

3. Rex



1. n "First things first – I gotta get away from this crazy guy!"
2. n "He's striding towards me with an eager, hungry grin, and every fiber in my body tells me I shouldn't stick around."
3. mcp "\"Uh, well, it was great meeting you!\\""
4. mcp "\"Have a great night, now!\\""
5. n "Backing away a few steps, I get ready to turn and bolt, desperately looking for an escape route –"
6. mcp "\"–!\\""
7. n "But the second I try to dash forward, Rex lunges out and grabs me with incredible speed."
8. rp "\"Whoa, whoa, where you goin'?\\""
9. rp "\"Don't you know it's rude to leave a guy all by himself?\\""
10. n "His gleaming silver eyes fill my vision again, and I tense up in his grip, eying those sharp fangs."
11. n "Rex growls to me under his breath, licking his lips with a longing stare focused on my throat."
12. r "\"Why don't we catch up where we left off? You know, before that stupid emo guy came and ruined everything.\\""
13. mcp "\"...\\""
14. n "...I'm not getting away easily from this guy, am I?"

15. n "He's like some kind of rabid dog. If I show fear or manage to run away, he'll just get more of a kick out of it while he's chasing me down."
16. n "In fact, I think he {}wants{/i} me to struggle and try to escape. That's why he's taking his time taunting me, surely."
17. n "There's really only one way I can try to get out of this alive... {w}and that's by doing the opposite of what he expects."
18. old "I'll let you drink from me"
19. old "Do whatever you want"
20. n "Taking a deep breath, I steel myself and gaze into Rex's greedy eyes."
21. n "I'm still petrified with fear, but I have to try and appeal to whatever human reason he has left – there has to be at least a little bit, right?"
22. mcp "\"If you're that hungry, I'll... let you drink from me.\""
23. mcp "\"But please... don't kill me, okay? If you drain me dry, that'd really put a damper on my day.\""
24. n "With a loud sigh, I force my body to relax, and roll my eyes dramatically."
25. n "I'm still petrified with fear, but I have to try and act like I don't care."

26. mcp "\"...Fine. No point in trying to bargain with a wild animal.\""
27. mcp "\"But if you drink from me, just try not to kill me... okay?\""
28. mcp "\"My boss would be pretty pissed if he had to find someone else to pull the night shift.\""
29. r "\"...\""
30. n "Sure enough, my abrupt shift in attitude makes him pause."
31. n "He blinks at me for a few seconds, but soon, a pleased smirk curls across his lips again."
32. r "\"...Wait, are you tryin' to be all brave and noble and shit?\""
33. r "\"Damn, that's pretty cute... almost better than you bein' all wide-eyed and scared.\""
34. mcp "\"...\""
35. n "—Well, shit."
36. n "{i}That{/i} plan backfired badly. {w}What the hell do I even do now?!"
37. mcp "\"N-no, I was being serious!\""
38. mcp "\"If you're gonna drink from me, go on already... I deserve it, being stupid enough to come down here in the first place.\""
39. n "I bite my lip, a little bit of my fear changing to self-hatred."
40. n "I wasn't expecting to run into goddamn {i}vampires{/i}, but I should've known something bad would happen."

41. r "\"...Huh... you...\""

42. n "Rex narrows his eyes at me skeptically, as if he's not sure what to make of my awkward
surrender."

43. n "Maybe he expects some kind of trap or that I'm going to run away when he lets his
guard down."

44. n "I mean, I can't really believe it, either. {w}Why the hell am I willingly offering myself to
a vampire? I must be going crazy..."

45. u "\"Rex! Why aren't you coming to the fi-\""

46. n "Suddenly, a loud voice calls out to us from the end of the alleyway."

47. u "\"...Whoa, what's that smell?\""

48. u "\"Damn, it's so sweet... Holy shit, did you catch a {i}Strix{/i}?\""

49. n "A stocky man in punkish, ragged clothing approaches us with wide eyes."

50. n "His mouth hangs open in a grin, and I glimpse two sharp canines that suggest he's a
vampire, too."

51. r "\"—None of your business.\""

52. mcp "\"...\""

53. n "To my shock, Rex steps out in front of me, blocking the man's path."

54. u "\"Haah? What's up with that?\""

55. u "\"You gotta share with your clanmates, Rex! It's only fai-\""

56. r "\"I said it was none of your fuckin' business, didn't I?\""

57. r "\"He's {i}my{/i} find, so back the hell off and get your own.\""
58. n "Cutting off the other vampire's whine of protest, Rex hisses out an annoyed response."
59. n "Even though he's only a little taller than me, he suddenly seems to cast a long,
intimidating shadow over the other man."
60. n "What happened to his carefree attitude from a few minutes ago? I can hardly believe
he's the same person..."
61. u "\"W-What the hell, man?\""
62. u "\"You normally always share... Fine, whatever.\""
63. n "Despite his sheepish reply, Rex'ss clanmate turns his gaze towards me, and the
reptilian thirst in his eyes makes me shudder instinctively."
64. n "He looks even more inhuman than Rex – {w}like some kind of giant serpent staring
down prey."
65. r "\"...Come on. I don't feel like puttin' on a show for this rude fucker.\""
66. n "Muttering under his breath, Rex grabs my shoulder and steers me towards the alley
exit."
67. mc "\"H-Hey! Watch it...\""
68. n "I mumble in protest, though it feels like my voice gets swallowed up by the thick
tension in the air."
69. n "Rex is definitely not my ideal companion... {w}but he's better than being left alone with
that guy, I'm pretty sure."

70. n "The redhead pushes me all the way to the street, not releasing my shoulder until the other vampire is out of sight."

71. n "—As soon as we round the corner, he stops in his tracks, turning to fix a narrow-eyed stare on me."

72. r "\"...\""

73. mc "\"...\""

74. n "We watch each other for a long moment."

75. n "And then..."

76. r "\"Whew! What a nasty creep, right?\""

77. r "\"Damn, some guys just don't have any manners.\""

78. mc "\"...\""

79. n "Just like that, he breaks out into another fanged grin, as if nothing had ever happened."

80. n "...Jeez, it's like he only has a switch between \"rabid dog\" and \"frat boy\" mode."

81. r "\"People keep bargin' in on us, too. First that big brooding guy, then shit-for-brains back there...\""

82. mc "\"You make it sound like we were having some kind of formal meeting.\""

83. r "\"Ahahaha!\""

84. n "When I grimace at his words, Rex breaks out into a fit of delighted laughter."

85. r "\"Hey, you were the one makin' it weird. Food doesn't usually talk back, ya know?\""

86. mc "\"...My name isn't 'food,' asshole. It's [mc].\""

87. mc "\"...'Food,' huh? What a charmer.\""

88. mc "\"I'm called [mc], actually.\""

89. r "\"Oh man, now he's even telling me his name... Wow, wow! That's kinda adorable.\""

90. n "He leers at me with those gleaming fangs, and I instinctively lean back a little."

91. n "I guess I probably shouldn't push the point *{i}too{/i}* much, or else he might actually
decide to make me his dinner."

92. mc "\"...\""

93. n "I'm starting to be less afraid and more just annoyed. *{w}*Does he plan to just mock me
all night?"

94. mc "\"...Hey, what was that guy talking about back there?\""

95. mc "\"He said some funny word, 'Strix'... what's that supposed to mean?\""

96. r "\"...\""

97. n "Rex's grin falters slightly, and he goes quiet for a few seconds."

98. n "Raising a hand to awkwardly scratch at the back of his neck, he hesitates, glancing to
one side."

99. r "\"Er, it's kinda hard to explain. Something to do with your blood being sorta...
different.\""

100. r "\"Mostly, it just means you have a reaaal good scent to guys like us. A real good taste, too.\""
101. r "\"Like a choice fuckin' brandy compared to cheap beer, right? Ahahaha!\""
102. n "Rex cackles at his own joke, clapping his hands together."
103. mc "\"Right... I should've known.\""
104. n "Sighing to myself, I glare bitterly at the cracked sidewalk beneath my feet."
105. n "It's just my luck that, somehow, I end up with the blood type that's quality crack to vampires... {w}I wonder if I can get a transfusion to fix it."
106. mc "\"You said 'mostly' a second ago. Is there something else, too?\""
107. r "\"...\""
108. n "He pauses again, this time fiddling with the lapel of his jacket, chewing on his lip briefly."
109. n "But soon, a bright smile returns to his face, and he waves a dismissive hand at me."
110. r "\"...Eh, just forget I said that, yeah?\""
111. r "\"It's nothing a little guy like you needs to worry about~\""
112. mc "\"...\""

113. n "I stiffen, opening my mouth to retort that I'm not \"little\" compared to him –"
114. mcp "\"Ah–!\\""
115. n "–When he abruptly presses in towards me, getting so close that our chests
bump together."
116. r "\"So, gettin' back to business... here's the deal.\\""
117. n "Rex's voice drops down to a smug whisper."
118. r "\"That guy back there? He's gonna tell aaaaall the other little boys and girls that
you're a nice, juicy treat, just waitin' to be snatched up~\\""
119. r "\"...But you wanna know how you can get off real easy, scot-free, no
worries?\\""
120. n "The wolfish smirk on his face makes it pretty clear that it's not going to be a
great deal for me."
121. mcp "\"Yeah, yeah... tell me already, I'm dying of suspense.\\""
122. n "My impatience seems to only tickle Rex more, because he slowly runs his
tongue over his lips – as if to savor the moment."
123. mcp "\"I'm a little skeptical about the 'no worries' part, but...\\""
124. mcp "\"I'm listening. Go on.\\""
125. n "Rex's eyes gleefully shine at my response, like he's some kind of kid about to
unwrap a birthday present."

