in Hollywood was at Crush. At least everyone who was anyone. We spotted a couple of Kardashians drinking in the corner, a couple of Disney Channel faux-teens dancing near the DJ, and a couple of current *Dancing with the Stars* contestants trying to tango to a Madonna re-mix. And along with Hollywood's elite were a few non-elite's that Dana and I recognized as well. Namely a slim, Hispanic guy in zebra printed, vinyl Daisy-Dukes and a red mesh tank with a boy toy in one hand and a martini in the other.

He waved the moment he saw us, wiggling his plastic clad butt our way. "Maddie, dahling, what are you doing here?" he gasped in an accent that was 50% Valley Girl and 50% San Francisco.

Marco worked as the receptionist at my step-father, Fernando's, salon while cultivating his budding career as a party planner. He was known for wearing more eyeliner than Lady Gaga, owning more pairs of leather pants than any other man (or woman) on the west coast, and having enough drama-queen in him to single handedly keep Broadway in business for the next decade. His current look included dying his hair bright yellow and drawing in a large, black beauty mark on his cheek, just above the cheekbone.

I greeted him with a couple of air kisses, before answering his question. "Dana's boyfriend is a part owner of the place."

"Fabu, honey!" Marco exclaimed, giving Dana a shoulder bump before he turned back to me. "But what I

meant was what are *you* doing *here*? You know... in your *condition*?" he asked, pseudo whispering the last word as if saying it out loud might suddenly make pregnancy a catching disease.

"I'm having a good time," I hissed.

He scrunched up his nose. "Is that allowed when you're... you know?"

"I'm pregnant, not dead," I shot back.

Marco threw his hands up in surrender. "Okay, geeze, sorry for asking." He turned to Dana. "The hormones are making her a little touchy, no?"

"Who's your friend?" Dana asked, wisely changing the subject lest she need to pull the hormonal woman off another unsuspecting skinny person that night.

Marco's face brightened up immediately. "This," he said gesturing to the boy toy, "is Gunnar."

Gunnar was tall, blonde, tanned, and built like he'd just escaped from the set of *Baywatch*.

"Nice to meet you," Dana said.

Gunnar flashed a bright white smile at her and nodded.

"Gunnar's Norwegian," Marco said. "He doesn't speak a word of English. Isn't that precious?"

Gunnar smiled and nodded again.

I nodded back and did a universal "hello" wave. "He doesn't understand any English either?" I asked.

Marco shook his head, beaming. "None. He's an exchange student staying with your mom and Fernando," Marco explained. "They asked me to show him around. Some days, I love my job." He sighed, eyeing Gunnar's biceps.

"Well, it's nice to meet you, Gunnar," I told his blank expression. "But I think I have to go find the ladies' room. Cranberry juice overload."

Dana looked down at my glass. "But you only took a couple sips."

My turn to sigh. “I know. Peeing has become my hobby lately. You dance, I’ll catch up to you,” I told her, heading back toward the stairs.

It took a good twenty minutes to shove back through the crowded club again before I finally reached a door near the back with a little blue stick figure in a dress pasted on it signaling my Mecca. I quickly pushed through, instantly assaulted by the scents of hairspray, body spray, and something else that was lightly less aromatic. Three young, annoyingly slim, and fashionably dressed so-used-to-be-me women stood at the mirror primping, while two stalls sat behind them. Even in here the noise from the DJ was still deafening as I bent down and tilted my head under the stall doors, trying to peek for tell-tale feet. Just my luck, a pair of stilettos stared back at me under the first door. Next to a pair of loafers. I heard a moan from behind the metal door and it didn’t take much imagination to realize what was going on in there. I think I blushed as I moved on to the second stall, and did a repeat.

Again, shoes. This time black, satin with tall, metal spiked heels. Great. Bitch Chick was in the second stall. Just my luck.

I crossed my legs, leaned against the hand dryer, and waited. And waited.

And waited.

Three minutes into it, I thought I was going to explode.

“Um, you going to be long in there?” I called out.

No response.

“There’s a pregnant woman out here about to burst,” I warned.

Again, nothing.

I moved to bang on the door with my fist, but the second my hand made contact, the door swung open.

And that’s when, for the first time in five months, peeing dropped to number two on my priority list.

