

3. Dominic



1. n "...Dominic doesn't seem to be sticking around, and to be honest, I don't want to either."
2. n "But he's already close to rounding the corner, so I have to hurry if I want to catch him—!"
3. mcp "\"Some other time, maybe! Bye-bye!\\""
4. n "Calling out nervously to the approaching Rex, I turn to dash after Dominic's disappearing figure."
5. n "By the time I make it out of the alleyway, he's already heading down the sidewalk."
6. n "When I jog up to his side, Dominic casts me a curious, skeptical glance."
7. mcp "\"Phew...\\""
8. mcp "\"Hey. Dominic, right?\\""
9. mcp "\"I'm [mc], in case you didn't hear my name earlier.\\""
10. n "I attempt to start a conversation as I walk beside him, but Dominic gives no reply."
11. mcp "\"...Where are you heading off to? It was pretty obvious you didn't want to get involved back there.\\""
12. dp "\"...\\""
13. n "With his hands stuffed in his pockets, Dominic hesitates briefly."
14. dp "\"...I'm going to have a smoke.\\""
15. mcp "\"...\\""
16. n "His blunt reply catches me off guard."

17. n "He sounds completely apathetic, like he doesn't care one bit about the other vampires
or Isaac and Luka..."
18. mc "\"Ah, right. Could I come with you, then?\""
19. mc "\"I have a lot of questions about all this, and I trust you the most out of all the guys
I've met so far.\""
20. mc "\"Right... Well, do you mind if I tag along?\""
21. mc "\"There's a few questions I'd really like to ask, and you seem to be the only one sane
enough to answer them.\""
22. n "After my tentative words, Dominic slows his pace and comes to a halt."
23. n "He turns to look at me, his eyes widening a little."
24. n "—I didn't say anything weird, did I? {w}For whatever reason, he seems surprised."
25. d "\"...\""
26. n "Finally, he just shrugs his broad shoulders and starts walking down the street again."
27. n "...I'll choose to interpret that as \"sure, whatever\" and not \"go away.\""
28. n "Without any further attempts at conversation, I follow Dominic along a few different
roads, heading towards an older part of the city."
29. n "Around fifteen minutes later, we come to an old warehouse.{w}Its peeling paint and
decaying exterior make it look like it's been abandoned for some time."

30. n "Dominic ducks under a piece of rotting paneling, disappearing into the dark interior,
and I quickly head after him."
31. n "—At last, after going down a few flights of stairs, we emerge into an open space that's
dimly lit by fluorescent lights."
32. mcp "\"The electricity's on... Wow, do people actually still use this place?\""
33. dp "\"...Seems like it.\""
34. n "Offering that insightful remark, Dominic leans back against the wall and slides down
onto the floor."
35. n "He pulls a pack of cigarettes and a lighter out of his pocket, flicking the latter until a
tiny flame sparks up."
36. n "After lighting his smoke, he takes a long pull from it, then blows out a thin gray cloud."
37. dp "\"...Are you gonna sit down?\""
38. n "Dominic raises an eyebrow at me, jerking his chin towards the floor."
39. mcp "\"O-oh, yeah. Sorry.\""
40. n "I hesitantly lower myself down beside him, pulling my knees up to my chest."
41. mcp "\"Don't mind if I do.\""
42. n "With a slightly nervous chuckle, I lower myself down beside him, crossing my legs."

43. n "This feels so awkward – {w}and I have absolutely no clue what's going through
Dominic's head right now."
44. n "Well, I'll just get to the point. I don't think there's any use in making small talk with this
guy."
45. mcp "\"So... If I'm not crazy, and everything that happened tonight was actually real,
then...\""
46. mcp "\"...You're a vampire?\""
47. d "\"...\""
48. n "Dominic stiffly nods."
49. mcp "\"There are... more of them, then?\""
50. mcp "\"Vampires? In San Fran?\""
51. n "He nods again, exhaling another small stream of smoke."
52. n "There's no change in his expression, and he just watches me with a look of mild
curiosity."
53. mcp "\"...\""
54. n "...I pause and bite my lower lip, at a loss for what to make of all this."
55. n "It feels like a dream, but there's no sign I'm going to wake up soon...{w} and after what
I saw tonight, I'm forced to believe something supernatural is going on."
56. n "—Damn it, I really shouldn't have gotten out of bed this morning."
57. mcp "\"That guy Rex was a vampire too, right? Why does he hate you so much?\""

58. d "\"...\""

59. n "At that, Dominic averts his eyes for a moment, grimacing slightly."

60. n "There was obviously no love lost between them, but Dominic seemed a lot less eager to fight than Rex did."

61. d "\"He's from a different clan.\""

62. n "Dominic answers in a guarded tone, his gaze hesitantly returning to my face."

63. mcp "\"Clan? Oh, right, Luka mentioned something like that...\""

64. mcp "\"Rex is from a different one than you?\""

65. d "\"Yeah. He's Helgen. I'm... with Seirei.\""

66. n "There's a small hint of disgust in his voice, and his face darkens a little."

67. d "\"He thinks the clans are like family or something. That they're important.\""

68. d "\"...Guess he doesn't see what a joke it all is.\""

69. mcp "\"So you're not into the whole clan thing, huh.\""

70. mcp "\"I get that. I always hated fraternities and shit back in college.\""

71. d "\"...\""

72. n "My halfhearted joke makes Dominic crack a little smile, which softens the shadows on his face."

73. n "...When I look at his heavily-lidded eyes, I don't see anything that resembles a monster."
74. n "If someone had told me he was a vampire this morning, I would've called them crazy."
75. n "He's quiet and awkward, sure, but he's not scary at all when he smiles like that."
76. mcp "\"Hey...\\""
77. mcp "\"Thanks for saving me earlier, by the way. Back when Rex had me against the wall.\\""
78. mcp "\"Ah, yeah, before I forget...\\""
79. mcp "\"I really appreciate you saving me back there with Rex. You seemed like some kind of superhero, coming to my rescue just in the nick of time.\\""
80. n "I shiver as my mind flashes back to the terrifying sight of those fangs, right before they plunged into my neck."
81. dp "\"...It's fine. I was just passing through.\\""
82. n "He evasively turns his head away from me, taking another pull from his cigarette and avoiding my gaze."
83. n "...Is it my imagination, or does he look kind of embarrassed?"
84. extend "No, that can't be right."
85. mcp "\"Talk about a crazy string of coincidences, though. I can't believe you know Isaac and Luka, too.\\""

86. dp "\"...\""

87. n "When I mention their names, Dominic pulls a face, grinding his cigarette down against the concrete floor."

88. d "\"I don't know {i}them.{/i} They know {i}us.{/i}\""

89. n "He grimly stares into the distance, and looks like he doesn't plan to explain further unless I ask."

90. mcp "\"You mean... they know the other vampires in the city?\""

91. d "\"Isaac does. He sells information and guns, playing both clans for money. That kid Luka's his sidekick.\""

92. d "\"You shouldn't mess around with them.\""

93. n "Dominic runs a hand through his long, messy hair, letting out a tired sigh."

94. mcp "\"...Yeah, I guess that makes sense. They don't sound like great guys, to be honest.\""

95. n "I'm not sure why, but I feel sympathy for Dominic, even though he's... {w}not human."

96. n "If I was caught up in all this craziness, I'd probably just want to escape, too. No wonder he looks so gloomy all the time."

97. d "\"Why were you out there tonight?\""

98. n "His sudden question breaks the silence, and I glance over to see him gazing at me with interest."

99. old "I was looking for you"

100. old "I was just curious..."
101. mcp "\"...If I'm honest, I think it's because I was looking for you.\""
102. d "\"...\""
103. n "He tilts his head in confusion at my response, and I awkwardly laugh."
104. mcp "\"Isaac said something about a customer of mine showing up... and I guess, subconsciously, I thought he meant you.\""
105. mcp "\"I wanted to say thanks for the generous tip, after all.\""
106. d "\"...\""
107. n "—For a moment, Dominic just stares at me with apparent surprise. {w}Had he forgotten about the tip he left...?"
108. n "Eventually, he turns his head away from me – but I can see a faint smirk briefly flicker over his mouth."
109. d "\"...It was good coffee.\""
110. n "He mutters something so quietly that I can barely make it out."
111. n "Deciding to be a little coy, I give Dominic a taste of his own medicine by offering a casual shrug."
112. mcp "\"I was just curious, that's all. Isaac told me something interesting was going to happen tonight, so I came to see for myself.\""
113. mcp "\"Boy, was that ever a mistake...\""
114. d "\"...\""

115. n "His brow knits together in a slight frown."
116. mcp "\"Except for the part where I got to see you again, that is. I was a little worried you might never come back to the diner.\""
117. d "\" ...\""
118. n "—For a moment, Dominic just stares at me with apparent surprise.{w} Did he think I'd forgotten him or something?"
119. n "Eventually, he turns his head away from me – but I can see a faint smirk briefly flicker over his mouth."
120. d "\"Yeah... it worked out.\""
121. n "He mutters something more to himself than me, and I can barely hear what he's saying."
122. mcp "\"Come again?\""
123. n "Instead of replying, though, Dominic rather abruptly pushes himself up to his feet – turning to me with a more serious expression."
124. n "He hesitates after opening his mouth, lowering his head a little."
125. d "\" ...Isaac put you in a lot of danger.\""
126. mc "\" ...\""
127. n "His slow, husky voice takes on a sharper edge all of a sudden."
128. d "\"Humans who know about us are a threat. Rex will tell the other Helgen about you.\""

129. d "\"When that happens, word'll spread fast. Someone will come after you...
probably by tomorrow night.\""
130. n "Dominic's eyes narrow, and he pauses for a long moment."
131. d "\"Until they forget you and start hunting someone else, you shouldn't be alone
in the dark.\""
132. mc "\"...\""
133. n "—His words send a cold tingle through me, and a knot curls in the pit of my
stomach."
134. n "Troy's out of town for a little while, so I can't just take off work... {w}and there's
no way I can afford a taxi every night."
135. n "And even when he gets back, who's to say they won't still be coming after me?
I can't stay inside my house forever."
136. mc "\"Maybe I should just skip town...\""
137. d "\"They'll find you before you can leave.\""
138. mc "\"Then what am I supposed to do? How can I stand a chance against —\""
139. mc "\"I'll get a gun, or a knife, or something like that. I'll find some way to defend
myself.\""
140. n "Dominic just shakes his head, letting out a long exhale."
141. d "\"That won't work.\""

142. mc "\"What do you mean it won't work? You expect me to just –\""
143. d "\"I'll help you.\""
144. mc "\"...\""
145. n "At his unexpected offer, I freeze, my mouth hanging open."
146. n "Is... {w}Is he seriously saying he'll protect me?"
147. extend " Aren't I threat to them? Shouldn't he be working against me?"
148. n "But before I can ask why he'd do something so crazy, Dominic turns his back to
me, murmuring a few last words."
149. dp "\"I'll come to the diner tomorrow.\""
150. dp "\"...Don't do anything stupid.\""
151. n "–And with that parting command, he stalks off towards the stairs, his long
strides carrying him out of sight in a few moments."
152. n "I'm left speechless, standing alone with only Dominic's discarded cigarette for
company."
153. n "The hum of dim, fluorescent lights around me is all that disrupts the dead
silence."
154. mc "\"...\""
155. n "I don't know what to think."
156. n "Dominic... I didn't do anything to deserve his help, but he's going to give it to
me anyway."