126. r "\"—It's simple.\""
127. r "\"You just say you're mine.\""
128. mcp "\"...!\""
129. n "I narrow my eyes at him to see if he's joking, but he actually looks fairly serious."
130. r "\"The other guys in Helgen? They won't touch you. You don't mess with a brother's prey unless they wanna share.\""
131. r "\"Those Seirei bastards, they're another matter... but I'll keep 'em away from you, baby, don't worry.\""
132. n "Rex reaches out a hand, possessively cupping my cheek."
133. n "His skin is cool, just like ice.{w} The sensation sends an odd shiver down my spine, and the back of my neck tingles."
134. old "I'm nobody's prey!"
135. old "If it'll keep me safe..."
136. n "—As if I'd ever agree to something like that! Is this guy crazy?!"
137. mcp "\"You can fuck right off! I'm nobody's 'prey,' and there's no way in hell I'll tell anyone I'm {i}yours{/i}.\""
138. n "I spitefully growl back at Rex's face, but rather than getting angry at my refusal, he just snickers."
139. r "\"Yeah? Huh...\""

140. r "\"Funny, I don't really remember sayin' you had a choice, though~\""
141. n "Bearing his fangs, he suggestively lets his gaze drop towards my throat."
142. mcp "\"...\""
143. n "God, I've met highway truckers with more subtlety than this guy."
144. mcp "\"Ngh...\""
145. mcp "\"Listen, if all I have to do is just say it, then I guess I could maybe...\""
146. mcp "\"...\""
147. n "I guess there's no other way out of this, is there?"
148. n "Obviously, the last thing I want to do is say I'm this guy's \"prey,\" but if it's
either that or get drained by someone else..."
149. mcp "\"...If all I have to do is say it, then fine.\""
150. mcp "\"...That {i}is{/i} all I have to do, right?\""
151. r "\"Mmm... maybe...\""
152. r "\"...Maybe not.\""
153. mcp "\"—!\""
154. n "The casual way he shrugs his shoulders makes my temper immediately flare."
155. n "I shove him away with all of my might, and he stumbles away a few feet."

156. n "I've had just about enough of his bullshit games, and right now, I'm a lot more irritated than afraid."
157. mc "\"We're done here. You'd better keep your word, or else...\""
158. r "\"...Or else what?\""
159. r "\"You're gonna glare at me like I'm a big meanie until I say sorry?\""
160. mcp "\"...I don't know what else I expected.\""
161. n "Muttering under my breath, I pull away from Rex's arms before he has a chance to taunt me any more."
162. n "He pouts a little, looking unsatisfied."
163. mc "\"I'm leaving. I'll put up with your crap for now, but —\""
164. r "\"You keep talking like you've got options besides me, baby.\""
165. r "\"You hit your head earlier or something?\""
166. mc "\"Well, I could always ask Dominic if he wants to help me out...\""
167. r "\"...!\""
168. n "{i}That{/i} gets his attention, much to my satisfaction."
169. n "It's like I just dangled a treat in front of a mutt, then threw it to another dog."
170. r "\"...Okay, okay. No need to act all spiteful 'n shit.\""
171. r "\"I get it. I'll play nice... nicer.\""

172. mc "\"Yeah? I hope that attitude lasts for more than ten seconds.\""
173. n "I turn on my heel before he can reach out for me again, shoving my hands into my pockets and walking away."
174. n "Christ, out of all the vampires, why do I have to be stuck with the craziest one?"
175. rp "\"Hey! Wait!\""
176. mcp "\"What?\""
177. n "Without turning around, I call back to Rex."
178. rp "\"...Watch yourself on your way home.\""
179. rp "\"I don't want some lame guy takin' a bite out of you first, okay? That's all.\""
180. mcp "\"...\""
181. n "Something about his slightly awkward tone makes me pause."
182. n "I glance over my shoulder to try and glimpse his face —{w} but he's already gone, his wiry figure disappearing down the alley."
183. n "...Whatever.{w} Trying to understand him is probably a waste of time, anyway."

184. n "But I end up following Rex's advice, hurrying back to my apartment while keeping a watchful eye for anyone lurking in the dark."
185. n "I've never worried about thugs before – who'd wanna rob a broke-looking guy like me? – but now, every alley seems dangerous."
186. n "Damn it.{w} Is every night going to be like this from now on...?"
187. n "–Home sweet home."
188. n "If only I could pretend all of this was a crazy fever dream..."
189. n "If only it was that easy."
190. n "I end up tossing and turning in bed for what feels like ages, until eventually..."
191. n "The exhaustion from tonight pulls me into a deep sleep."
192. mc "\"Ngh...\""
193. n "The early afternoon sun trickles into my apartment, fighting through storm clouds to arrive on my face."
194. n "I push myself up with a yawn."
195. extend " I can't say I feel very refreshed."
196. mc "\"...\""
197. n "Those events last night, the fight between Dominic and Rex..."

198. n "...The vampires."
199. n "I was hoping it would be a dream, but —"
200. extend " it sticks too vividly in my mind, like a bad taste that won't leave my mouth."
201. mc "\"This would make for a great story to write about... except I'd definitely have an anxiety attack while writing it...\""
202. 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...\""
203. 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...\""
204. n "Still half-asleep, I mumble to myself as I put on the coffee machine."
205. 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."
206. n "Rex..."
207. n "His words from last night still echo in my ears."
208. n "I definitely don't want to be someone's food supply, though I also don't want to end up dead in an alleyway."
209. n "Rex is obviously untrustworthy, but at least he doesn't seem intent on killing me... yet, anyway."

210. n "I'll just have to see what happens, I guess. {w}With luck, he won't decide to make me tonight's dinner."
211. 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."
212. 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."
213. n "I change a few details here and there, but it reads more like a diary rather than fiction."
214. 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."
215. 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."
216. 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."
217. 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."
218. 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."

219. 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."
220. n "—When I get ready to leave for work, the sight of the darkening sky outside makes me tense."
221. n "What I saw yesterday, along with Rex's warning, won't stop nagging at my mind."
222. n "I'd better hurry to the diner before it gets too late... and hope that Rex keeps his word."
223. n "Luckily, nothing happens on the way to my shift, and I flick on the diner's lights with a sigh of relief."
224. mcp "\"This crap is doing a real number on my stress levels, I'll say...\""
225. n "Muttering to myself, I switch the sign to \"Open\" after a little bit of prep work, and the night finally begins."
226. u "\"Y-yeah, I'll have, uh... just the fries, uh, yeah...\""
227. mc "\"Coming right up.\""
228. n "—Just the normal drunk customers."
229. u "\"Hey dude, can I get... an ice cream frothy... thing?\""
230. mc "\"...You mean a milkshake?\""

231. u "\"Yeah, dude, {i}milkshake!{/i} That's totally what I meant, how'd you know?\""
232. n "–Average, high-as-a-kite teenagers."
233. n "Nothing out of the ordinary... {w}not yet."
234. n "Occasionally, I glimpse a shape moving outside the diner's windows, although
it's probably just a random passerby."
235. n "...For some reason, though, I have an uneasy feeling."
236. n "It's like I'm being watched – and not in the comforting \"guardian angel\" way,
either."
237. mc "\"Phew...\""
238. n "Closing time finally rolls around."
239. n "No sign of any angry vampires, but Rex hasn't shown up, either."
240. n "I don't know if I should be worried or relieved. {w}Not sure what I expected
from someone like him, though..."
241. mc "\"Maybe I should call a taxi.\""
242. n "Sighing, I finish wiping a glass and put it on the shelf nearby."
243. n "Right as I turn around to start leaving the bar –"
244. mcp "\"...!\""
245. n "The diner door violently swings open."
246. mc "\"You...\""

