

Vampire Darcy's Desire

Prologue

She was beautiful in all her innocence, much more beautiful than the infamous Mrs. Younge, his latest minion, who arranged this encounter and waited for him in the adjoining woods. Long, thick lashes rested on the rise of her high cheekbones, and although a bit mussed, the golden tresses spread out across her pillow like the sun's rays. A deep sigh brought his attention to her lips, and for a moment he thought her awake, but Georgiana Darcy slept soundly thanks to his spellbinding charm. She was the embodiment of his beloved Ellender.

One candle lit the room, casting shadows, which danced in the corners. There was nothing mediocre about her chamber—rich tapestries and elegant sculpting. “Only the best for the Darcys,” he mumbled as he moved forward to stand over her.

With a unique swagger not found in many of his kind, he glided to the bed's edge. Unable to hide his anger and his contempt, a frown furrowed his brow, and a flash of fire transformed his vision. A torrent of images racked his soul—pictures of blood—of betrayal—of revenge. “You will do quite well, my Dear,” he whispered. “I will enjoy spending an eternity with you.” He lightly twisted one of her curls around his finger. “This is for the suffering I have endured at the Darcys' hands.”

Slowly, he leaned over her, feeling the blood rush through her veins—hard, dark eyes, seeking the indentation of her neck—relishing a feeling of expectancy—ringing silence broken only by his breathing.

Fully engulfed in his desire, when the door swung open, it took several seconds before he realized an intruder discovered his inexplicable need for her. “Move away from her, Wickham,” the tall, dark figure ordered as he stepped carefully into the room. “You will not bring your death and decay into my household.”

“You brought it into mine, Darcy.” Wickham stood, trying to judge his next move. He knew in an out-and-out fight to the end, the man before him stood no chance of survival, but sensing no supernatural fear from the intruder, Wickham questioned what else this confrontation held. Absent of all volition, he hesitated only a moment before moving in a swirling whirlwind to an advantageous point, but the man framed in the doorway's light did not move.

A dramatic black eyebrow lifted quizzically. “You forget, Wickham, you and I already share the same characteristics. You cannot infect what is already infected. I will not follow you into the darkness nor will I allow you to convert my sister. This madness ends—the curse—the wicked allure will die with us.” His voice's deep rumbled filled the room, and a gleam entered his ice blue eyes, intensified by his opponent's muteness.

Wickham glowered. “I have not given up taking my fill of beautiful young ladies.” A squall-like eruption pushed Wickham forward, arms extended to the side, sending Darcy rolling along the floor, scrambling to avoid the chasm—death's abhorrent shudder. “I am coming for you, Darcy,” the voice boomed through the room as cold blasts flew from sinewy hands, reminiscent of the grave.

Sucking noises filled Fitzwilliam Darcy's senses, and he realized the tall, pale form loomed over him in an infuriating counterattack. Sliding against the far wall, it was all Darcy could do to bite back a scream, but he ducked first and came up, arm flung overhead, preparing to unload. “Now, Wickham,” he hissed, and then he released it.

A vial, carrying clear liquid, tumbled end-over-end, splitting the silence surrounding them—each figure moving in slow motion, playing out their parts in a swirling tableau.

And then the stopper exploded, and the transparent fluid rained down on George Wickham's apparition. An agonized scream—full of old blood and dark radiance—filled the room. The shadow hissed in the moonlight, and the odor of burning flesh wafted over them.

Fitzwilliam Darcy's smile turned up the corners of his mouth. "Holy water," he whispered in affirmation.

"You will rot in hell!" Wickham threatened. "I will see those you love ruined—see them lick the blood from your body. Sharp fangs jutting from their mouths—smelling of death and decay—ghoulish nightmares!" He started forward again, but Darcy anticipated the move. Pulling the double crucifixes from his pocket, he met Wickham's intent with one of his own. "Iron," he mocked, unfurling the chain and reaching out to his enemy.

Panic showed in Wickham's fever-filled eyes as he backed away from the Trinity's symbol, stumbling—recoiling—and suddenly, he was gone, a grey shadow moving across the lawn, a highly combustible howl billowing upon the breeze in his retreat.