157. n "Normally I'd feel indignant, but if I've somehow made myself a target of vampires who are anything like Rex... {w}well, I'd be an idiot to refuse Dominic."
158. n "Normally I'd refuse, since it's pretty stupid to rely on a creature who sees you as food."
159. n "But if I compare Dominic to vampires like Rex, who act like wild animals...{w} well, I'd be an idiot to refuse the help."
160. n "—And, for some reason, I feel like I can trust him."
161. n "I don't know why, but there's something comforting about being with Dominic. {w}It's like having a guardian wolf, almost."
162. mc "\"Guardian wolf... Man, did I just walk out of some trashy fantasy book?\""
163. n "Muttering to myself dryly, I slip out of the warehouse, gripped by a growing fear."
164. n "All the way back to my apartment, I keep an eye out for anything lurking in the shadows."
165. n "The streets look the same as they always do, but now..."
166. n "They're starting to feel like a battleground instead of my home."
167. n "—Home sweet home."
168. n "If only I could pretend all of this was a crazy fever dream..."

169. n "If only it was that easy."
170. n "I end up tossing and turning in bed for what feels like ages, until eventually..."
171. n "The exhaustion from tonight pulls me into a deep sleep."
172. mc "\"Ngh...\""
173. n "The early afternoon sun trickles into my apartment, fighting through storm clouds to arrive on my face."
174. n "I push myself up with a yawn."
175. extend " I can't say I feel very refreshed."
176. mc "\"...\""
177. n "Those events last night, the fight between Dominic and Rex..."
178. n "...The vampires."
179. n "I was hoping it would be a dream, but —"
180. extend " it sticks too vividly in my mind, like a bad taste that won't leave my mouth."
181. mc "\"This would make for a great story to write about... except I'd definitely have an anxiety attack while writing it...\""
182. mc "\"I could mix up an amazing EP inspired by this stuff... although I'm not sure if I'd live long enough to drop it...\""

183. mc "\"But I feel like I could draw some amazing vampire shit right now... It would probably land me on the cover of a teen goth magazine, though...\""
184. n "Still half-asleep, I mumble to myself as I put on the coffee machine."
185. n "It's true, all this excitement's definitely inspired me a little – though I'm also too on edge to really channel it right now."
186. n "Dominic..."
187. n "His offer from last night still echoes in my ears."
188. n "I can't believe he really wants to help me. Maybe it's just a bad prank, and he's not going to show up tonight after all."
189. n "That would make more sense, anyway. I have a hard time believing a guy like him would just help me out of the kindness of his heart."
190. n "...But after yesterday, I really don't know {i}what{/i} to believe any more."
191. n "I manage to get some writing commissions finished up during the rest of the day, although they are sorely in need of some editing."
192. n "In the last couple hours before work, I decide to start a new little story, drawing heavily from the crazy stuff that happened last night."
193. n "I change a few details here and there, but it reads more like a diary rather than fiction."
194. n "I finish a couple of short songs for the indie game I was hired onto, but I know I'll need to go back and give them another listen when I'm more focused."

195. n "In the last couple hours before work, I decide to play around with a new track, trying to capture the essence of the tension from last night."
196. n "It ends up as some dark, trip-hoppy piece with out-of-tune guitar and grungy synths. {w}Sounds like it'd be right at home in a vampire game, at least."
197. n "I spend the rest of the day on a few commissions, my eyes glazing over a little as I color and shade in auto-pilot mode."
198. n "In the last couple hours before work, I decide to draw the new picture filling my head – a looming, shadowy figure in an alleyway."
199. n "I make sure the light is focused on the figure's bared teeth, using the memory of Rex's fangs as reference. {w}It turns out surprisingly well - almost {i}too{/i} well."
200. n "—When I get ready to leave, the sight of the darkening sky outside makes me tense."
201. n "I'd better hurry to the diner before it gets too late... and hope that Dominic keeps his word."
202. n "Luckily, nothing happens on the way to my shift, and I flick on the diner's lights with a sigh of relief."

203. mcp "\"This crap is doing a real number on my stress levels, I'll say...\""
204. n "Muttering to myself, I switch the sign to \"Open\" after a little bit of prep work,
and the night finally begins."
205. u "\"Y-yeah, I'll have, uh... just the fries, uh, yeah...\""
206. mc "\"Coming right up.\""
207. n "—Just the normal drunk customers."
208. u "\"Hey dude, can I get... an ice cream frothy... thing?\""
209. mc "\"...You mean a milkshake?\""
210. u "\"Yeah, dude, {i}milkshake!{/i} That's totally what I meant, how'd you know?\""
211. n "—Average, high-as-a-kite teenagers."
212. n "Nothing out of the ordinary... {w}not yet."
213. n "Occasionally, I glimpse a shape moving outside the diner's windows, although
it's probably just a random passerby."
214. n "...For some reason, though, I have an uneasy feeling."
215. n "It's like I'm being watched – and not in the comforting \"guardian angel\" way,
either."
216. mcp "\"...\""
217. n "At last, my shift comes to an end, but there's no sign of Dominic."

218. n "I want to head home soon, but I really don't feel safe going outside..."
219. n "If worst comes to worst, maybe I can just sleep in the diner overnight. Storage crates don't make great pillows, but they're better than coffins."
220. n "I want to head home soon, but I wish I'd brought something to defend myself with."
221. n "Even though it'd probably be useless against creatures of that speed and strength... damn it, I shouldn't have thrown my old rosary away."
222. mc "\"...!\\""
223. n "At that moment, the door swings open, and the sight of a new customer interrupts my thoughts."
224. mc "\"Hello! Welcome to the -\\""
225. mc "\"...Dominic?\\""
226. n "Sure enough, the tall and intimidating figure before me is the same one I spoke to last night."
227. n "When he sees my shocked reaction, however, Dominic's expression darkens somewhat."
228. d "\"Why do you look so surprised?\\""
229. d "\"I told you I'd come.\\""
230. n "There's a very slight, wounded hint in his voice, as if my lack of trust makes him unhappy."

231. mc "\"...I'm sorry. You were just a little late, so I was starting to get worried, that's all.\""
232. n "I mutter a reply under my breath, my cheeks growing a bit hot."
233. mc "\"Sorry. I'm a bit too jaded to believe in knights in shining armor...\""
234. mc "\"Although I guess I could make an exception for knights in baggy jackets.\""
235. n "Now I feel guilty for doubting him... even though I think it was pretty justified, all things considered."
236. d "\"Are you ready to go?\""
237. n "His eyes soften faintly after my apology, but there's still a tense look on his face."
238. n "He's probably thinking about what'll happen if we get caught by other vampires. {w}\nWell, he's not the only one who's worried."
239. mc "\"I'm ready. You want a cup of coffee or something before we leave?\""
240. mc "\"It's not exactly... blood, or anything, but...\""
241. n "Jeez, that sounded stupid. Should've just kept my mouth shut."
242. d "\"...I'm fine. Thanks.\""
243. n "Dominic gazes at me for a moment, the corners of his lips curling ever so slightly upwards."
244. n "Then, he turns towards the door, beckoning for me to follow."

245. n "After I grab my things, we head outside onto the dark street."
246. n "It's pretty deserted this time of night, so the only people on the sidewalk are
me and Dominic."
247. n "He moves at a pretty fast clip, his eyes darting around us warily, flicking
towards any kind of movement – whether it's a stray moth or a fluttering plastic bag."
248. n "I can't help but notice how close he is to my side, too. {w}His arm brushes
against mine every couple of seconds."
249. n "A little embarrassed, I shift a couple inches away, but he ends up closing the
gap again a few moments later."
250. dp "\"You're gonna fall off the sidewalk.\""
251. mcp "\"...!\""
252. n "At his amused comment, I realize I've drifted so close to the curb that I'm
almost in the street."
253. mcp "\"...\""
254. n "Well, if I move any further to the right, I'll crash into his side!"
255. mcp "\"Well, whose fault is that?\""
256. n "This guy... he's got a mean sense of humor."
257. mc "\"Ahem... So, do you have any family around San Fran?\""

258. d "\"...\""

259. n "When I try to change the subject, Dominic shoots me a sharp look."

260. n "—Yeesh, did I stumble on a touchy topic?"

261. mc "\"...You don't have to answer if you don't want to.\""

262. mc "\"I mean, it's gotta be complicated with the whole vampire thi—\""

263. mc "\"...I didn't mean to pry, sorry.\""

264. mc "\"I was just curious about what your life is like, considering you're—\""

265. d "\"East Coast.\""

266. mc "\"...?\""

267. n "He murmurs flatly, avoiding my gaze for a moment."

268. d "\"They're out on the East Coast. They... don't know where I am.\""

269. n "He sounds guilty, as if he ran away without saying anything. Did he come out
here to get away from his family, then?"

270. n "Or maybe he was just trying to protect them – like he's trying to protect me,
now."