247. r "\"Hey, hey~ That's no way to say hi to your cool vampire master, is it?\""
248. r "\"How about a nice 'Hello, sir' or 'Please take me sir,' or –\""
249. n "I grab a box lying on the nearby counter and chuck it straight at his head."
250. r "\"Whooooa!\""
251. n "He ducks out of the way just in time, straightening back up with a delighted snicker."
252. r "\"Careful, baby~ You don't wanna mess up this nice diner of yours, right?\""
253. n "I roll my eyes, pointedly ignoring the rest of his blabbering."
254. n "If he's going to go on like this every night, I think I'd rather just be drained dry and put out of my misery."
255. r "\"Hey, are you listenin'? Don't tune me out like that, you're gonna hurt my feelings!\""
256. n "Rex strides up to the counter, leaning forward and propping up his elbows on the white surface."
257. mcp "\"Yeah, just make yourself at home, sure.\""
258. mcp "\"What'd you come here for, anyways? To torment me?\""
259. n "Rex lets out a theatrical sigh, staring at me with sparkling silver eyes."
260. r "\"Nah, well... I gotta make good on my promise, you know?\""
261. mcp "\"Your promise?\""

262. n "When I repeat his words in confusion, he nods, clearing his throat."
263. r "\"Yeah, keepin' my cute blood bag safe, and all that.\""
264. r "\"Figured I'd stop in to make sure nothin' weird happened while you were
alone.\""
265. mcp "\"...\""
266. n "Am I entirely misunderstanding things, or..."
267. n "Is Rex saying he's trying to protect me?"
268. n "—No, I think I've got it wrong. {w}He just wants me safe so he can use me as a
\"blood bag.\""
269. mcp "\"...Gee, thanks. I was having a real rough time fighting off the junkies until
my knight in shining armor showed up.\""
270. r "\"I didn't mean {i}them{/i}, dumbass. The other vampires out there!\""
271. n "To my surprise, Rex actually gets a little worked up at my snide comment, and a
sour look flickers across his face."
272. n "...He must be taking this whole \"protecting\" business pretty seriously."
273. mcp "\"What, you mean I can't just grab some garlic from the kitchen to defend
myself?\""
274. r "\"Pfft. Garlic doesn't do shit-all to vampires, except make us smell funky.\""
275. mcp "\"Why can't I just buy a stake from the hardware store and carry it
around?\""

276. mcp "\"Seems more efficient than having a snot-nosed 'guard.'\""
277. r "\"Yeah, sure. That stake shit, that'll hurt us about as much as a slap to the face.\""
278. n "Rex snorts, grabbing a straw and fiddling with it between two fingers."
279. r "\"I'm bein' serious, though.\""
280. r "\"Striges like you, they're pretty damn rare... I'm kinda surprised no one's pounced on you yet.\""
281. mcp "\"Maybe your fellow vampires have more self-restraint than you. Ever think about that?\""
282. r "\"Tch, it's not my fault! You were totally giving me those fuck-me-eyes back in the alley!\""
283. r "\"Or maybe it was more please-don't-kill-me-eyes... kinda hard to tell the difference sometimes...\""
284. mcp "\"Jesus, what kind of messed up sex life do you have?\""
285. n "I try to keep up an annoyed front, but it's hard not to laugh at such stupid bantering."
286. n "It helps that Rex is acting a little more bearable than yesterday, not just treating me like some kind of captured prey."
287. n "He's definitely not my {i}preferred{/i} conversation partner, though there are worse guys to be around."

288. n "—As I watch him lean lazily on the counter, a question pops up in my mind."

289. mcp "\"Hey... how'd you get turned into a vampire, anyway?\""

290. mcp "\"You seem a lot happier about being one than, say, someone like
Dominic.\""

291. r "\"...\""

292. n "Rex's eyes instantly narrow when I mention Dominic's name."

293. n "They really don't get along, do they?"

294. r "\"That guy... Ngh.\""

295. r "\"He doesn't love or respect his clan one fuckin' bit. It's a shitty clan, sure, but
you gotta treat your clanmates like family.\""

296. r "\"Otherwise, you're just a blood-suckin' monster, all alone in the world..."

297. r "\"...Not even a reflection to keep you company.\""

298. n "His voice trails off to a quiet, distant murmur, and for a moment, he looks
unusually wistful."

299. mcp "\"Rex...?\""

300. n "The second I curiously nudge his shoulder, though, his eyes leap back up to me
with a bright flash."

301. r "\"Oh, right! How'd I get turned?\""

302. r "\"Man, it feels like forever ago, even though it was only last August!\""

303. r "\"Let's see...\""

304. rp "\"So I was in this gang, right, a group of guys in Phoenix who did a lot of hardcore shit.\""
305. n "Rex starts recounting his tale with an eager grin, clearly fond of the memory."
306. mcp "\"You were in a gang?\""
307. rp "\"Er, yeah, well.\""
308. rp "\"My parents had... some problems, so I kinda... wanted to get out of there.\""
309. n "His smile falters briefly, eyes shifting to one side to evade my puzzled gaze."
310. rp "\"The guys in the group were cool as hell, though! Just like real brothers!\""
311. rp "\"We had a lot of fun, did some crazy things, almost died a couple times.\""
312. rp "\"But guess what? One of them was friends with a fuckin' vampire!\""
313. rp "\"He was awesome, real strong, but we thought that was just 'cuz he pumped a shit-ton of iron.\""
314. rp "\"None of us knew what he was, though.\""
315. rp "\"It kinda came outta left field when he pulled me aside one day and was all, 'Hey, man, you wanna become part of a {i}cooler{/i} gang?\""

316. n "Rex keeps beaming while he's talking, but a shadow of something like guilt crosses his face all of a sudden."
317. r "\"I, uh... I thought he meant my buddies and I would all be joinin' together...\""
318. r "\"Didn't really think he was serious when he talked about the whole vampire shit, figured it was some weird, freaky hazing thing.\""
319. r "\"But he only bit me, not them. Took me down here, to San Fran, and brought me into the Helgen.\""
320. r "\"I couldn't talk to the guys back in Phoenix... I mean, how would they understand somethin' like that?\""
321. n "He seems to be struggling to keep up a cheery voice."
322. mcp "\"...\""
323. n "This \"gang\" of his back in Arizona must've been pretty dear to him."
324. r "\"It's not that bad, though! The other guys in Helgen are great, really chill about feeding and everything.\""
325. r "\"And bein' a vampire is awesome, once you get used to it!\""
326. mcp "\"Really? You wouldn't go back to being human if you could?\""
327. r "\"...\""
328. r "\"...I mean...\""
329. n "My question makes Rex hesitate, and he stares at me for a long few seconds."

330. n "He doesn't really seem to know the answer himself...\n{w}I get that impression from seeing his conflicted eyes."
331. r "\"...Christ, why you gotta ask such hard fuckin' questions, man?\""
332. n "He screws his face up in a playfully annoyed way, nudging a fist against my shoulder."
333. mcp "\"Hey, hey, careful with that ~vampire strength~ of yours, you might break something.\\""
334. r "\"You little shit, you're gonna {i}make{/i} me break something!\\""
335. n "I snicker as Rex waves his plastic straw threateningly in my face, a grin returning to his lips."
336. n "...This guy, maybe he's not as bad as I first thought."
337. n "Honestly, he just reminds me of a goofy teenager – when he's not leering at me with his fangs, that is."
338. r "\"...I guess you should be gettin' home, huh?\""
339. n "Letting out a long sigh, Rex pushes away from the counter, shoving his hands into his pockets."
340. mc "\"Yeah... it's gotten pretty late.\\""
341. n "Surprisingly, I'm a little reluctant to leave."
342. n "Damn, I must be really starved for company if I enjoyed talking to {i>this{/i} guy.{w}\nI need to get out more."

343. n "I grab my keys and follow Rex over to the door, and we head outside to the night road."
344. r "\"Hey. I'll walk you home, 'kay?\""
345. mc "\"...\""
346. n "I open my mouth to reflexively refuse the offer out of pride, but..."
347. n "The eager, hopeful look in Rex's eyes makes the words get stuck in my throat."
348. mc "\"Er, sure. Can't hurt, I guess.\""
349. mc "\"Just don't start stalking me when you know where I live. Vampire or not, I'll give you a piece of my mind.\""
350. r "\"Come on, man, don't you think I have better things to do with my time?\""
351. r "\"Unless... Hey, you don't shower with the window open, do you?\""
352. mc "\"-!\""
353. n "I elbow his ribs sharply as we start walking along, but he only wheezes and laughs raucously in response."
354. mc "\"Just don't expect to be invited in for tea or anything.\""
355. r "\"Huh?\""
356. r "\"Why would I wanna be invited in when the best drink's standin' right in front of me?\""
357. mc "\"...And here I was, thinking you'd gotten past seeing me as a three-course meal.\""

358. n "My route back home is usually pretty quiet and lonely, so Rex's happy chattering along the way is a welcome change."
359. n "He talks about his clan a lot, raving about how the older members are \"so cool,\" just like a sports fanboy or something."
360. n "I'm almost envious. {w}I don't think I've ever had a group of friends, or even family, as close as Rex apparently is with his clanmates."
361. n "Some of what he says seems a little at odds with his actions, though... after all, why isn't he hanging out with his clan instead of with me?"
362. n "A few blocks away from my apartment, Rex and I round the corner into a narrow side road, idly talking about some old 80's movies."
363. rp "\"Yeah, I didn't give a flyin' fuck about Elliot Ness until I saw that flick, then I was like damn, he's so cool!\""
364. rp "\"Goin' after Capone like a badass, man, I really –\""
365. u "\"Hey, Rex!\""
366. n "Suddenly, a loud holler breaks through the darkness."
367. rp "\"...\""
368. n "A moment later, three tall figures come jogging towards us from the other end of the alley."
369. n "I can't really make out their faces in the dark, but their clothing is similar to Rex's own."