Sitting inside the stall, slumped backward on the toilet seat was the dark-haired girl I'd had words with earlier. And while she wasn't doing what one might think a person in a toilet stall would be doing, it was clear she was not going to be getting up any time soon. Her head lulled to one side, a trickle of blood dripped down the front of her dress, and her eyes stared at the ceiling, wide and unseeing. And totally dead.

Chapter Three

Had the music not been so loud, it's possible I might have heard myself scream. As it was, the first sign I had that I was freaking out was a wave of nausea and a swaying of the room in front of my eyes. I blinked, took in a deep breath, willed my stomach contents to stay put as I grabbed onto the side of the stall, then took another deep breath.

Once I was pretty sure I remembered the mechanics of breathing again, I tried to force some logical thought into my brain.

Here's the thing: I'm ashamed to admit this is not the first dead body that I've found. Through no fault of my own, I seem to be some kind of dead person magnet. In fact, that's how I originally met my husband, the homicide detective. I'd like to think it's just bad luck on my part, but the truth is my dead-body-finding luck is beyond bad. It's downright disastrous.

I gingerly reached into the stall and put one finger to the side of Bitch Chick's neck to feel for a pulse. Her skin was still warm but had a distinctly rubbery feel that gave me a serious case of the heebie-jeebies. Not surprisingly, no blood pulsed there.

I pulled my hand back and instinctively wiped it on the seat of my pants to get rid of the dead person cooties. Yep, she was definitely gone. I mentally debated between calling the cops and grabbing the attention of one of the burly security guys Crush had roaming the floor. Considering calling the cops probably entailed lots of hanging out in the bathroom with a dead woman while on hold with 911, I went with option two.

I shut the stall door, said a silent prayer that no one else stumbled in here in the next two minutes, and backed out of the restroom.

The strobe lights and lasers from the dance floor immediately assaulted my eyes as I scanned the crowd for one of the guys in a black t-shirts with "security" printed on the back. I finally found one near a grouping of tables to the right and shoved my way through the crowds toward him.

"Dead girl," I panted as I reached his side, realizing I was out of breath.

The security guy squinted down at me. He was at least a foot taller than I was, at least a hundred pounds heavier (which was saying something, given my current condition), and his skin was two shades darker. He had intimidating bad-ass written all over him.

"What are you talking about, girl?" he asked.

I paused, took in a deep breath, willed my heart to slow down a couple of hundred beats per minute. "In the women's restroom. There's a dead body."

"You high?" he asked, his eyes narrowing further as he checked my pupils.

I shook my head so hard blonde hair whipped my cheeks. “No. I swear. Go look. She’s really dead,” I managed in a choppy breath.

He stared at me for another beat, still not convinced I was for real. Then finally said, “Show me.”

While going back in there was the last thing I wanted to do, I was left with little choice. So I did, leading him toward the restroom. There was still a crush of girls primping at the mirrors, though thankfully Pumps and Loafers had finished their business, leaving one stall empty. I pointed with a noticeably shaky hand at the other one.

“In there,” I said, hating how high and squeaky my voice was.

Security Guy knocked on the stall door. But, just as it had for me, it swung open before anyone could respond. Not that anyone in there *could* respond. I gulped back a wave of nausea again, looking away.

Security Guy was silent for a moment, his face unreadable as he stared into the stall. Then he finally said, “Oh yeah. She’s definitely dead.”

* * *

Forty minutes later I had finally relieved myself (in the men’s room), the strobe lights were off, the lasers gone, the DJ’s station silent, and the crowd assembled in hushed groups of three and four as uniformed officers questioned potential witnesses. Including yours truly. Dana, Marco, the silent Gunnar and I were all slumped in a booth near the back, awaiting round two of questions as officers huddled near the door to the ladies’ room, whispering, pointing, calling in higher ranking detectives to do the dirty work.

One of whom I unfortunately recognized immediately.

“Uh oh,” Dana said her eyes honing in on him as she voiced my thoughts exactly. “Isn’t that...”

“Yep.” I gulped down a ball of dread.

“You know what?” Marco said, spotting him too. “I think I’m just gonna go use the little boys’ room...” he trailed off, sliding out of the booth, Dana and Gunnar a quick step behind him.

Traitors. Though, as I watched the reason for their quick getaway spot me, scowl, then make purposeful strides toward my booth, I kinda didn’t blame them. I’d flee if I could, too.