271. old "It must be hard"

272. old "It can't be helped"

273. mc "\"You must miss them.\""

274. mc "\"I bet they're worried sick about you, if they don't already think you're
dead...\""

275. n "After a brief pause, Dominic nods."

276. n "I can't help but think he looks terribly lonely, shadows grooving deeply into his
tired features."

277. mc "\"I'm sorry. I can't really put myself in your shoes, but...\""

278. mc "\"I know it must be hard.\""

279. d "\"...\""

280. n "He offers me a faint smirk, although there's nothing happy about it."

281. d "\"...Don't see a point to self-pity.\""

282. d "\"It's just how things are, now.\""

283. mc "\"It's kind of unavoidable, isn't it?\""

284. mc "\"You wouldn't want to drag your family into a world like this.\""

285. n "After a brief pause, Dominic nods."

286. n "I can't help but think he looks terribly lonely, shadows grooving deeply into his
tired features."

287. mc "\"I guess that's part of being... being what you are. Saying goodbye to
everyone you once knew.\""

288. n "He turns his head to the side, inhaling deeply."

289. d "\"...Yeah.\""
290. d "\"Yeah, it is.\""
291. n "Dominic's eyes drift up to the light-polluted sky as we walk along, and I follow
his gaze."
292. n "There are no stars, just dark, moody clouds that look like billowing smoke."
293. dp "\"My brother's getting married soon.\""
294. mcp "\"Oh? How'd you find out?\""
295. dp "\"...Saw it in a newspaper.\""
296. n "His broad shoulders slump a little, even though his voice remains steady."
297. mcp "\"There's no way for you to go?\""
298. n "Dominic shakes his head, tightly closing his eyes."
299. dp "\"I can't face them like this.\""
300. n "...He sounds so bitter that it makes my chest hurt a little."
301. n "I have a feeling that he doesn't get any joy out of being a vampire.
{w}Whatever powers it must give, the costs are probably a lot worse."
302. mcp "\"Maybe you could phone him? Send an anonymous note?\""
303. mcp "\"... Not the same as being there, though, is it... Damn.\""

304. n "I frown, trying to think up some alternative for him, but I doubt anything replaces an in-person meeting."
305. mcp "\"If I were you, I'd just go anyway. Screw the risks.\""
306. mcp "\"They don't like you how you are now, tough luck. It's not like you can do anything about it.\""
307. n "...I realize after the words leave my mouth that I probably sounded a little insensitive.{w}\nOh well."
308. d "\"...\""
309. n "When I glance over to him, I notice Dominic watching me with a smile."
310. n "Wasn't he just brooding a second ago? Did I say something stupid again?"
311. mcp "\"—!\""
312. n "To my shock, Dominic reaches out with one of his large hands, suddenly ruffling my hair."
313. n "His fingers tousle through the strands, mussing them up playfully."
314. n "The touch of his hand is softer than I'd expect, and I can't even believe it's the same hand that was swinging punches at Rex last night..."
315. n "—He pulls back before long, though, and I hurry to smooth out my messy hair."
316. mcp "\"...What was that all about?\""
317. mcp "\"Where'd that come from? Jeez, warn a guy first.\""

318. d "\"Don't worry about it.\""
319. n "Dominic shakes his head, and his smile fades soon afterwards."
320. n "He really doesn't stay bright for longer than a few seconds, does he...{w}\nLike
the sun flickering out between clouds."
321. d "\"...You're different.\""
322. mcp "\"Huh?\""
323. n "Here he goes again, saying stuff out of the blue."
324. n "How am I supposed to keep up...?"
325. d "\"Yesterday... Rex jumped you because you had a different scent.\""
326. mcp "\"A different – scent? What do you mean?\""
327. n "Hesitating, Dominic averts his eyes to one side, narrowing them with
uncertainty."
328. d "\"It's something special... It makes your blood sweeter to us, but...\""
329. d "\"If you were turned, then...\""
330. d "\"–!\""
331. n "Dominic suddenly freezes."
332. n "I stop beside him, glancing around in confusion."
333. mcp "\"Then what...?\""
334. mcp "\"Dominic? What's going –\""

335. mcp "\"–Uah!\\""
336. n "The next second, he grabs my hand and breaks into a sprint."
337. n "Completely baffled, I run with him as fast as I can, and we dash into a nearby
alley at top speed."
338. mcp "\"Dominic! What the hell's going on?\\""
339. dp "\"Behind us.\\""
340. n "Dominic's voice growls out urgently over the sound of our footsteps."
341. mcp "\"–!\\""
342. n "When I throw a glance over my shoulder –"
343. n "There are several figures hurtling towards us, one of them on all fours."
344. u "\"Heeeey~ Where are you guys going?\\""
345. u "\"Come back!\\""
346. n "A familiar, sing-song voice calls out to us gleefully, echoing in the alleyway."
347. mcp "\"–Rex?!\\""
348. dp "\"Ignore them.\\""
349. n "My eyes go wide as I recognize the voice, but Dominic immediately grips my
hand harder."
350. rp "\"Are you guys on a date?!\\""
351. rp "\"You didn't even invite me! Hey, Dom, don't be selfish~!\\""

352. n "Rex's mocking words ring out behind us as we keep running, taking every twist and turn we can."
353. mcp "\"Ngh...\""
354. n "It's hard for me to keep up with Dominic, whose long legs and powerful body propel him forward with incredible speed."
355. rp "\"You can't get away from me, baby! I could catch that scent from miiiiles away~\""
356. rp "\"Come on, Dom, share him with us! You wanna keep him for yourself, don'tcha?\""
357. rp "\"Greedy bastard! Ahahaha!\""
358. dp "\"...\""
359. n "Dominic grits his teeth together, his eyes flashing with visible anger."
360. n "A cold sweat breaks out on my back as Rex taunts us."
361. n "Dominic... {w}No, Dominic's different from them."
362. n "He's not keeping me around for that. There's no way."
363. d "\"Quick! Inside!\""
364. mcp "\"...!\""
365. n "Suddenly, Dominic shoves me through the side door of a building."
366. n "I stumble through the darkness, but he pulls my hand to tug me further in."
367. mc "\"Where – where are we...\""

368. mc "\"...Huh?\""
369. n "The dimly-lit space we emerge into is..."
370. n "A club?"
371. dp "\"...Blend in.\""
372. n "He leans down to hiss into my ear, brushing his lips against it so that I can hear
his voice over the loud music."
373. mcp "\"...\""
374. n "Without missing a beat, Dominic guides me onto the dance floor, weaving
through the throngs of people."
375. n "I glance worriedly over my shoulder to see if Rex and the others are following,
but I can't make out anything in the dark."
376. n "—But when I turn back, I realize Dominic isn't pulling me along anymore."
377. n "Instead, he's facing me... and his blue eyes glimmer faintly in the flashing
lights."
378. mcp "\"...Dominic? Aren't we going to...\""
379. d "\"Shh.\""
380. n "...And just like that, he starts to curl his arms around my waist, tugging me
towards him."
381. mc "\"—!\""

382. n "My first reaction is to pull away, but I realize what he's doing after a few seconds."
383. n "—He wants to dance here so that the other vampires will lose our scent in the middle of all these people?"
384. n "They probably can't attack us in this place even if they do find us... {w}I guess it's a pretty smart plan."
385. mc "\"...\""
386. n "Although my cheeks start to flush a little from our sudden closeness, I hesitantly slide my arms around Dominic, grasping the fabric of his jacket."
387. n "—He's really tall."
388. n "And have his eyes always been {i}that{/i} blue? They're so clear that I can see myself in them, almost..."
389. d "\"...You have to dance, not just stare.\""
390. n "He murmurs to me, his deep voice reverberating in my ears over the heavy bass."
391. mc "\"I know that! Shut up.\""
392. n "Mumbling an angry reply, I turn my head away and start to move a little to the music, gripping Dominic tightly."

393. mc "\"Ah, yeah, sorry... just been awhile since I did this, that's all.\""
394. n "I awkwardly start to move a little with the music, avoiding Dominic's gaze."
395. n "...I feel like he's enjoying this a lot more than he should be, considering the situation."
396. n "The club is so packed with people that it's practically a zoo, but after awhile, I don't notice them as much."
397. n "My heartbeat should be slowing down now that we've stopped running, yet it's still pounding a mile a minute."
398. n "Dominic doesn't bother glancing around for the other vampires at all –"
399. extend " instead, he just watches me."
400. n "His eyes seem to glow a little in the dark, gazing at my face with an unusually intense look."
401. mcp "\"...Now who's staring?\""
402. mcp "\"You're gonna make me self-conscious, watching me like that.\""
403. mcp "\"I hope you're staring because my hair's on point, not because I look like dinner...\""
404. dp "\"...\""

405. n "My mutter is swallowed up by the music, but there's a chance Dominic heard me, because his lips curl into a sly grin."
406. n "The tips of his fangs glimmer faintly when they catch the light, simultaneously deadly and beautiful."
407. n "—Normally, I hate clubs, but I'd be lying if I said this wasn't sort of fun."
408. n "There's a chance Rex and the others are inside, watching us, but..."
409. n "It's hard for me to think about that when Dominic squeezes my hips, pressing against me to the beat of the music."
410. n "...But really, how the hell did this turn out to be some kind of weird date?"
411. n "It really doesn't feel like we're just acting to throw off the vampires any more.\n{w}That, or Dominic deserves an Oscar."
412. n "Shit, I didn't intend for things to end up like this..."
413. d "\"You want a drink?\""
414. mc "\"...!\""
415. n "Dominic casually leans in to murmur a question in my ear."
416. mc "\"—A-ah, no, I'm fine, thanks!\""

417. mc "\"W-what kind of question is that?\""
418. mc "\"We came here to ditch Rex and his crew, not get wasted!\""
419. n "...Man, now it {i}seriously{/i} feels like a date. {w}An awkward, spontaneous date."
420. n "Although, judging from Dominic's smirk at my flustered response, his only goal with that question was to make me embarrassed."
421. n "He's got a sadistic streak to balance out his generosity, all right."
422. mcp "\"How about you? You want a drink?\""
423. d "\"Now that you mention it...\""
424. n "My eyes widen when Dominic actually nods, a teasing light flashing in his eyes."
425. n "Wait, he must mean – {w}no, seriously?!"
426. mcp "\"...\""
427. d "\"Only if you're offering, though... I won't force you.\""
428. n "He gently squeezes my waist, making me relax a little, but I still hesitate."
429. n "Can I really trust him like this...?"
430. old "Let him drink from me"
431. old "Refuse"
432. mcp "\"If – If you'd like, sure, I guess.\""

433. n "The words spill out before I can stop them."
434. mcp "\"Well, I'm a little curious about it, I'll admit...\""
435. mcp "\"Just don't drain me dry, okay? That would be a shitty first date.\""
436. d "\" ...\""
437. n "For a split second, Dominic looks shocked – like he wasn't even expecting an answer."
438. n "But before I know it, he reaches out to grab me, tugging my body tightly against his chest."
439. mc "\"...!\""
440. d "\"Just relax.\""
441. n "His hot whisper fills my ear, and as if he'd just flipped a switch, my anxiety starts to fade."
442. n "It gets hard to think about anything other than Dominic, and even when I close my eyes and tilt my head back, all I can envision is his eager gaze."
443. n "Something sharp starts to tease along my skin, dragging a line from my collar to the side of my neck."
444. n "I feel his wet tongue flickering out against a certain spot, followed by the brush of his lips."