370. u "\"Yo, we were lookin' for you! Hey, wait...\""
371. n "The one in the middle cranes his neck a little, and I get the feeling his eyes are trained on me."
372. u "\"Wait, is that the guy Gary was talkin' about?\""
373. u "\"He your feeding pet, Rex?\""
374. u "\"Hey! If he's just a blood bag, why are you guys walking around together? Shouldn't you have him locked up somewhere?\""
375. n "Another one of the men – probably a group of vampires – chimes in, his voice high and nasal."
376. mcp "\"...\""
377. n "I shoot a worried look over at Rex, who's frozen in place, eyes wide."
378. u "\"Shit, don't tell me... you're not {i}friends{/i} with him, right?\""
379. u "\"Rex, you know Bishop doesn't allow that shit!\""
380. u "\"You get caught bein' friends with a human, and it'll spell reaaaal big trouble!\""
381. n "The three vampires' jeering words call out to us."
382. n "I'd guess that they're Rex's clanmates... but they don't sound very brotherly at all."
383. r "\"...Guys, you know it's not like that...\""
384. n "Rex mumbles under his breath, his lips pulled together tightly."

385. u "\"It's not, huh? Well, shit, I don't know if I believe you!\\""
386. u "\"Yeah, me neither.\\""
387. u "\"Hey, if he's really just a blood bag, why don't you take a nice long drink from
him right here?\\""
388. r "\"...\\""
389. n "His eyes sliding over to me, Rex pauses, a strange grimace pulled over his lips."
390. u "\"Yeah, yeah! If you don't, we'll take him!\\""
391. u "\"He doesn't smell claimed, but he {i}does{/i} smell pretty fuckin' good...\\""
392. n "One of the vampires takes a step closer to me."
393. mcp "\"...Rex...\\""
394. n "I unthinkingly hiss out Rex's name to try and spur him into action."
395. n "What's he doing, just staying quiet at a time like this?! {w}These guys are not
messing around, clearly!"
396. n "He has to tell them off like he did to that other man last night, otherwise, I'm
going to end up someone's meal—!"
397. r "\"...C'mere, [mc].\\""
398. mcp "\"...\\""
399. n "Rex's voice is soft, but oddly firm."

400. n "He reaches out a hand, beckoning me closer."
401. n "The light in his eyes is much different from earlier. {w}Right now, it reminds me
of how he looked when we first met."
402. n "Hungry, eager –"
403. extend " but also, just faintly, a little sad."
404. old "Get closer"
405. old "Stay away"
406. n "...His expression is terrifying, but I don't really have a choice, do I?"
407. n "I trust Rex more than these other guys, at least, even if it's just by a tiny
amount... and I don't want to get into a fight."
408. n "Reluctantly, I step closer to him, although I try to keep a couple feet between
us."
409. n "...That look can't mean anything good."
410. n "I thought Rex was supposed to \"protect\" me, so why is he acting strange all
of a sudden?"
411. n "If I keep my distance, maybe he'll come to his senses, or I can buy some time to
escape..."
412. r "\"I said, come {i}here!{/i}\""
413. mcp "\"–!\\""

414. n "But a second later, Rex lunges forward, grabbing me and pulling me into his arms."
415. u "\"That's more like it, haha!\""
416. u "\"Hey, Rex, see if you can get him to make some cute noises~ I love it when they're scared!\""
417. n "The sound of taunting voices barely reaches my ears, drowned out by my own pounding heartbeat."
418. n "I stare up at Rex, silently pleading for him to have an escape plan."
419. r "\"Yeah... he's scared, all right.\""
420. r "\"So fuckin' cute that it's drivin' me wild...\""
421. mc "\"...\""
422. n "It takes me a few seconds to recognize the meaning behind his low, growled words."
423. n "But as soon as I start to frantically struggle –"
424. mc "\"Aah–!\""
425. n "A sharp pain shoots through my neck, and I cry out, trying to push Rex away."
426. n "It feels like two small blades are splitting open my skin, driving deep into my neck."
427. n "It's so terrifying that I can hardly breathe."
428. mc "\"Nnh... ah...\""

429. n "...But soon, the pain starts to melt away."
430. n "In its place comes something completely different..."
431. n "A strange, warm tingle that spreads through me from where Rex's fangs are
sunk into my neck."
432. mc "\"Haah... fu...\""
433. n "...What is this?"
434. extend " What are these noises I'm making?"
435. u "\"Haha, there you go!\""
436. u "\"Wow, he's really loving it, Rex! You got a way with them, for sure~\""
437. n "—A deliciously sweet sensation starts to float down my spine."
438. n "I unconsciously relax in Rex's arms, closing my eyes as the powerful pleasure
makes my body hotter and hotter."
439. n "He clings onto me tightly, his face still buried against my neck, and I hear him
softly panting as he drinks."
440. n "It feels incredible..."
441. n "I want to tell Rex that, but all my strength is draining away."
442. n "I can't even lift my head up or form any words... {w}I can only shiver in his
embrace, relishing this blissful feeling."
443. mc "\"Mmh... R-Rex... aah...\""

444. n "The moans leaving my lips get weaker as my consciousness slips away bit by bit."

445. n "Rex squeezes me against him, and I think I feel his fingers running through through my hair."

446. n "I don't want it to end."

447. extend " It's the most wonderful thing I've ever felt."

448. n "I want more..."

449. n "—Before long, though, I sense Rex pulling back."

450. n "His tongue laps over the wound at my neck, making me shudder again in delight."

451. r "\"[mc]...\""

452. n "His voice whispers passionately in my ear."

453. r "\"[mc]... I'm....\""

454. n "I hear his words, even though I can't understand what he's saying."

455. n "It might be something important...{w} but it's too hard to focus."

456. n "Finally, I give in to the pull of darkness, and let myself be washed away into a comforting void."

457. mc "\"Ngh...\""

458. mc "\"Fuck, my head...\""

459. n "Groaning loudly, I turn over in my bed, reaching for the sheets."

460. n "...Huh, were my sheets always this small?"

461. n "Also, my bed feels a lot harder than I remember."

462. n "The mattress was never exactly luxury foam, but it wasn't {i}this{/i} bad..."

463. mc "\"...\""

464. n "—Wait a second."

465. n "This isn't my bed."

466. n "This is..."

467. n "My eyes shoot open."

468. n "The first thing I see are concrete walls and fluorescent lighting."

469. n "I'm lying on the floor in — {w}some kind of warehouse?"

470. n "I pull my aching body up into a sitting position and realize that there's a large
cloth draped over me."

471. n "It looks like something used for covering stacks of crates, but it's been serving
as my makeshift blanket."

472. mcp "\"How the hell did I get here...?\""

473. n "I can't remember anything. {w}I know I had my shift at the diner, and talked to
Rex, and then we went home...."

474. mcp "\"...\""

475. n "...And just like that, it all comes flooding back."

476. mc "\"Haah... fu...\""

477. mc "\"Mmh... R-Rex... aah...\""

478. n "Those noises I made..."

479. n "The strange sensations that were making me feel so hot..."

480. mcp "\"—Goddamn it!\""

481. n "With an angry cry, I throw away the blanket and push myself up to my feet."

482. n "It was probably Rex who took me here... after {i}that{/i} happened."

483. n "Bastard. {w}I can't believe he actually went through with it!"

484. mc "\"...\""

485. n "...Why do I feel so betrayed?"

486. n "He made it clear a couple nights ago that he only wanted my blood."

487. n "I guess I just... thought that he wasn't actually serious about it."

488. n "Now, I feel like a complete idiot. {w}I shouldn't have trusted him."

489. n "With a strange gloominess clouding over me, I drag myself out of the
warehouse and head outside."

490. mcp "\"Ngh... bright...\""

491. n "It's broad daylight, probably early afternoon. I must've slept for a really long
time."

492. n "The street I'm on looks like it's not too far from home. {w}I guess Rex dropped
me off at this warehouse, not knowing which apartment I lived in."