He was tall and built like a boxer – all tight muscle and tough attitude. A faint scar ran through his left eyebrow, a black panther tattoo snaked down his left bicep, and his eyes were a deep, dark brown, so intense they were almost black as they bore down on me.

I cleared my throat and did a little one finger wave his direction. “Hi, honey.”

My husband did not wave back. No smile, no hint of amusement whatsoever. In his defense, I guess finding your wife at your crime scene wasn’t every detective’s dream. But, in *my* defense, you’d think he’d be used to it by now.

I cleared my throat again and shifted nervously in my seat.

Ramirez crossed his arms over his chest. He looked from me to the yellow tape being stretched across the ladies’ room door. Back to me. Then he slowly shook his head.

“Lucy, you got some ‘splainin’ to do. *Again.*”

I gulped. No kidding.

“Look, it wasn’t my fault,” I protested. “I just had to pee.”

“You always have to pee. You don’t *always* find dead bodies.”

“I’d like you to remember that statement in the future.”

He shot me a dark look. “Just tell me what happened, Springer.”

Ouch. Last name. He was serious. I shifted again, then spilled it in the best so-not-my-fault way I could, telling him how I'd encountered Skinny Bitch Chick in the ladies' room.

When I was done he gave me a long, hard stare. "What on earth possessed you to take our unborn baby to a club in the first place?" he finally said.

I blinked at him. "Excuse me, last time I checked this was still *my* body."

"Carrying *our* baby."

"Well for another four months she goes where I go, and if I want to go to a club, I'm going. Besides, it's a club not a shooting range. What danger could she possibly be in?"

"Besides his mother getting in an altercation with a woman just before she's murdered?"

I bit my lip. "Oh. You heard about that, huh?"

He nodded. "Oh yeah. I heard. Apparently witnesses said you threatened to kill her? To suffocate her to death?"

"She called me fat!" I protested.

Ramirez closed his eyes. He did a silent two count, and I could see him employing a couple of those deep Lamaze breaths I'd been learning.

"Let's get back to the body," he finally said, opening his eyes again. "You said you found her in the restroom, correct?"

I nodded. "She was in a stall."

"Who else was in the restroom at the time?" he asked.

I scrunched my nose up, trying to remember specifics. "There were some girls in front of the mirror, but they were just hanging out there. And there was a couple getting busy in the stall next door."

The corner of Ramirez's lip quirked up. "'Getting busy'?"

I felt myself blush. "Doing... you know. Anyway, no, I didn't see anyone fleeing the scene with a knife in hand." I paused. "Or a gun?" I asked, realizing I wasn't exactly sure

how Bitch Chick had met her demise. Admittedly, I hadn't done a thorough examination of the body in the stall.

Ramirez shook his head. "No evidence of a gunshot so far."

"How did she die then?" I asked.

Ramirez looked past me to the crime scene. "We'll have to wait for the M.E.'s report to be sure. But it looks like exsanguination."

"She bled to death?" I clarified.

Ramirez nodded.

I felt a frown pull between my brows. "But there didn't seem to be *that* much blood," I pointed out, remembering the thin trickle I'd seen earlier. "I mean, I saw a little on her dress, but not much."

He nodded. "I know. We're looking into it. It's possible she was killed elsewhere then dumped here."

I felt my frown deepen. Sure, that might have been possible... but only half an hour earlier she'd been at the bar insulting me. That didn't leave a lot of time for the killer to rush her somewhere else, bleed her to death, then rush her body back.

"What makes you think she bled to death?" I asked, wondering if maybe their theory had some holes in it.

Ramirez pursed his lips. "There were lacerations on her neck."

"Lacerations?" I asked. "Like, cuts? Stab wounds?"

He frowned. "Sort of. More like puncture wounds."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Puncture wounds. On her neck. How many?"

Ramirez cleared his throat. "Two of them."

"Wait," I said, holding up a hand. "Are you telling me that she has bite marks on her neck?"

Ramirez's mouth took on a pinched look. "*Puncture* wounds."

"Holy shazbah, she was killed by a vampire bite?"

Ramirez shot me a look. “That’s it. No more *Moonlight* for you, Springer.”

“But you just said she was drained of blood.”

“She bled out. I didn’t say she was drained.”

“And she had bite marks.”

“*Puncture* wounds. And beyond that, I’m waiting for the M.E.’s report before speculating further on how or why the marks are on her neck. And,” he added giving me a stern look, “I suggest you not speculate either.”