445. n "Then, he pauses, and everything in the world seems to freeze for a moment..."
446. mc "\"Nnh—!\\""
447. n "A stabbing pain shoots through my body, making my eyes water and my stomach do an awful backflip."
448. n "My first instinct is to try and shove Dominic away, but I force myself to stay calm."
449. n "And then... {w}Bit by bit, the pain begins to sweeten."
450. d "\"...\""
451. mc "\"A-aah... D-Dominic...\""
452. n "As he holds me tightly in his arms, burying his face against my neck, I start to feel a little dizzy."
453. n "My skin's growing hotter and hotter, and an unusual heat bubbles at the base of my spine."
454. d "\"...Sweet...\""
455. n "Somehow, I manage to hear Dominic's low growl —{w} but it feels like his voice is almost coming from inside my mind."
456. n "The pounding bass fades far into the distance, as all I can hear and feel is Dominic, his fangs buried in me as he suckles hungrily at my flesh."
457. mc "\"Mmh... haah...\""

458. n "This is complete surrender...{w} if he wanted to, he could drain me dry right now, and no one would notice – it's too dark and crowded."
459. n "But I don't feel scared.{w} My heart's pounding a mile a minute, but all I can think of is giving myself to him...{w} more, more, more."
460. mc "\"Nn... aah...\""
461. n "When Dominic finally pulls back, licking a red drop off his upper lip, I struggle to catch my breath."
462. n "He must've noticed my reaction, because he gives me a long, feral smirk and brushes his fingertips against my throat."
463. d "\"Was hard keeping ahold of myself.\""
464. d "\"Especially with you squirming against me like that... Can't have been that bad for you, huh?\""
465. mc "\"Nnh... Shit...\""
466. n "Acute embarrassment makes my lightheadedness vanish, and I know my face has to be the same color as a cherry."
467. mc "\"S-Sorry if I was jerking around or anything... I hope you got enough.\""
468. d "\"Not sure that's even possible.\""
469. mc "\"D-Damn...\""
470. mc "\"Go easier on me next time, asshole... you just about drained me dry.\""

471. d "\"Yeah? You didn't seem to mind.\""
472. mc "\"...\""
473. n "As the last traces of that incredible sensation gradually fade away, I can't help but feel happy at Dominic's reaction."
474. n "He pulls me into another dance, and I notice his eyes are burning brighter – his usual cool expression now warm and eager."
475. n "Even his skin feels a little hot, like part of him's alive again... {w}and there's something strangely bittersweet about that thought."
476. n "I shake my head apologetically."
477. n "As much as I'd like to, it simply feels too unnatural...{w} and I can't just put my life in someone else's hands."
478. n "Dominic seems slightly disappointed, but he shrugs playfully, as if to say it's no big deal."
479. n "He keeps holding me loosely, and I feel relieved that he doesn't plan to take any blood by force."
480. n "But I'm silly for even thinking he would. He's a man, not a beast."
481. n "—We dance for what feels like hours afterwards, though at the same time, it passes in the blink of an eye."
482. n "When I start to get a little tired, I lean against Dominic's chest, and a pleased smile briefly curls on his lips."

483. n "Finally, just as it's getting close to dawn, we reluctantly separate and make our way to the exit."
484. d "\"...\""
485. mc "\"...\""
486. n "It's still dark when we emerge on the street, although probably not for much longer."
487. n "With the music now muffled by concrete walls, an awkward silence drifts between us."
488. d "\"...Let's go.\""
489. mc "\"...Right.\""
490. n "—Shit, I entirely forgot that he was supposed to be taking me home."
491. n "That was the whole point of meeting up, wasn't it? {w}So how did {i}that{/i} just happen?"
492. n "I bite my lip as we head down the sidewalk again, but Dominic seems completely at ease."
493. n "This guy... I guess he's not even worried that the other vampires will come after us.\n{w}Am I the weird one for being so flustered about everything?"
494. n "We end up making it to my apartment building without any incident."
495. n "When we reach the door, Dominic stops, so I come to a halt in front of him."

496. mcp "\"Er... thanks.\""

497. d "\"It's fine.\""

498. n "With that casual response, he starts to turn away."

499. mcp "\"Hey, wait--!\""

500. n "When I hastily call out to him, Dominic pauses to look back at me."

501. mcp "\"...Are you...\""

502. mcp "\"Were you planning on coming back to the diner tomorrow night?\""

503. mcp "\"You don't have to, or anything, but...\""

504. n "He tilts his head to one side, quirking an eyebrow slightly."

505. d "\"I said I'd help you, didn't I?\""

506. n "He sounds puzzled, as if that was only something natural."

507. n "It probably sounds like I'm questioning his kindness, but after tonight's chase, I
wouldn't blame him for wanting to keep his distance."

508. mcp "\"I just wasn't sure how long you would... never mind.\""

509. n "My response trails off into an awkward mutter, and I avert my gaze,
grimacing."

510. d "\"...As long as you need me.\""

511. mcp "\"...\""

512. n "Dominic's words sound unusually gentle, so much that I look up at him in
surprise."

513. n "But he's already turning around again, starting to walk away with his hands
shoved in his pockets."
514. mcp "\"...\""
515. n "This time, I just watch his tall figure gradually head into the distance, until
finally he disappears around the corner."
516. n "His parting words feel like a dream, and I almost have to wonder if I didn't
mishear them."
517. n "...{i}As long as you need me.{/i}"
518. mcp "\"Seriously... what a weird guy.\""
519. n "I mutter to myself in disbelief while climbing the stairs, unable to contain a
smile."
520. n "Unlike last night, a warm feeling bubbles in my chest when I reach my
apartment."
521. n "I don't understand Dominic at all... but deep down, I can see that he has a good
heart."
522. n "It's the last thing I'd expect from someone who's supposed to be a blood-
sucking monster.{w} I guess you really can't judge a book by its cover, huh?"
523. n "This time, when I throw myself onto my bed, it doesn't take long for drowsiness
to overtake me."

524. n "As I slip into unconsciousness, the last image I see is Dominic's bright blue eyes, glittering warmly in the dark – {w}swallowing me in their endless depths."
525. n "—And so began my new, bizarre routine."
526. n "Every night, Dominic would show up at the diner, right as I'd be getting ready to close."
527. n "After our encounter with Rex, he was a lot more cautious. We'd take hidden alleyways and paths through abandoned buildings, a new mini-adventure each time."
528. n "There were a couple close calls, but we managed to avoid getting spotted by roaming vampires – just barely."
529. n "Neither of us ever speak about what happened in the club."
530. n "It's not like our relationship is awkward, but... {w}every time I think about the way we danced, my face starts to feel hot."
531. n "I know it was just a spur-of-the-moment thing, probably meaningless. But no matter how hard I try, I can't forget the look in his eyes back then."
532. mc "\"Wow, time to leave already? I must've really been spacing out.\""
533. n "Today marks a week since Dominic – or Dom, as I've started calling him – first offered to escort me."
534. n "But this time, I've decided to man up and ask him if he wants to come up to my apartment tonight."

535. n "Just for a drink and a chat or something... He's not very talkative, but I think he
might enjoy the company, and I'd like to get to know him better."

536. n "It's so easy to forget Dom's a vampire, but the sense of loneliness he carries
reminds me of the cold, solitary life he's forced to live in the night."

537. n "He stays away from his clan, and I can tell he misses his family more than
anything.\n{w}From what he's told me, I'm the only friend he has here."

538. n "I want to help ease that loneliness for him – even if it's just a tiny bit."

539. n "The streets are still slightly lively as I commute to work, compared to their
usual abandoned state on my way home."

540. n "Normally, I'd keep my head down and be lost in thought during the walk to the
diner, but I feel unusually bright today."

541. n "Must be the adrenaline from my plan to invite Dom inside... I don't know why
it's making me so nervous."

542. mc "\"...\""

543. n "When I take a turn down a side street, I see the shape of a familiar building not
far off."

544. n "—Isn't that the abandoned warehouse where Dom went to smoke the other
day?"

545. n "I wonder if he's there right now... or if that's where he stays before he comes to
the diner."