493. n "I probably look like complete shit after all I've been through. Hopefully I'm not mistaken for a crazy bum by people passing by."
494. n "—I make it to my apartment before long, and I waste no time in taking a nice, cold shower."
495. n "After some coffee and a delicious frozen meal, I feel a bit more like my normal self."
496. n "...But a lot of my energy is still zapped, though I don't know whether it's from being fed on or being pissed off at Rex."
497. mcp "\"...\""
498. n "Sighing, I slump down into my office chair, stuffing my hands into my pockets."
499. mcp "\"...Huh? What's this?\""
500. n "My hand brushes something thin and crinkly inside my jacket."
501. n "Huh? It's a note — and it definitely wasn't there last night."
502. n "I unfold it and scan over the text, which is written in a very messy hand."
503. mcp "\"...'Sry abt 2nite. Meet me @ club skyline tmrw nite. Want 2 apolygize.'\""
504. mcp "\"...\""
505. n "—I don't know what's worse, his butchered spelling of \"apologize\" or the fact that he wants me to meet him again."

506. n "Well, it's not like I have to. {w}If I wanted, I could just skip town and get another shitty job somewhere else that {i}isn't{/i} vampire central."
507. n "I doubt Rex would come after me. He's too attached to his \"clan,\" obviously."
508. mcp "\"Ngh...\""
509. n "But... {w}to be honest, I do sort of want to see him again, even though I shouldn't."
510. n "Mostly, I just want to ask why he turned on me last night, instead of defending me like he did a couple nights ago."
511. n "Club Skyline's pretty close to the diner, too, so I could just stop by on my way home..."
512. mcp "\"You really have no self control, [mc].\""
513. n "Muttering under my breath dryly, I decide to distract myself with some commission work for the rest of the day."
514. n "One of my current jobs is a romance story. Normally, I kinda suck at writing hot and steamy scenes, but..."
515. n "My mind keeps drifting back to last night, and somehow, the words that fill my screen are really sexy, painting some surprisingly visceral imagery."

516. n "The feeling of being fed on is hard to describe, but when I remember the sensations, they make my imagination spring to life –"
517. extend " and something else too, ugh."
518. n "My latest job is a track for a strip club scene, part of a little indie flick."
519. n "I was kinda stuck on how to make it sound \"sexy,\" but when my mind drifts back to the feelings I had last night, when Rex was feeding on me..."
520. n "Somehow, I manage to capture it perfectly – {w}a slow, heavy rhythm and sleazy electric guitar pulling it all together."
521. n "My latest commission is a smutty drawing of some person's original characters."
522. n "I'm not great at drawing erotic stuff normally, but..."
523. n "When my mind drifts back to last night, and the hot, sweet sensations that flooded through my body, my pen starts to move on its own."
524. n "The way their bodies entwine, the expressions on their faces – {w}somehow, I draw it more vividly than I ever could before."
525. mc "\"Phew... I'm gonna need another cold shower.\""
526. n "By the time I finish up and get ready to head to work, my mood's actually a lot brighter."

527. n "I got some good work done, and..."
528. n "Well, I'll get to see Rex in a few hours. {w}Of course, I'm mostly just excited to
chew him out."
529. n "—Like always, the street is fairly busy around this time."
530. n "I mostly just tune out the racket of car stereos and blaring horns."
531. n "It's funny to think that out of all these people, next to no one realizes that
they're in a city infested with vampires..."
532. n "...And just a few nights ago, I was one of them."
533. n "My shift goes like normal, full of junkies and the occasional drunk prick."
534. u "\"Can I get number seven? A, uh...\""
535. mc "\"—That's a whole pie, sir. Are you sure you really want a {i}whole{/i} pie?\""
536. u "\"High? I'm not high, you're high!\""
537. mc "\"...Ngh...\""
538. n "Ah, late night crowd, never change."
539. n "Finally, I decide to close up shop a little early."
540. n "Shoving my keys in my pocket, I head towards Club Skyline, sticking to the main
road."
541. mcp "\"No vampires out to play tonight, I hope? Eheh...\""

542. n "I nervously laugh under my breath, making sure to peer down every alley I go past."
543. n "Luckily, it doesn't seem like anyone's trying to make [mc]-kebabs right now."
544. n "I reach the club before long and duck into the dark, crowded interior."
545. mcp "\"...\""
546. n "The bass is so loud that my eardrums feel like they might burst. {w}It smells of sweat and... probably other bodily fluids, too."
547. n "I grimace, squinting in the dark to try and find Rex in the sea of dancing bodies."
548. n "His unnaturally red hair is pretty easy to pick out, but I don't see him anywhere..."
549. n "—Hang on. {w}Doesn't that bartender look kind of familiar?"
550. mcp "\"—! Rex!\""
551. n "I push my way over to the bar quickly, and the man serving drinks turns around to face me."
552. r "\"...Oh, hey, baby! Was wonderin' when you'd show up!\""
553. n "Rex casts me his usual wide, feral grin while energetically shaking a mixer."
554. mc "\"What the hell? I didn't know you {i}worked{/i} here.\""
555. r "\"Hey, a guy needs some spending money, okay?\""

556. r "\"And I don't wanna get it all from robbing old ladies or some shit.\""
557. n "He defensively yells his reply over the music, then pours the mixed drink in front of a guy who looks completely smashed."
558. n "Afterwards, he yanks off a small strip of cloth he was using as a headband, then vaults over the counter to land beside me."
559. mcp "\"Whoa—!\""
560. mcp "\"Wait, aren't you on your shift? You can't just —\""
561. rp "\"Nah, another dude's comin' soon to take over, anyway.\""
562. rp "\"C'mon, over here!\""
563. n "Grabbing my wrist, Rex tugs me over to one corner of the club, and I stumble along behind him."
564. mcp "\"Ngh! Let go, you dick! I'm not some puppy on a leash for you to drag around!\""
565. rp "\"Yeah? You want me to carry you instead?\""
566. mcp "\"...\""
567. n "Unable to come up with a retort, I just glare at his back as we weave through the crowd."
568. mcp "\"You know, I can follow you just fine without being dragged!\""
569. rp "\"I don't wanna take any chances! Gotta stake my claim, yeah?\""
570. mcp "\"...\""

571. n "Arguing is probably useless, so I just grumble to myself and follow his persistent tugging."
572. n "Soon, we come to a stop in a slightly darker corner of the club."
573. n "Rex turns around to face me, staying close so that we can hear each other without needing to shout."
574. r "\"Alright, listen...\""
575. r "\"I know you're probably pissed about last night.\""
576. mcp "\"You're goddamn right I am.\""
577. r "\"...\""
578. n "Rex winces a little when I growl at him, and he sheepishly rubs a hand through the back of his hair."
579. mcp "\"Wouldn't you be?\""
580. mcp "\"For all that talk about protecting me, you sure did a 180 pretty fast.\""
581. r "\"...\""
582. n "He chews on his bottom lip uncomfortably, scratching at his tattooed cheek."
583. r "\"Listen, I just had to do what was best for both of us, okay?\""
584. r "\"If I hadn't, those guys woulda seen through it all, and you'd be locked up as one of their private blood bags right now.\""
585. r "\"...Or worse.\""

586. n "He wrinkles his nose, lips pressed together in a tight line."

587. mcp "\"Weren't they your clanmates? Why couldn't you just say you were going
home with me?\""

588. r "\"That's... not how it works.\""

589. r "\"The Helgen, they're all about showin' off.\""

590. r "\"If you were really just a pet, I would've...\""

591. r "\"...\""

592. n "Rex abruptly cuts off, and his eyes go wide."

593. r "\"I-I mean, er, of course you're my pet, I just –\""

594. mcp "\"Oh? What was that just now?\""

595. mcp "\"...You see me as more than a pet, huh?\""

596. n "Jumping on the opportunity to tease him, I savagely smirk, leaning in a little
bit."

597. n "In response, Rex lets out a loud cough and turns his head evasively to one
side."

598. r "\"W-what? I didn't say that!\""

599. r "\"Listen, it's fuckin' complicated, okay?\""

600. r "\"Besides, you should be thanking me for savin' your ass!\""

601. mcp "\"I thought the whole point of us meeting was for you to apologize.\""

602. mcp "\"You're not great at this whole 'communication' thing, are you?\""

603. r "\"...\""

604. n "It's hard for me to stay mad at Rex, for some reason."

605. n "I think it's because this is his own awkward way of saying he likes me – {w}as
more than just a \"pet.\""

606. n "Sighing, Rex glances up at the pulsing lights on the ceiling, which reflect in his
silver irises."

607. rp "\"You... you tasted even better than I thought you would.\""

608. mcp "\"Come again?\""

609. n "He mutters something so softly that I can barely understand."

610. rp "\"I {i}said{/i}, you tasted fuckin' amazing... the best thing I've ever had in my
life.\""

611. rp "\"Real talk, I dunno if I can go back to junkies and homeless dudes, now that
I've had your blood.\""

612. n "There's a brief glimmer of hunger in his eyes, mixed with a longing look."