Right. Only, how could I not? Pale skin, long black hair, bite marks, and death by blood sucking. It all added up to one thing as far as I was concerned.

Death by vampire.

* * *

“No way! Skinny Bitch Chick was a vampire?” Marco gaped at me across my kitchen table the next morning, almost spilling his mug of coffee.

I shifted in my seat. “I’m not sure we should continue calling her that now that she’s dead. And, no, she wasn’t a vampire, she was *bitten* by a vampire.”

“Lord have mercy, this is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to me,” Marco said. “Real life *Moonlight* hotties walking among us.” He practically drooled at the thought.

Dana scoffed. “Come on. You don’t really believe the vampire thing, do you?”

Marco shrugged. “A boy can dream,” he answered.

I shook my head. “No, I don’t really believe there are vampires roaming among us. But here’s the thing: even if there is no such thing as a vampire, someone clearly tried to make it *look* like she was bitten by a vampire. Bite marks, blood drained. Someone either thinks they are a vampire or wants us to think they are.”

“What do we know about Bit-” Marco paused, catching himself just in time. “About the victim?” he amended.

“Her name is Alexa Weston,” I supplied, rattling off the stats I’d dragged out of Ramirez last night. “She’s twenty-four, lives in Burbank, no record.”

“You just described half the women in this town,” Marco pointed out, sipping at his cup. Then he made a face, scrunching his nose and pursing his lips. “Honey, what is this stuff?” he asked me.

“Um, coffee?” I answered.

“You call this coffee? Mads, my baby bottle had stronger stuff than this in it.”

“Sorry. I’m not supposed to have caffeine because of...” I gestured down to *The Bump*.

“So the rest of us have to suffer, too?” Marco whined, pushing his cup away.

“Well I just hope,” Dana jumped in, “that Ramirez finds the killer - immortal or otherwise,” she said shooting a look Marco’s way, “quickly, and this can all just go away. Do you know what this has done to Crush?”

I shook my head.

“Ricky told me that they’re closed until further notice. They’re losing money like crazy every day that the doors are closed. Not only that, but a club closes down for a week in this town, and no one will remember it again.”

Marco waved her off. “Sure they will. Someone was *killed* there.”

“Great. I can only imagine what that will do to sales.”

“It’s Hollywood, honey. Every vampire wanna-be in town is going to be flocking to it hoping to get the bite,” he argued.

Dana shot him a look. “Or it will go under because no investors will have anything to do with it, and there goes Ricky’s slowing down. He’ll be out of town filming more *Moonlight* movies.” She grimaced. “With Ava.”

“Come on. She can’t be that bad,” I jumped in.

“She posed nude for *Playboy* last week.”

“I stand corrected.”

Dana pouted again.

“Well, then we just need to make sure this case gets solved quickly,” Marco decided, patting Dana sympathetically on the arm.

“I’m sure Ramirez is on it,” I said. In fact, he’d been so on it that he’d come home only to change clothes and slip back out into the night again. A fact that had left me mildly disappointed, as I’d kinda hoped we could do a little under-the-covers making up after the not-so-fabulous encounter at Crush. Unfortunately, as I well knew when Ramirez had a case, he had a one track mind. Sleep, food, and wife fell out of the equation faster than you could say “homicide.”

But Marco shook his head. “Sure, he’s all over the fingerprints and DNA and witnesses. But what about the vampire angle? Is Ramirez really investigating that?”

I bit my lip. Not likely. In fact, he seemed pretty defiant that there was no angle. “I’m not sure he’s really convinced about the vampire thing...”

“Right,” Marco said. “But you said so yourself that someone went through some trouble to make it look like a vampire death. I’d say that makes it a pretty relevant angle.”

I had to admit, I agreed.

“And who better,” Marco went on, “to track down a vampire killer than us? I mean, how many times have you seen *Moonlight*?”

“Seven,” I admitted. “This week.”

He turned to Dana. “You?”

“Way too many,” she answered rolling her eyes.

“I rest my case,” Marco said. “We are totally vampire experts.”

“Well, I guess it wouldn’t hurt to ask a few questions...” I hedged.

Famous last words.

Marco squealed and clapped his hands. “Ohmigod, I’ve got the perfect pink trench coat for vampire slaying. I’ve always wanted to go Buffy all over some evil undead hottie!”

I rolled my eyes. I hoped for all our sakes that Ramirez was making more headway.