546. n "I hesitate, but my curiosity winds up being too strong, and I duck inside the warehouse on a whim."
547. n "Downstairs, the dark, dirty interior greets me with the familiar hum of fluorescent lights."
548. n "But it doesn't seem like Dom's here. {w}There are a few fresh cigarette butts lying nearby, which means I might've just missed him."
549. mc "\"Ah well...\""
550. n "...Damn, why am I so disappointed?"
551. n "I'll get to see him tonight, anyway, so it's not like it really matters that much..."
552. u "\"Looking for Dominic, by chance?\""
553. mc "\"—!\""
554. n "Out of nowhere, a powerful voice resonates behind my ears."
555. n "I hastily spin around, coming face to face with a towering man"
556. n "He's in a finely made suit, and he doesn't look like a thug. {w}What's he doing in a place like this?"
557. n "I didn't even see him when I came in. Was he hiding?"
558. mcp "\"...I was, yeah. Do you know him?\""
559. u "\"I do, indeed. He's quite an interesting young man, although... a little misguided.\""
560. n "He slowly rubs a hand along one cheek, watching me with eyes that are —"

561. n "A vivid, piercing shade of red."
562. mcp "\"...\""
563. n "Wait, does that mean... {w}Could this guy be..."
564. u "\"Oh, where are my manners? I entirely forgot to introduce myself.\""
565. b "\"My name is Bishop. I am, to put it crassly, the 'leader' of San Francisco's two
clans.\""
566. n "He bows his head to me a little, his tone polite and reserved."
567. n "—If he's the \"leader\" of both clans, that must mean he's the top vampire in
the city."
568. n "The very thought makes me want to dash out of the room as fast as I can, but
curiosity and fear keep me pinned in place."
569. mcp "\"A-ah, nice to meet you. I'm [mc]... I guess you must have heard about me
from Rex.\""
570. mcp "\"...Bishop, huh?\""
571. mcp "\"I'm [mc] – but I'm sure you've already heard my name from Rex.\""
572. n "Bishop slowly nods, narrowing his crimson eyes for a moment."
573. b "\"Oh, yes. He talked about you quite a bit, including all of your special
qualities.\""
574. mcp "\"...Special qualities?\""
575. b "\"Naturally.\""

576. b "\"However, I didn't come here intending to discuss such things now... that can wait for another time.\""

577. b "\"The real reason I wanted to speak to you – or Dominic – was a certain {i}rumor{/i} that's been circulating about you two.\""

578. n "Pausing for an extended moment, Bishop lets his gaze drift up and down my body, and I hold back the urge to shiver."

579. n "He gives off a strong, oppressive aura, one that feels like black tendrils wrapping around me and squeezing out my breath."

580. b "\"You see, I don't allow my subordinates to engage in... equal relationships with humans.\""

581. b "\"It puts us all at great risk of being exposed, just from one tiny slip-up. A misplaced word here or there, and our veil of secrecy might be torn open.\""

582. n "He gives me a wide, sharklike smile."

583. mcp "\"Are you trying to say...\""

584. mcp "\"...I shouldn't talk to him anymore?\""

585. b "\"Hmh.\""

586. n "When my voice uncontrollably cracks with disappointment, Bishop laughs, although it doesn't make his expression look any kinder."

587. mcp "\"Is that a threat?\""

588. mcp "\"If I don't stop talking to Dom, then...\""

589. b "\"Hmh.\""

590. n "When my voice trembles with anger, Bishop laughs, although it doesn't make his expression look any kinder."

591. b "\"Please, don't paint me out as such a villain.\""

592. b "\"I have a different proposal in mind, if you wish to hear me out.\""

593. n "Bishop steps a little closer, and even though I want to move back, his crimson stare freezes me to the spot."

594. b "\"You see, we're always looking for new, promising additions to San Francisco's coven.\""

595. b "\"The vampires in Los Angeles, San Jose, even Fresno... their numbers are steadily growing, and soon, they might even pose a threat to us.\""

596. n "He reaches out with a claw-like fingernail to point directly at my throat."

597. n "I clench my teeth, doing my best not to show any signs of fear, and stare back into Bishop's unblinking eyes."

598. b "\"From your scent, I can tell that you're a Strix – a human with strong, receptive blood.\""

599. mcp "\"My scent...\""

600. n "Now that I think about it, both Rex and Dom said something like that."

601. b "\"If you joined us, I would have no objections to your relationship with
Dominic... In fact, I'd even encourage it.\""
602. b "\"After all, he's a very lonely boy. Someone like you could keep him from acting
out or causing us any further trouble.\""
603. n "Bishop towers over me as he speaks, casting a long shadow that feels like it's
swallowing me up."
604. n "It's all too clear that he's giving me an ultimatum –"
605. n "{i}Join us, or forget about us.{/i}"
606. n "Otherwise..."
607. extend " I'll be killed."
608. b "\"What are your thoughts, my dear? I don't like being kept in suspense.\""
609. mcp "\"...\""
610. old "Only if Dominic..."
611. old "It'd be worth the cost"
612. old "Tell him what he wants to hear"
613. old "Tell him what he wants to hear (unlocked)"
614. n "To be honest, the idea of never seeing the sun again is a horrible one."
615. n "Everything about my life would change, and I'd be forced into a world of
secrets and darkness..."
616. n "But if Dom was there for me, then...{w} I think I could endure it."

617. mcp "\"I'd consider your offer, as long as Dominic was the one who...\""
618. mcp "\"...Who turned me.\""
619. n "I really don't know how a mortal is made into a vampire, but if it's anything like the stories, they'd get bitten by another vampire."
620. n "And if there's a permanent bond between the two afterwards... {w}I'd only let something like that happen with Dom."
621. b "\"Oh? You're a picky one, I see.\""
622. n "Bishop seems greatly amused by my response, and he lets out a chuckle – letting me glimpse his knifelike fangs."
623. n "I take a deep breath, then murmur the first words that come to mind."
624. mcp "\"I'd consider it... yes.\""
625. n "Becoming a monster –"
626. extend " I never thought I'd willingly agree to something like that."
627. n "But...{w} I don't have any close family or friends who'd even realize I was gone."
628. n "And if it meant I could still be around Dominic, then wouldn't that be worth the cost? {w}There's nothing else important keeping me tied to my normal life."

629. b "\"Good. I'm happy to see that you're a boy with common sense, [mc].\""
630. n "Bishop's eyes narrow slightly, making him resemble a predatory cat with a satisfied, bloodstained smirk."
631. n "I don't like being threatened. I never have."
632. n "But refusing Bishop right now would be suicide. If I tell him what he wants to hear, he'll back off."
633. mcp "\"Yes... I'd be willing to join you.\""
634. n "Yet as the words leave my lips –"
635. extend " I have to wonder if there's not some truth to them."
636. n "I don't want to leave Dom's side, but I don't want to risk him getting hurt, either."
637. n "Is this really the only way out...?"
638. b "\"What a clever little thing you are.\""
639. b "\"I hope your words come from the heart, though. I have to say, I quite dislike the falsely loyal.\""
640. n "...I think I can guess what happens to the poor bastards he thinks are \"falsely loyal.\""
641. mc "\"Do I have to decide... right now?\""

642. n "When I worriedly look up at Bishop, he smooths a hand through his jet-black hair and offers me a shrug."
643. b "\"I'll give you a day to think about it.\""
644. b "\"Should you choose to reject my offer, however, I'm afraid I'll have to prohibit you from meeting Dominic...\""
645. b "\"Through whatever means necessary.\""
646. mc "\"...\""
647. n "—He's really not subtle about his threats, this guy."
648. n "But there's not much I can do to argue, so I offer a hesitant nod in reply."
649. mc "\"If you really wanted me to join you, though... why didn't you bite me forcefully?\""
650. mc "\"I doubt I'd be a match for a vampire.\""
651. mc "\"Is there a reason you didn't already bite me yourself?\""
652. mc "\"It's hard to believe someone like you would be scared of a single human fighting back. You probably think of us like cattle.\""
653. n "My question causes Bishop's eyes to glint with a dangerous, amused light."
654. b "\"Turning an unwilling subject often leads to troublesome side effects, my dear.\""

655. b "\"Death is often one such effect... among others. I'd rather not see someone so promising wasted like that – you understand, I'm sure.\""
656. mc "\"...I see.\""
657. n "I grimace, unsure how I feel about being called a \"promising\" candidate for a vampire."
658. n "It's a little comforting to know that they wouldn't turn me against my will, but an uneasy feeling's still gnawing at my stomach."
659. b "\"Excellent.\""
660. b "\"I'm quite pleased that we settled the matter so efficiently. I'll see you tomorrow, then.\""
661. b "\"Make sure you consider things carefully, as I'm sure neither of us want a disagreeable outcome.\""
662. n "Bishop offers me a sweeping bow, then turns around with a flutter of his long, black coat."
663. n "He walks towards the stairs, but to my shock –"
664. mc "\"...\""
665. n "The second he steps into the shadows, his form simply disappears."
666. n "–It must be some kind of power he has... {w}the very thought sends unpleasant shivers down my spine."
667. mc "\"What a shady bastard.\""

668. n "I unthinkingly mutter to myself, then freeze, praying he's not still lurking nearby."
669. n "...But there's no reply or angry vampiric hiss, so I guess Bishop's gone."
670. n "His presence was so incredibly icy that the whole warehouse felt a few degrees colder."
671. mc "\"...Shit.\""
672. n "What kind of awful situation have I gotten myself into?"
673. n "I don't want to give up my humanity, obviously, but I don't want to leave Dominic all alone, either..."
674. n "And I have a feeling that, even if we tried to keep our meetings secret, Bishop would find out."
675. n "How am I supposed to make a choice like this in a single day...?"
676. n "After a little while, I wearily leave the warehouse and head to the diner."
677. n "For most of my shift, my head's in a daze. {w}I have to ask customers to repeat themselves a few times, as I'm so distracted that I don't understand what they're trying to say."
678. n "Bishop's offer weighs heavily on my mind, and my stomach is tied in an anxious knot, tightening every time I replay our conversation in my head."

679. n "Finally, closing time arrives, and I let out a long, relieved sigh."
680. mc "\"...\""
681. n "As usual, Dom shows up at the door, coming to a stop a few feet in front of the counter."
682. n "But this time, he stares at me with a small frown, studying my face intently."
683. d "\"...Are you all right?\""
684. mc "\"Eh? Y-yeah, I'm fine.\""
685. mc "\"Just kinda worn out, long shift and everything.\""
686. d "\"...\""
687. n "Dom doesn't look like he's buying my excuse, and he keeps watching me with a worried narrowing of his clear blue eyes."
688. n "Either I must look really terrible, or he's incredibly perceptive – or maybe some mix of the two."
689. mc "\"Let's head out. The smell of grease is making me more nauseated than normal.\""
690. n "We leave the diner and start walking towards my apartment, completely alone on the deserted street."
691. n "There's an unusually tense silence between us.{w} I'd gotten used to Dom's quietness and normally kept up the conversation myself, but not today."