613. mcp "\"...Not sure if that's a good thing, but...\""

614. mcp "\"Thanks, I guess?\""

615. n "Christ, good thing the music's loud enough that no one can hear our bizarre
conversation."

616. n "Rex is gazing at me expectantly, like he's waiting for me to say something else,
or just outright offer myself to him."

617. n "Man, the nerve of this guy..."

618. old "The way it felt last night..."

619. old "Can't you treat me as a friend, not a meal?"

620. old "Watch out for next time"

621. old "Watch out for next time (unlocked)"

622. mcp "\"Well... I'm still pretty pissed at you and everything, but..."

623. mcp "\"It actually felt... kinda good for me, too.\""

624. mcp "\"I can't believe I'm saying this, but it was one of the best... one of the most
intense things I've ever experienced.\""

625. r "\"...\""

626. n "Rex's eyes light up at that, and an eager smirk quickly curls on his lips, showing
off his fangs."

627. r "\"Course it was!\""

628. r "\"I took things real slow so you wouldn't pass out right away. It's awesome,
right?\""

629. r "\"Shit, man, those sounds you were makin', too... it only took a couple seconds
for you to get har-\""

630. mcp "\"Yeah, yeah, I get the picture.\""

631. n "I cut Rex off with a sharp glare, hoping my face isn't growing too red."
632. n "My memory of last night is still a little hazy, but I think I'm fine with that, for my own pride's sake."
633. mcp "\"I wish you'd stop looking at me like a piece of meat.\""
634. mcp "\"If you wanna be friends, it's gonna be real hard with you treating me as a meal that can talk.\""
635. r "\"...\""
636. n "Rex pulls a face at my irritated comment, like a scolded child who knows they've done something bad."
637. r "\"Well, I mean, it's kinda hard for a cat to just be chill around a mouse... but whatever you say, boss.\""
638. n "His sulky response makes me heave a sigh."
639. n "I guess it {i}is{/i} probably instinct for him, so I can't be that angry – although I wish he'd have a little more restraint."
640. n "I reach out and grab the front of Rex's shirt, pulling him closer."
641. mcp "\"The next time you try to bite me, you'd better watch out...\""
642. mcp "\"I might just bite you back. You're probably into that kinda thing, though, huh?\""
643. r "\"...\""

644. n "His eyes widen, and he blinks at me in shock."
645. n "I bet he didn't see {i}that{/i} one coming."
646. r "\"W-wow, I mean, yeah...\""
647. r "\"Anytime you wanna bite me, baby, you just gotta ask.\""
648. r "\"Hell, you don't even to ask. You get VIP treatment!\""
649. mcp "\"...Man, you really play hard to get, don't you?\""
650. n "I roll my eyes at his eager reply, but it's hard to keep from smirking."
651. mcp "\"Anyway, more importantly – I forgive you.\""
652. r "\"Huh? Really?\""
653. mcp "\"Just this once. If you try to pull something like that again without warning
me, I'm not gonna be happy.\""
654. n "Rex, who seems thrilled that I'm not holding a grudge against him, eagerly nods
his head."
655. n "He does his best to mask his excitement by clearing his throat afterwards, but
it's not hard to see through him."
656. r "\"Well, if you're gonna be fussy about it, I'll say somethin' first next time. So
needy!\""
657. mcp "\"{i}I'm{/i} needy? Sorry, must've misheard you over the music.\""

658. n "We exchange a few more playful insults and jabs, and I even indulge Rex by dancing with him for a little while."
659. n "I catch glimpses of his fangs when he grins at me now and then – {w}and it makes me wonder how far away the vampiric beast inside him ever really is."
660. n "But right now, it's so hard to see him as anything other than a crazy, energetic kid... he really only does have two modes, I guess."
661. n "Finally, I hesitantly tell Rex that I should head home to catch some sleep."
662. n "He insists on walking me back, which I end up agreeing to despite my better judgment."
663. rp "\"Hey...\""
664. n "When we get close to my apartment, Rex pipes up with a more serious voice, although he sounds a little uncertain."
665. mcp "\"Yeah? What's up?\""
666. n "I cast him a curious glance, raising one eyebrow."
667. r "\"You think maybe... we could trade off seein' each other now and then?\""
668. r "\"I mean, I could stop by the diner some days, you could come by the club on others...\""
669. n "He scratches at the back of his neck a little awkwardly."

670. mc "\"Well, I figured you'd show up at the diner whether I wanted you to or not.\""

671. mc "\"I guess I don't mind stopping by the club now and then. Especially if you give me free drinks.\""

672. n "Rex lights up like a Christmas tree, flashing me a joyful, fangy grin."

673. r "\"Hell yeah! Free drinks for my favorite drink, anytime he wants!\""

674. n "He darts forward and pulls me into a crushing hug, which I return with a slight grunt."

675. mcp "\"Ngh... can't you come up with a nickname for me that isn't...\""

676. mcp "\"...You know, never mind.\""

677. n "—And just like that, our strange relationship kicked off."

678. n "Most nights, Rex would show up at the diner not long before I closed, and we'd chat about silly things almost until dawn."

679. n "I came to visit him at Club Skyline pretty regularly, too, where he made good on his promise of free drinks."

680. n "...But to my surprise, Rex stopped asking me for blood after that."

681. n "Whenever I questioned him about it, he brushed me off, acting like he didn't need to feed very often."
682. n "Maybe it's guilt, maybe it's embarrassment. {w}Or maybe he just wants us to be more like regular friends – I can't really tell."
683. n "He's started to look even paler than normal, though... {w}which worries me, but once Rex makes his mind up, it's impossible to change it."
684. n "Our relationship itself didn't outright grow beyond \"friends,\" even though it was obvious Rex liked me."
685. n "I guess you could say I'm just too scared to actually date a vampire, especially since I get the feeling Rex's clanmates are still watching us."
686. n "Although he's just so stupidly adorable (or is it adorably stupid?) that, sometimes, I can hardly keep from pouncing on him."
687. mc "\"Ahh... closing time, finally.\""
688. n "I let out a sigh of relief."
689. n "It's been a long shift, but tonight, I get to see Rex at the club and grab some on-the-house beers... something I've started to look forward to a lot."
690. n "I head over to the club while humming under my breath, enjoying the cool, refreshing night air."
691. n "Before stepping inside, I smooth out my jacket and hair just the tiniest bit."

692. n "Like usual, it's pretty packed, and I have to wade my way through the crowd to reach the bar."

693. mc "\"Rex!\\""

694. mc "\"Rex, I could really use a dr-\\""

695. mc "\"...?\\""

696. n "But when I get close, I realize Rex is standing beside the bar, surrounded by a few figures in punkish outfits."

697. n "I think I might recognize a couple of them from that night in the alley...\n{w}Are they his clanmates?"

698. u "\"...So, Rex, what we're tryin'a say is...\\""

699. u "\"You're not part of the Helgen anymore.\\""

700. r "\"...\\""

701. n "A look of shock and horror contorts Rex's face, frozen like a mask."

702. n "His eyes slowly drift between the men around him, as if trying to see whether they're joking or not – {w}hoping for it to be a prank."

703. u "\"Tough shit. You knew it was comin', didn't you?\\""

704. u "\"Yeah, man. You can't just get all close with a fuckin' human like that.\\""

705. u "\"Didn't we keep tellin' you? Jesus, you're even dumber than I thought you were.\\""

706. n "Their voices are just barely audible over the pounding bass, but I can hear the scorn in what they say."
707. n "Rex has the face of someone stuck in a nightmare, and his silver eyes are glazed over in disbelief."
708. u "\"Bishop ain't gonna be happy, either. You know what he does to guys who break the rules.\""
709. u "\"Go find some other shitty clan that'll let you play with your blood-bag boyfriend. Don't stay here.\""
710. u "\"Yeah, we don't want you here. Always thought you were a fuckin' weirdo, anyway.\""
711. n "Snickering to themselves, the shadowy group starts dispersing into the crowd, turning their backs on Rex."
712. n "They disappear one by one, until finally, Rex stands there alone...{w} still frozen in place."
713. r "\"...\""
714. n "At last, he seems to notice me, and our eyes meet."
715. mcp "\"Rex...\""
716. n "I take a step towards him, biting my lip."
717. r "\"...Stay away!\""
718. mc "\"...\""

719. n "He growls at me suddenly, his eyes narrowing into a desperate glare."

720. mc "\"-Rex!\\""

721. mc "\"Where are you going? Stop!\\""

722. n "Just like that, Rex turns on his heel and bolts off into the darkness."

723. n "He's obviously heading for the side exit, so I take off after him, running as fast
as I can."

724. n "By the time I make it into the alleyway, Rex is already dashing to the end of the
street."

725. mcp "\"Rex!\\""

726. mcp "\"Come back here, dumbass!\\""

727. n "Even if I sprint at top speed, I can only barely keep Rex in sight."