Darcy stood motionless for several long minutes, needing to clear his head. He took a slow breath, trying to control his anger, and then he smelled it—smoke. Against his better judgment, he rushed to the bedchamber's open door. "Wickham!" he cursed. The house he rented in Ramsgate heated with a fiery blaze, started at three separate entry points on the bottom floor. Thick smoke, fueled by heavy draperies and fine upholstered furniture, rolled from the doorways of the lower rooms and rose in a black drape to cover the stairway. Acrid smoke drifted his way. Immediately, he turned toward the body still reclining on the bed where George Wickham left her.

"Georgiana!" he called in a panic as he scooped her into his arms and pulled his sister tight to his chest. Darcy grabbed a towel on the washstand and dipped it into the tepid water she used earlier. He draped the wet towel over her head and face, repeating the procedure for himself. Then he made his way to the top of the stairs. Thick smoke covered the lower half of the rise. He took a deep breath and lunged forward.

Surprisingly, a pocket of air existed once he stumbled his way to the bottom of the steps. He felt Georgiana slipping from his grip as he fought his way past flaming lips, consuming doorways along the corridor. Using the last of his strength to lift her to him again, Darcy braced his shoulders along the wall leading to the servant's entrance, the only door not blocked by flames. Forcibly, he shoved his way into the night—into the shelter of the open air. Heaving from the weight of her—from the fear—from the effort—from the deadly murk filling the night sky, he staggered forward, trying to get away.

When the explosion hit, he was far enough from the house to escape the brunt of the debris, but not far enough to go unscathed. Splintered doorways and shards of glass flew like deadly projectiles, many of them lodging in his arms and legs and back, but Darcy kept moving, trying to get his precious Georgiana to safety. Finally, he collapsed to his knees, laying her gently on the dewy grass before uncovering her face.

"Georgie," he pleaded as he patted her hands and face. Over a few elongated moments, he prayed, and then she caught a deep breath and began to cough uncontrollably. A soft moan told him she was well; only then did Fitzwilliam Darcy allow the exhaustion to overtake him, collapsing—face first—into the dirt.

"Mr. Darcy!" his valet, Henry Sheffield called as he rushed to his employer. Covered with ashes, his clothes, torn and disheveled, Darcy lay in a defeated heap upon the soft earth.

Georgiana righted herself and crawled to where he lay. "Fitzwilliam," she begged between fits of coughing. "Oh, please . . . please . . . talk to me."

“He is hurt, Miss Darcy,” Henry told her as he jerked off his coat and wrapped it around her light muslin gown.

“Help him,” she pressed.

By that time, footmen and neighbors rushed forward carrying lamps. Mr. Phelps, the owner of the house to the left, examined Darcy’s body. “We should not turn him; he has several lacerations—no telling what might be in the wounds.” As the man spoke, Darcy’s body arched, seeking air before choking on the same gulping breath. “Georgie,” he managed to say between barking gasps.

“I am here,” she assured him, draping her soot-covered arm over his shoulder.

Mr. Phelps took charge. “Lift him to his feet, and be careful about it,” he ordered. “Jemmy, go for the doctor. You others help Mr. Darcy to my house.”

Two footmen shoved themselves under his arms, arranging them about their shoulders and supporting his weight as they nearly dragged him towards Phelps’s open door. Townspeople scrambled to the bucket brigades to put out the fire. Darcy’s head hung low, trying to recover his senses as the servants struggled under his weight. Finally, he forced his gaze towards the gathering crowd across the street. Then, instinctively, his eyes fell on George Wickham, a figure wrapped in a long, black cape and sporting a beaver. With a wry smile and a nearly imperceptible salute, the usurer disappeared into the crowd.

Darcy could do nothing more tonight; he stopped Wickham this time; he was lucky. Could he do again? Could he kill the man who plagued his family? “Come, Georgiana,” he urged, demanding his body to relax into his rescuers’ arms. Phelps’s town house and momentary safety awaited.