692. n "I should say something about Bishop, but I just can't force any words out right now...{w}\nIt's like there's a lump in my throat."

693. mcp "\"...\""

694. dp "\"...\""

695. n "Only the sound of our footsteps on the pavement echoes around us."

696. n "Dominic must sense something's wrong, because he avoids my eyes and walks further away from me than normal."

697. n "It doesn't seem like there're any vampires hunting us today, either... {w}I almost wish they'd start up a chase, just to break this awkwardness."

698. n "We make it to my apartment before long, neither of us speaking a single word on the way there."

699. n "Finally, when we arrive at the door, I pause and take in a deep breath."

700. mc "\"Hey, Dom... you wanna come inside for a bit?\""

701. d "\"...\""

702. n "He blinks at me in astonishment, like I'd just asked him to wear a tiara and have a tea party with me."

703. mc "\"Just for a drink, or a... smoke, or something. We don't get to hang out very much, and...\""

704. mc "\"Well, I'd like to talk a little more.\""

705. mc "\"What's with that look? When was the last time you hung out with someone, anyway?\""

706. mc "\"Come upstairs and have a smoke or something. You're a pretty cool guy, vampire or no...\""

707. mc "\"...And, well, if you've dealt with my company this long, a little more can't hurt, right?\""

708. n "—Dom hesitates, his eyes dropping from my face to stare at the ground for a long few moments."

709. n "But finally, he raises his head and nods, and I can't help but grin in relief."

710. mc "\"C'mon, then! Let's not hang outside until the sun comes up, yeah?\""

711. d "\"...Yeah.\""

712. n "With Dom trailing at my heels, I head up to my apartment, and my heart starts to beat faster and faster."

713. n "God, it's really happening. {w}I actually invited him inside."

714. n "I hope he doesn't think I'm acting weird or anything. I mean, this is a natural thing for friends to do, right?"

715. n "...Damn it, who am I kidding? {w}I obviously like him as more than a friend. A lot more."

716. mc "\"Well, this is it!\\""
717. mc "\"Not Buckingham Palace or anything, but hey, it's home.\\""
718. mc "\"W-well, here it is.\\""
719. mc "\"Make yourself at home!... Ah, sorry in advance for any clothes lying
around.\\""
720. n "I nervously chuckle after leading Dom inside, watching him while his eyes dart
around my apartment."
721. d "\"...I like it.\\""
722. n "A faint smile curls on his lips, lightening the shadow that's been there all night."
723. mc "\"O-oh, really?\\""
724. mc "\"I mean, thanks! Needs some serious spring cleaning, though...\\""
725. n "As I scratch the back of my neck, uncertain of what to do next, Dom lowers
himself onto the edge of my bed."
726. n "The mattress springs creak a little under his weight, but he doesn't seem to
notice."
727. mc "\"So, how about a drink? I've got some wine in the fridge, a couple cans of
beer too.\\""
728. mc "\"You drank that cup of coffee, so alcohol's good too, right? Eheh.\\""

729. n "Dom shakes his head at my offer."
730. n "Instead, he just motions for me to come closer, beckoning with one hand."
731. dp "\"Sit down.\""
732. mc "\"...\""
733. n "Swallowing, I step closer to him, not exactly sure if I should sit on the bed or
pull up my office chair."
734. n "Did he mean sit beside him, or...?"
735. dp "\"...On my lap, idiot.\""
736. mcp "\"Wh— Wait, what? You mean...\""
737. dp "\"If you don't hurry up, the sun's gonna rise.\""
738. mcp "\"...\""
739. n "After Dom's coaxing words, I finally end up settling in his lap, squirming a bit."
740. n "It's not like I'm new to this kind of thing... but I can't calm myself down."
741. d "\"Why are you so nervous?\""
742. mcp "\"...\""
743. n "Dom asks me in a curious, low voice, and a blush instantly rises to my face."
744. n "He noticed, damn it."
745. d "\"You're pretty bad at hiding how you feel.\""
746. d "\"I think my third-grade textbooks were harder to read.\""

747. mcp "\"...Shut up. It's not my fault that I'm honest.\""
748. mcp "\"And what else am I supposed to do when you're looking at me like that,
anyway?\""
749. mcp "\"...Now you're just being mean for no reason.\""
750. mcp "\"Maybe I wasn't trying to hide it.\""
751. d "\"Sorry, sorry.\""
752. n "When I mumble an indignant reply, Dom just snickers, tightening his arms
around me."
753. n "The gentle, but firm, way he hugs my body against him is oddly comforting, and
I find myself relaxing before I even know it."
754. n "I guess he shares my feelings, at least a little bit. {w}The thought makes a happy
warmth flood through my chest."
755. mcp "\"Can I ask you a question, Dom?\""
756. mcp "\"You... How did you turn into a vampire?\""
757. dp "\"...\""
758. n "He goes silent for a long moment."
759. n "I feel him squeeze the fabric of my jacket – with fingers that tremble ever so
slightly."
760. dp "\"I got bitten ten years ago against my will. Wrong place at the wrong time.\""
761. n "He speaks with a resigned calmness, not the bitter tone I was expecting."

762. n "Ten years ago... {w}he's been living like this for ten years?"
763. dp "\"Once I realized what I was – a monster – I cut myself off from everyone,
everything.\""
764. dp "\"{w=0.3}I hoped I'd just disappear, swallowed up by the shadows one night,
and everyone would forget about me.\""
765. dp "\"The vampires here forced me into a 'clan', but it's all a joke. Creatures like
us shouldn't even exist – there's no pride in what we are.\""
766. d "\"I was tired, [mc].\""
767. d "\"I came to your diner that night because... {w=0.3}I wanted to pretend I was
human, one last time.\""
768. d "\"Rex was nearby, waiting to ambush me, and so...\""
769. d "\"I was planning to let him tear me apart after I left.\""
770. mcp "\"...\""
771. d "\"I thought I'd revisit an old favorite spot, have my first cup of coffee in ten
years...\""
772. d "\"And then head out for a final night.\""
773. mcp "\"Dom...\""
774. d "\"But... when you treated me just like a regular customer, like a man rather
than a monster...\""

775. d "\"And after you didn't mention me to Luka, as if you were trying to protect me...\""
776. d "\"I guess I thought it'd be worth sticking around a little longer, just to see what you might get up to.\""
777. mcp "\"...\""
778. n "My eyes burn, and a lump forms in my throat."
779. n "If I hadn't...{w} Dom could've..."
780. d "\"Shh... it doesn't matter anymore, [mc].\""
781. d "\"It's all right.\""
782. n "He strokes a hand through my hair with a tenderness that makes my held-back emotion almost burst free."
783. n "But I manage to swallow it back, and once I give Dom a little nod, he smiles at me reassuringly."
784. n "I don't understand his strength...{w} He's been living in solitude all this time, part of a world he doesn't belong in, and yet he's still so gentle... so kind."
785. n "If I had known all this back at the diner, how would things have been different...?"
786. dp "\"[mc]...\""
787. dp "\"Something happened to you today, didn't it?\""

788. n "He tilts my chin up so that our gazes meet, and his sky-blue eyes gaze into mine
with a look of concern."

789. mcp "\"...Yeah. I... Earlier this evening...\""

790. mcp "\"...I met Bishop.\""

791. dp "\"...\""

792. n "Dom's face immediately darkens when I mention Bishop's name."

793. n "I'm guessing he isn't too fond of him... and I can see why."

794. d "\"What did he say to you?\""

795. n "His voice grows urgent, rising slightly with suspicion."

796. mcp "\"He said that I shouldn't meet with you any more, unless I...\""

797. mcp "\"Unless I joined the coven.\""

798. d "\"...\""

799. n "Dom's fingers curl more tightly in the fabric of my jacket."

800. n "He watches me with an intense, unwavering stare, as if he's trying to search
the contents of my soul."

801. n "Unsure of those contents myself, I gaze back into his eyes, glimpsing my own
reflection."

802. d "\"Is that what you want?\""

803. mcp "\"...\""

804. n "His earnest question makes me pause."

805. n "The truth is, I don't really know... {w}and I don't know if I'm brave enough to
accept a new life, hiding away from the sun forever."

806. old "No, it isn't (unlocked)"

807. old "No, it isn't"

808. old "Yes, it's what I want"

809. old "I'll take the risk..."

810. mcp "\"...No, it isn't.\""

811. mcp "\"I don't want to hide away from the sun forever... I don't want to hunt
down other people to survive.\""

812. n "I chew my bottom lip, trying to summon enough courage to finish my words."

813. mcp "\"But I might not have a choice. If Bishop's only going to give me one way
out...\""

814. mcp "\"Then I'll have to take it.\""

815. d "\"...\""

816. n "For some reason, the corners of Dom's lips curl just a little bit upwards."

817. n "He gazes at me with that curious smile for a few moments, but soon, his brow
 darkens with worry again."

818. n "...But the more I think about it, maybe I don't really belong here at all."

819. n "Maybe becoming a vampire would break me out of this lonely, unchanging life
 I've been living for God-knows-how-long."

820. n "Maybe I'd be more alive as a vampire than I would as a human... {w}and maybe
 I could finally have someone else at my side."

821. mcp "\"Yes, it is.\""

822. mcp "\"I... don't think that I'd mind.\""

823. d "\"...\""

824. n "For a moment, I sense a conflicted feeling in Dom's expression."

825. n "He tightens his grip on my back, pulling me closer."

826. n "...In reality, I feel like it doesn't truly matter to me whether I end up staying as a
 human or not."

827. n "If someone as gentle as Dom can be a vampire, then what is there to be afraid
 of?"

828. n "Despite what he says, I know he's not a monster – {w}I understand, now, that
 unlife doesn't mean becoming a beast."

829. mcp "\"I'm... scared of losing myself, I'll admit, but I think...\""

830. mcp "\"Well, I'd be willing to take that risk.\""

831. mcp "\"Because more than anything, I just... I don't want you to be alone any more.\""

832. mcp "\"I want to be by your side, Dom. Even if it means giving up everything else.\""

833. n "Ashamed of my own cheesy words, however honest they are, I bow my head slightly."