728. n "He hurtles down the sidewalk, his figure growing smaller and smaller in the
distance."

729. mcp "\"Ngh...!\\""

730. n "But as I chase after him, I realize where he's going."

731. n "The warehouse—!"

732. n "Sure enough, Rex disappears down a familiar alley, and I follow him quickly."

733. n "By the time I reach the narrow road, he's already ducked through the
entrance."

734. mcp "\"Good thing he didn't keep going down the street..."

735. n "Muttering anxiously to myself, I hurry inside the abandoned building."
736. n "But when I rush into the warehouse basement – {w}I realize Rex has stopped running."
737. n "Instead, he's slumped with his back to the wall, his face buried in his hands."
738. n "His body jerks and trembles a little bit, and a muffled noise leaks from between his fingers."
739. n "Is he...{w} crying?"
740. mcp "\"Rex...?\""
741. n "I call out softly to him, but he doesn't lift his head to reply."
742. n "...Well, I can't just leave him like this, can I?"
743. n "Somewhat hesitantly, I approach Rex from the side, half-expecting him to bolt away again."
744. n "But when I get close, the sound of his quiet, choked breaths fills my ears, and I feel an unexpected pang in my chest."
745. mcp "\"Rex, what's wrong?... Come on, you can tell me.\""
746. mcp "\"Did those guys' words really hit you that hard?\""
747. r "\"...\""
748. n "He looks up at me with an expression I've never seen him wear before –"

749. extend " like an innocent child who can't understand why they've been hurt."
750. r "\"S-sorry...\""
751. r "\"You probably think I'm... pretty lame, huh.\""
752. n "With a tearful smile, he rubs at his eyes with the back of one hand, still shaking."
753. mcp "\"...Tch.\""
754. mcp "\"I already thought you were lame a long time ago. Crying's not gonna change that.\""
755. mcp "\"Just because of a few tears? Nah, don't be silly.\""
756. mcp "\"Even guys like us have to let it out sometimes.\""
757. n "Doing my best to sound playful, I reach out to gently squeeze his shoulder."
758. n "For whatever reason, I can't stand the sight of him like this. Even his normal crazy self is much better."
759. n "Sadness just doesn't suit Rex... {w}that thought lingers at the back of my mind."
760. r "\"...\""
761. mc "\"—!\""
762. n "—All of a sudden, Rex curls his arms around me, pulling my body up against his own."

763. n "He squeezes me like I'm some kind of oversized teddy bear, burying his face against my neck."
764. n "At this point, I'm used to him invading my personal space, but this feels very... different."
765. r "\"They're all I had...\""
766. n "Rex whispers bitterly, his breaths brushing lightly along my skin."
767. r "\"I thought they were my brothers – that I finally found a place I belonged.\""
768. r "\"But I never believed they'd... just kick me out.\""
769. r "\"I guess I... I never meant anything to them from the start, huh?\""
770. mc "\"...\""
771. n "His fingers curl tightly into my jacket, clutching onto the fabric for dear life, like he's afraid I'll vanish before his eyes."
772. n "—I had no idea he loved his clanmates so deeply."
773. n "I guess a part of me always assumed he saw them as peers or friends, never anything more."
774. n "Yet, his broken voice belongs to someone who lost his flesh and blood, who saw his bond ripped in half."

775. rp "\"So much for friends... so much for family.\""

776. n "Rex's eyes close painfully, forcing out tiny, clear drops that trail down his cheeks."

777. rp "\"Now they're all gone... and I've got nothing left.\""

778. n "His choked words are so quiet that they barely reach my ears."

779. n "...But when I recognize what he's saying, a spark of anger immediately lights inside of me."

780. n "After all we've been through, Rex thinks he's all alone?\\n{w}That I'm just going to drop him like everyone else?"

781. mc "\"—Are you really that stupid?\""

782. r "\"...?\""

783. n "I scold him quietly, curling my fingers in his bright, soft hair."

784. mc "\"How can you say you've got nothing left?\""

785. mc "\"Do you think I'm just gonna leave you here and walk away?\""

786. mc "\"I'm hurt, you know.\""

787. r "\"...\""

788. mc "\"You're talking like I'm just gonna drop you and leave...\""

789. mc "\"...When it should be obvious that I like you way too much to ever do that.\""

790. mc "\"You're crazy, and impulsive, and you've got a horrible temper, and you seriously need to learn about personal boundaries...\""
791. n "Pausing, I bite my lip for a moment."
792. n "His gaze is full of such pure, desperate hope, like a drowning man clinging onto a tattered raft."
793. mc "\"...But you're a good kid, Rex. You... aren't the big bad guy you try to be.\""
794. mc "\"I've already decided that I won't leave you alone.\""
795. mc "\"Besides... Who else would look out for you, if I wasn't here to keep you in line?\""
796. n "As I speak to him softly, Rex stares at me with pure awe, as if he can hardly believe what I'm saying."
797. n "When his tear-filled eyes glimmer in the light, I can't help but think they look incredibly beautiful – {w}not the eyes of a monster, not one bit."
798. r "\"—!\""
799. n "My body moves on its own, and a moment later, I pull Rex in for a kiss."
800. n "His lips are cool and a little dry, and I trace my tongue along them gingerly, catching the salty drops of his tears."

801. n "He doesn't move an inch at first, but I keep lavishing his mouth with soft kisses, curling my arms around his neck."
802. n "—Finally, Rex starts to press back against me, his movements slightly hesitant."
803. n "Once he seems to realize I'm not tricking him, though, he returns my kisses with an even fiercer passion, arms encircling tightly around my waist."
804. n "My tongue slides along and dances with his, and I feel a strong heat rushing up to my cheeks."
805. n "Our kisses grow messier and hotter, the wet sounds echoing around us, but no sense of embarrassment wells up inside of me."
806. n "Rex squeezes me in a painfully tight grip, but it warms my heart more than anything – I don't want him to let go."
807. n "I can't believe I never realized it, but I really do care for this bastard... {w}a lot more than I'd like to admit."
808. n "Vampire or no, he's still a kid who hasn't really grown up yet. He's not evil, and he's not cruel..."
809. n "...He's just lost."
810. mc "\"Nnh...\""
811. r "\"...Mm... fu...\""

812. n "Rex teases my lower lip with his fangs, then laps at the corners of my mouth, letting his tongue coax its way forward."
813. n "Even though his body doesn't give off warmth, the eagerness with which he holds me makes up for it, each kiss growing more and more heated."
814. mc "\"Rex...\""
815. n "When I pause for breath, panting, Rex gazes back at me with an astonishingly gentle smile."
816. n "There's still a lingering sadness in his eyes, but now, they look a little brighter – {w}and so full of adoration that my heart aches."
817. r "\"You're callin' me crazy...\""
818. r "\"But you've gotta be pretty crazy, too, if you're stickin' around.\""
819. n "Before I can offer any complaints, he pulls me back into another kiss, swirling his tongue against mine."
820. n "We share the moment for a while longer, savoring every warm second – until finally, Rex loosens his grip on me a little."
821. r "\"...We gotta get out of San Fran.\""
822. mcp "\"...?\""
823. n "Rex murmurs against my lips with a rare, serious look in his eyes."
824. r "\"Bishop's gonna come after me – no, {i}us{/i}, as soon as he hears what happened.\""

825. r "\"He's the big boss, and he doesn't let his coven get... friendly with humans.\""
826. n "He bites his lower lip, his fangs sinking into the pale flesh almost hard enough to pierce it."
827. r "\"Some bad shit will happen if we stick around. We gotta leave by tomorrow night.\""
828. mcp "\"—! By tomorrow?\""
829. n "Rex doesn't seem like he's joking, so I suck in a sharp breath."
830. n "Troy'll be pretty pissed if I skip out on him like this, but... {w}is there anything else I can do?"
831. mcp "\"Good thing I don't have any important crap in my apartment, damn.\""
832. mcp "\"I'll be ready to go tomorrow night, if you are.\""
833. n "My grimly confident reply makes Rex let out a relieved sigh, and he nods his head."
834. r "\"Hey, I'm...\""
835. r "\"I'm sorry I dragged you into this.\""
836. r "\"I didn't know things were gonna turn out so... so...\""
837. n "He still looks troubled, probably due to his clanmates' words from earlier."

838. n "I pull him back into a rough hug, squeezing his slightly larger form with every ounce of strength I have."
839. mcp "\"Don't apologize. It's as much my fault as yours.\""
840. rp "\"Yeah, it's your fault for lurin' a guy like me in, with your pretty face and attitude and —\""
841. mcp "\"Hang on, you didn't list 'smell' at the top of that list? Man, things must be getting really serious between us, huh?\""
842. rp "\"Hey, you're the one who whines if I ever say it! Stop sendin' me mixed messages, man!\""
843. n "When some of Rex's feistiness returns, a smile grows on my face."
844. n "I guess when you really care about a person, all that matters is seeing them happy...{w}What a funny thing."
845. n "Rex walks me home, but with sunrise not far off, he has to hurry back."
846. n "It's oddly nostalgic to see his figure disappear into the thick of night.{w} It wasn't long ago that we first met, yet somehow, it still seems like a distant memory."
847. mc "\"...\""
848. n "I head upstairs with mixed feelings swirling in my chest."