834. dp "\" ...\""

835. n "Although I avoid looking at Dom's face, I get the sense that he's smiling."

836. n "My heart leaps up again, and I barely resist the urge to bury my face against his shoulder."

837. n "...But when I look at him next, his features have darkened again, and his arms squeeze protectively around me."

838. d "\"If you accept his offer, you have to make me a promise.\""

839. mcp "\"...Oh? What's that?\""

840. n "The look in his eyes is so serious that I instinctively tense up a little."

841. d "\"Don't accept the bite of anyone besides me. Don't let anyone else turn you.\""

842. d "\"Otherwise, something... might happen.\""

843. n "Part of his words sound uncertain, but the hesitation in his voice makes me wonder if he's hiding something from me."

844. n "Earlier this week, he was talking about something different in my blood... could this be related to that?"
845. n "Bishop, too, mentioned the same thing – \"Strix,\" he called it."
846. d "\"Promise me, [mc].\""
847. n "Dom interrupts my thoughts with an urgent murmur, as if he's worried I might forget what he's saying."
848. mcp "\"R-right, of course. I promise.\""
849. n "My reply seems to set Dom somewhat at ease, and his impatient gaze softens."
850. n "Puzzled, I start to open my mouth to ask what's so important about accepting someone's bite –"
851. mc "\"–!\""
852. n "But at that moment, Dom presses his face towards mine."
853. n "It takes me a second to realize that his cool, soft lips are smashed against my own."
854. n "But it takes even less time for me to realize that I don't mind, not one bit."
855. mc "\"...mh...\""
856. n "I curl my arms around Dom, pressing back tenderly into the kiss."
857. n "He pulls me down against him with an overwhelming rush of passion."
858. d "\"Everything about you drives me wild...\""

859. d "\"Your scent, your kindness, your pretty face... all of it.\""
860. n "Dom breathes those low words against my skin, quickly sealing my lips again
with another fierce, hungry kiss."
861. n "His tongue insistently presses its way forward, and I let it tease inside my
mouth, sliding along my own."
862. n "There's a sweetly smoky taste on his breath, tingling my senses delightfully as
our tongues dance and twirl together."
863. mc "\"Dom...\""
864. n "I let out a soft whimper when his hand slips under my shirt, drifting across my
skin."
865. n "When he captures my bottom lip between his fangs and playfully nips it, a
delicious tingle shoots down my spine, and I clutch onto him tighter."
866. n "In those beautifully clear blue eyes, there's a heated glimmer that watches me
longingly."
867. n "If only that gaze was fixed on me forever."
868. d "\"You're so warm... every inch of you...\""
869. n "He purrs out with a mixture of awe and delight, his cool fingers tracing up and
down my spine."
870. n "They explore all the curves and dips of my body, teasing around my hips,
slipping around to my chest."

871. mc "\"Nnh... a-ah...\""

872. mc "\"Well... what good is body heat if there's... no one to share it with?\""

873. n "I close my eyes, drowning in the sweetness of his tongue tracing the corners of my lips, while those large, gentle hands caress my entire figure."

874. n "This rush of excitement –"

875. extend " it's not just from physical stimulation."

876. n "It's a deep and comforting warmth, as if every ounce of tension's gone from my body."

877. n "I feel like I can entrust every part of myself to Dom, like I don't need to keep any secrets or hold anything back."

878. d "\"Please...\""

879. d "\"...Please stay with me, [mc].\""

880. n "Dom whispers against my lips, his words so soft that I can barely hear them."

881. n "But the pleading tremble in his voice makes my chest ache, and I nuzzle against his cheek affectionately."

882. mc "\"I will, Dom... no matter what happens.\""

883. d "\"...\""

884. n "He heatedly kisses me again as soon as I reply, like he's desperate to seal my promise into an unbreakable bond."
885. n "I squeeze my arms around his neck, wanting to reassure him that I don't plan on letting him go anytime soon."
886. n "The rest of the night becomes a blur after that, filled with so much passion that I can barely keep up."
887. n "Finally, I drift off to sleep, intoxicated by Dom's scent and the comforting embrace of his arms."
888. n "The only thought in my mind is a desperate hope for this to last forever..."
889. n "...And a prayer that I'll be strong enough to make the right choice."
890. mc "\"Mmh...\""
891. n "I roll over in my bed, trying to curl up against Dom."
892. mc "\"...?\""
893. n "He's not here?"
894. n "When I sit up straight, I realize that sunlight's streaming faintly in through my apartment window."
895. n "No sign of Dom, either. {w}He must've left before dawn."
896. mc "\"...Shit...\""

897. n "The memories of last night flood back when an ache runs through my body."
898. n "Ngh... he *is* a monster in some ways, I'll give him that."
899. mc "\"The sheets are gonna need to be changed... mmh, I'll do it later.\""
900. n "I roll out of bed and put on some coffee before settling down to work, all while wearing a happily sleep-deprived smile."
901. n "As I write, though, my mind keeps drifting between Dom and Bishop."
902. n "The mood of the words I type grows steadily darker, like it's mirroring the uncertainty in my heart."
903. n "I have to keep myself from turning my light-hearted romance commissions into horror stories... that'd be bad for business."
904. n "As I work on my newest composition, though, my mind keeps drifting between Dom and Bishop."
905. n "The tone of my piece grows steadily darker, like it's mirroring the uncertainty in my heart."
906. n "I have to actively focus to keep it from turning into something grim and moody, more fitting for a horror game than a fantasy one."
907. n "As I work on my latest commission, though, my mind keeps drifting between Dom and Bishop."

908. n "The colors of my drawing grow steadily darker, like they're mirroring the
uncertainty in my heart."
909. n "I have to keep myself from adding grim shadows and moody lighting, otherwise
this picture of a cute couple is gonna turn into a gothic metal album cover."
910. n "Even as night draws close, and I head out on my way to work, I keep nervously
weighing Bishop's offer in my head."
911. n "How the hell am I supposed to make a decision like this in one day?"
912. n "He gave me that ultimatum yesterday, so I guess he'll come seek me out
tonight. {w}The very thought sends shivers down my spine."
913. n "Bishop isn't outright aggressive like Rex, but he's ten times more unsettling –
and radiates that frigid, intimidating aura that makes it hard to think straight."
914. n "Damn it...{w} There's no easy way out of this, is there?"
915. mc "\"Coffee? Sure, coming right up.\""
916. n "I put on a forced grin as I take a customer's order."
917. mc "\"...\""
918. n "...When I start brewing a fresh pot, my mind flashes back to when Dom first
came to this run-down place."
919. n "The way he seemed so confused about what to do... {w}I guess that'd happen if
your diet doesn't normally include anything except blood, huh?"

920. n "I think that was the moment I really started to fall head over heels for him and his cute, quiet ways."
921. mc "\"...I have to do it.\""
922. n "I mutter unconsciously to myself as I pour the black liquid into an empty mug."
923. n "I have to accept Bishop's offer... {w}I won't leave Dom alone."
924. n "My determination grows stronger and stronger as my shift continues, and by closing time, I feel grimly confident."
925. mcp "\"...\""
926. n "—Why is Dom not showing up, though?"
927. n "He usually always walks through the door right now. {w}Did he get delayed?"
928. n "I lean against the counter to wait, drumming my fingers impatiently on the grimy surface."
929. n "...But as time goes on, and there's no sign of Dom, a foreboding feeling sinks in my chest."
930. mc "\"Dom...\""
931. n "Damn it! Something must have happened to him..."
932. n "What if he's injured? {w}Or... what if he's trying to avoid me? That doesn't seem like him, but..."
933. mc "\"The warehouse—!\""
934. n "If he's not here, then that's the only other place he could be."

935. n "Grabbing my keys, I rush out of the diner, only barely remembering to lock the
door behind me."
936. n "I dash down the empty street, tearing my way towards the warehouse as fast
as I can."
937. n "{i>Please be all right, please be all right...{/i}"
938. n "Repeating those words like a prayer, I run down the dark alleys as a cold sweat
breaks out on my back."
939. n "Finally, I arrive at the warehouse and frantically tear inside."
940. mcp "\"Dom!\\""
941. mcp "\"Dom, are you h-\\""
942. u "\"[mc]!\\""
943. n "A pained voice calls out to me, and I freeze in my tracks."
944. u "\"Ah, you're late.\\""
945. u "\"I'm glad that you could make it, regardless.\\""
946. n "Bishop steps from the shadows, approaching me with long, purposeful steps."
947. mcp "\"Bishop...?\\""
948. mcp "\"Why are you... what's happening?\\""
949. n "—Two large, heavily-built men are holding Dom in place, grasping onto his
arms."

950. n "He struggles in their grip, but even his powerful physique is no match for two
vampires – their fanged grins gives that much away."
951. b "\"I believe I explained this already, but our beloved Dominic here was – very
knowingly – breaking the rules of our coven by playing around with a mortal.\""
952. b "\"He was evidently planning to escape with you tonight, despite being fully
aware of the agreement we discussed...\""
953. n "Bishop grasps my chin with a cold hand, forcing me to turn away from Dom and
look up at him instead."
954. b "\"You didn't think I'd let him get away without proper punishment, did you?\""
955. mcp "\"No, please...\""
956. mcp "\"I'll do whatever you want, just let him go!\""
957. n "I stare pleadingly into those blood-red eyes, trying to fight off the crushing aura
that surrounds Bishop."
958. mcp "\"You... you really are a monster.\""
959. mcp "\"What do you want from me? I'll do whatever it is, as long as you let Dom
go.\""

961. b "\"Is that so?\""
962. b "\"Well, I might be persuaded to release him...\""
963. n "His voice drops a little, taking on a hint of a provocative growl."
964. b "\"Provided you accept my offer... and let me be the one to turn you.\""
965. dp "\"-!\""
966. n "Dominic seems to catch Bishop's low words, and he starts to struggle even
harder, gritting his teeth together furiously."
967. dp "\"No, [mc]! Don't listen to him!\""
968. dp "\"You can't! You'll turn into -\""
969. n "One of the men holding Dom abruptly kicks his stomach, causing his words to
turn into a gasp of pain."
970. b "\"Don't interrupt, Dominic. I thought I taught you better manners than that.\""
971. b "\"This is a matter between myself and our lovely [mc], here, and I believe you
forfeited your right to have a say in the matter.\""
972. n "After scolding Dom in a quiet, taunting voice, Bishop turns back towards me –
waiting for my answer with an expectant smirk."
973. old "I'll do anything to help Dom"
974. old "I can't trust him"
975. n "...There's only one way I can help Dom."

976. n "I'll let Bishop turn me, and maybe he'll let Dom go – or I'll gain powers that I
can use to free him."
977. mcp "\"Fine...\\""
978. mcp "\"...I accept.\\""
979. dp "\"–!\\""
980. n "Biting my lip, I nod reluctantly at Bishop, whose eyes light up with clear
satisfaction."
981. b "\"Wonderful.\\""
982. b "\"I knew you had excellent judgment, [mc]... I'm glad it won't go to waste.\\""
983. n "Bishop pulls me into his arms, tilting my head back to expose my neck."
984. dp "\"[mc], you can't!\\""
985. dp "\"Let him go, Bishop, or I'll–!\\""
986. mcp "\"Dom... don't worry...\\""
987. n "I murmur under my breath as I close my eyes, allowing Bishop to embrace me."
988. n "His lips brush over my skin, but I block out the sensation, trying to think of Dom
instead."
989. b "\"Now... just relax...\\""

990. n "Soft, hypnotic words purr into my ear, and all tension leaves my body."
991. n "A moment of unnatural silence passes..."
992. n "—And then."
993. mc "\"—!\\""
994. n "A splitting agony runs through me."
995. n "It starts out as overwhelming pain, but gradually, it begins to subside."
996. n "...Bit by bit, as Bishop drains my blood, a tingle of pleasure courses along my spine."
997. n "I start to lose consciousness, succumbing to the hot, delightful sensations that make me feel numb and lightheaded."
998. n "And just before I completely black out..."
999. b "\"Open your mouth... drink.\\""
1000. n "Drops of something sweet and metallic fall onto my tongue."
1001. n "It tastes... {w}amazing."
1002. mc "\"...!\\""
1003. n "I can feel it pumping through my veins, bringing me back."
1004. n "The hunger..."
1005. n "It's so strong."
1006. n "It's aching, burning..."

1007. n "Like I'm going to burst if I don't feed."
1008. mcp "\"...\""
1009. n "My own ragged breathing echoes in my ears."
1010. u "\"This is what you wanted, isn't it, Dominic?\""
1011. u "\"No...\""
1012. u "\"No—!!\""
1013. n "A distant cry."
1014. n "But more importantly..."
1015. n "A delicious scent."
1016. n "Sweeter than anything I've ever smelled before..."
1017. n "I want it."
1018. u "\"[mc]... [mc], no...!\""
1019. n "So red... {w}so sweet."
1020. n "I drink and drink, feeling the body go limp in my hands."
1021. u "\"How admirable... my new, perfect creation.\""
1022. n "A hand gently strokes the back of my head."
1023. n "But I ignore it, instead focusing on draining every last drop."
1024. u "\"Once you're tamed, you'll make for a lovely addition, indeed...\""
1025. u "\"Although it's a shame you lost your wits, after all.\""
1026. n "—The hunger subsides a little."

1027. n "The corpse of a tall man in a dark jacket lies before my feet."

1028. n "...But I'm still hungry."

1029. n "I want more... {w}more."

1030. n "I want to drain the whole world dry."

1031. n "There's a hole inside me now, and I don't think it will ever be filled."

1032. n "That's right...{w} I'm missing something, aren't I?"

1033. mc "\"...\""

1034. n "No... {w}it doesn't matter."

1035. n "Nothing matters any more, except the hunger."

1036. n "More, and more, and more..."

1037. n "...Until the whole world is dyed a wonderful, painful {w}red."

1038. mcp "\"...\""

1039. n "—It's impossible."

1040. n "There's no way that Bishop will let Dom go, even if I do let him turn me..."

1041. n "And more than anything, if Dom says I shouldn't give in, then I trust him."

1042. n "If nothing else, I'd like to hold Dom one last time."

1043. n "This might be the end, but if they kill us together —"

1044. extend " {w=0.5}I think I'd be able to endure that."

1045. n "I don't care if they rip us to shreds."

1046. n "I'll fight them for Dom until my last breath –"
1047. n " {w=0.5}And not have a single regret."
1048. mc "\"Dom–!\\""
1049. n "Breaking away from a startled Bishop, I rush towards Dom as fast as my legs
will take me."
1050. dp "\"–!\\""
1051. n "Dom's eyes widen when he sees me run up to him, and the vampires guarding
him blink in surprise, as well."
1052. n "I take a deep breath, getting ready to throw myself at him for a last embrace –"
1053. mc "\"...!\\""
1054. n "–When suddenly, my feet lift off the ground."
1055. n "Dom is –"
1056. n "I'm being carried...?"
1057. b "\"What are you fools doing?!\""
1058. b "\"Get them!\""
1059. n "Bishop's angry hiss jolts me back to my senses."
1060. n "Dom has me in his arms, and he's dashing towards the warehouse exit."
1061. mcp "\"Dom... you...\""

1062. dp "\"...\""
1063. n "With a sudden burst of strength, he must've thrown off the guards in their
moment of shock."
1064. n "I hear their hurried footsteps rushing behind us, and I cling tightly onto Dom as
he sprints up the stairs."
1065. mc "\"Where are you going?\""
1066. mc "\"Dom!\""
1067. n "He keeps running up more and more flights, racing towards the building's
roof."
1068. n "It isn't long before we burst outside, and Dom brings us all the way to the edge
of the rooftop –"
1069. mcp "\"Dom!\""
1070. mcp "\"Don't jump, you idiot! We'll –\""
1071. d "\"Just trust me...\""
1072. d "\"...Like you did back there.\""
1073. mcp "\"...\""
1074. n "For a split second, Dom smiles down at me, an incredibly gentle look welling in
his clear blue gaze."
1075. n "Somehow, that confident smile melts away every fear I have."
1076. n "I trust him..."

1077. n "More than anything."
1078. n "As Dom readies himself to jump to a faraway roof –"
1079. n "I close my eyes, and hold onto him as tightly as I can."
1080. u "\"...take this man... wedded husband...\""
1081. u "\"...I do!\""
1082. n "–If I strain my ears, I can hear happy voices not far in the distance."
1083. n "A tall man in a suit and a slender lady in a white dress stand side-by-side before
a priest."
1084. mc "\"I can't believe they decided to hold their wedding at night!\""
1085. mc "\"It's almost as if they knew, huh?\""
1086. n "Whispering excitedly, I elbow the man crouching beside me, who offers a little
smirk."
1087. d "\"My brother always liked the night... guess it runs in the family.\""
1088. n "Dom reaches out to gently press his forehead against my own, chuckling under
his breath."
1089. n "–Back in San Francisco, Dom and I somehow managed to escape Bishop and his
men."

1090. n "Dom pulled off some stunts that were way too close for comfort, leaping from roof to roof, making impossible jumps that nearly gave me a heart attack."
1091. n "We were almost caught several times, but as soon as we got to the nearest bus station, we fled the city as fast as we could."
1092. n "To get as far away from San Fran as possible, we headed east, doing bits of work here and there to make ends meet."
1093. n "A vampire's strength can really be a valuable asset for heavy lifting jobs, let me tell you."
1094. n "When I remembered that Dom's brother was going to be married soon, I convinced him we should try and visit."
1095. n "It took awhile to reassure him we'd stay hidden, but he finally gave in, much to my satisfaction."
1096. n "...And now, I can tell how happy he is that we actually came."
1097. n "Even if his brother doesn't know he's here – or even alive – I think Dom just wants to watch over him, to see him off into being a \"true adult.\""
1098. d "\"He's all grown up now... ten years makes a hell of a difference.\""
1099. d "\"I just wish I could shake his hand.\""

1100. n "Dom murmurs to me with a wistful smile, but there's only a little sadness in his voice."
1101. n "I stroke a hand through his feathery hair, letting out a soft sigh."
1102. mc "\"Maybe you can, one day.\""
1103. mc "\"Maybe you won't have to hide away from the world... one day.\""
1104. n "—Dom hasn't turned me yet, saying he thinks I need more time before I decide to seal my life away forever."
1105. n "I'm grateful for it, too. It's a heavy curse to bear, and he doesn't want me to end up doing something I'll eternally regret."
1106. n "...But I think I'll end up saying yes. {w}After all – I don't think I could bear the thought of facing death and leaving this adorably gloomy man all alone."
1107. u "\"I now pronounce you... man and wife!\""
1108. n "The priest's announcement rings out in the gardens, followed by enthusiastic cheers."
1109. mc "\"...Well, should I try and catch the bouquet? I'll be expecting a giant diamond ring from you,\nso be prepared.\""
1110. d "\"You're pretty needy for a guy who was working in a diner.\""
1111. mc "\"Jeez, how rude.\""
1112. n "Dom leans in to press a little kiss onto my pouting lips."

1113. n "For a moment, I glimpse a look of pure, gentle contentment in his eyes, and all the lingering shadows on his face are completely lifted."

1114. d "\"Hey, [mc]...\""

1115. mc "\"Yeah?\""

1116. d "\"...Thanks.\""

1117. mc "\"Huh? For what?\""

1118. n "Letting out a little chuckle, Dom shakes his head, gazing down affectionately into my eyes."

1119. d "\"Don't worry about it.\""

1120. n "Man, after all this time, I can still barely read him...{w} but I guess that's just part of his charm, stoic bastard that he is."

1121. n "I curl against Dom's side while we watch the joyful reception, eventually letting my eyes drift closed."

1122. n "In our shared silence, there's a warm, comforting sense of togetherness, like we're one body, one soul, rather than two."

1123. n "And for all the world, that might as well be the case. Since, back in San Francisco –"

1124. n "I promised Dom that I wouldn't leave his side, no matter what..."