849. n "If I go through with Rex's plan, then tonight's is my last night in this apartment... and in San Fran, at least for awhile."
850. n "It may seem crazy, and it probably is. {w}Leaving my steady job and normal life behind, all just to be with a guy I've only known for a few weeks..."
851. n "But in a way, I think it's time for me to go. {w}I was stuck in this place for years, and I never had anything or anyone to really be passionate about."
852. n "Now, at least, there's someone I want to protect – someone who makes all these dull days feel a little less colorless."
853. mcp "\"Landlord's gonna be pretty pissed... poor guy.\""
854. n "I flop onto my bed, still a little giddy from the kiss we had earlier, but dog-tired."
855. n "Before long, I drift off to sleep, submerged in the happy image of Rex's fanged grin."
856. n "The next day, I scurry around my little apartment, stuffing everything I might need into my backpack."
857. n "I call up Troy, too, and leave a hasty message on his answering machine, letting him know I'll be taking off work – indefinitely."
858. mcp "\"He'll find someone else to cover the night shift.\""

859. mcp "\"Probably.\""
860. n "The sky grows dark a lot sooner than I'd like, and before long, I get the sense that it's time to go."
861. n "I pick up my bag of things and head to the door, giving a last, wistful glance around my apartment."
862. mc "\"One day, I'll come back here and get wasted while crying over Frank Sinatra albums... one day.\""
863. n "Outside, there are a few people wandering around the streets, but I don't see Rex."
864. n "...My mind instantly starts to race through a hundred awful possibilities."
865. n "Did he get ambushed?{w} Captured?{w} Killed?"
866. n "Should I go look for him? I can't just stand around here, or else..."
867. rp "\"Hey, baby! You're early.\""
868. mcp "\"...\""
869. n "An eager voice behind me interrupts my thoughts."
870. n "To my relief, Rex hurries up unscathed, looking as happy to see me as I am to see him."
871. mc "\"Glad you decided to show up. I'd almost started worrying.\""
872. mc "\"...\""

873. n "I pause, studying Rex's face for a moment."
874. n "Is it just me, or does he look a little... {w}sickly?"
875. n "Oh, that's right..."
876. mc "\"You haven't fed off me for awhile, have you? You must be starving.\""
877. mc "\"I can let you take a little before we leave, if you want.\""
878. r "\"Nah, don't worry about me. I can wait until after we're outta here.\""
879. r "\"Wouldn't wanna drink from you without being able to enjoy every drop, yeah?\""
880. mc "\"That's the sweetest thing anyone's ever said to me.\""
881. n "Despite his playful reply, I can't help but be a little concerned.{w} There's a feverish look in his eyes, like he's trying to bite back pain."
882. r "\"Let's go. Waitin' here's making me all antsy.\""
883. mc "\"Right...\""
884. n "Without wasting any more time, we set off down the street, heading towards the nearest bus station that'll take us far, far away."
885. n "I follow Rex closely, trying to reassure myself that we'll be fine.{w} He seems on edge, too, eyes darting from side to side as we walk along."

886. n "The side roads we take feel eerily quiet, even though that's typical for this time of night."
887. rp "\"Just a little farther. Don't worry.\""
888. n "Rex squeezes my hand reassuringly, but I feel like it's more to soothe his own nerves than mine."
889. n "His hand's trembling a little bit... I wonder if it's because he hasn't fed for awhile."
890. n "Damn it, why didn't he just drink from me earlier...?"
891. mcp "\"...\""
892. n "Just as I start to believe that we'll make it out unscathed –"
893. n "Footsteps start to approach us, and a shadow looms over me from behind."
894. n "...I should've known it wouldn't be so easy."
895. n "I turn to see a pair of towering figures leering down at us."
896. n "I recognize them from last night – those two were taunting Rex the loudest."
897. u "\"Well, well, looks like we found the little traitor and his human buddy.\""
898. rp "\"...\""
899. n "Rex tenses beside me, grinding his teeth."

900. n "Unlike last time, he glares at his former clanmates, eyes narrowing to slits."

901. u "\"Thought we'd carry out some vigilante justice... Bishop might even give us a
reward!\""

902. u "\"Yeah. Your ass is worth more dead than alive to him, Rex.\""

903. rp "\"That right? I figured you bastards would show up sooner or later.\""

904. rp "\"You're always runnin' around trying to kiss Bishop's ass.\""

905. u "\"Well, we're not about to let you waltz outta San Fran just like that, now are
we?\""

906. u "\"Bishop really doesn't like traitors... but you knew that goin' in, right?\""

907. u "\"I'm gettin' pretty tired of lookin' at his dumb face, you know...\""

908. u "\"So let's get to business—! Ahahaha!\""

909. rp "\"Ngh—!\""

910. n "One of the two vampires leaps at Rex, trying to shred his flesh with sharp
claws."

911. mc "\"Rex...!\""

912. u "\"And your 'friend' over here...\""

913. n "Before I can dash over to help Rex, the second vampire steps forward to block
my path, dragging his tongue across his gleaming fangs."

914. u "\"Won't hurt to rough you up a little first... show you what it means to fuck
around in places you don't belong...\""

915. mc "\"...!\\""
916. n "Shit –{w} how am I supposed to defend myself against a guy his size?!"
917. rp "\"You– Get the fuck away from him!\\""
918. n "Rex shouts desperately towards us, but he's locked in a struggle with the
second vampire, both of them grappling each other like animals."
919. n "There's no way he can reach me in time.{w} I have to–"
920. u "\"C'mere, you little...!\\""
921. mc "\"Ngh–!\\""
922. n "Something sharp rakes across my shoulder, tearing through my jacket, and a
searing pain wells up around the spot."
923. n "Hot blood starts to spill down my arm – the metallic scent reaching my nose a
second later."
924. rp "\"...!\\""
925. n "As I stumble back, clutching a hand to my injury, Rex abruptly freezes."
926. n "His fingers tremble as they clench the other vampire's collar, knuckles turning
white."
927. n "And his eyes...{w} They stare at me, unfocused, gleaming in a strange way."
928. mcp "\"R-Rex?\\""
929. mcp "\"Rex, what are you...!\\""

930. r "\"...\""
931. n "As he takes a slow step towards me, I realize...{w} Rex isn't his normal self."
932. n "He looks exactly like an animal.{w} Like some sort of hunting dog going crazy
with bloodlust."
933. u "\"Ahaha, someone hasn't been feeding!\""
934. u "\"He's no better than us. Still just a beast inside.\""
935. n "The vampires' jeering voices echo around us, but I can't tear my eyes off of
Rex."
936. u "\"Hey, Rex...\""
937. u "\"If you jump on that kid and drain him dry, we'll let you back into the clan.\""
938. r "\"...\""
939. n "He gasps sharply at one of the vampire's remarks."
940. n "He understood them – does that mean he'd understand me if I called out to
him?"
941. u "\"Yeah! Prove you're not some pathetic guy who goes around playin' with
humans all day!\""
942. u "\"Do it, Rex! You used to love showing off!\""

943. n "...I have to say something.{w} This isn't like before... Rex doesn't know what he's doing."
944. n "He wants to drain me.{w} I can see it in his eyes, a terrifying hunger."
945. mcp "\"Rex... Rex, don't listen to them!\\""
946. mcp "\"They... I...\""
947. old "They don't care about you"
948. old "We promised"
949. old "I won't run away (disabled)"
950. old "I won't run away"
951. old "You're just another beast (disabled)"
952. old "You're just another beast"
953. n "I swallow the burning sensation in my throat, taking a deep breath."
954. mcp "\"They don't care about you, Rex.\\""
955. mcp "\"Your clan isn't the family you thought they were. They just want to use you.\\""
956. r "\"...\""
957. n "His ragged breathing grows louder, and a look of pain grips his features."
958. mcp "\"Please, Rex... don't believe what they say.\\""

959. mcp "\"You're better than them. No matter what happens...\\""
960. mcp "\"...I have faith in you.\\""
961. n "I swallow the burning sensation in my throat, taking a deep breath."
962. mcp "\"We promised, Rex...\\""
963. mcp "\"We promised that we'd run away from all of this... together.\\""
964. r "\"...\\""
965. n "His wide, glassy stare burns into my face, unblinking."
966. n "Are my words even getting through to him...?{w} No, I have to keep going – I
have to pray that he can hear me."
967. mcp "\"I decided back there that I wouldn't let you go... that I wouldn't give up on
you.\\""
968. mcp "\"So... so don't give up on me... please...!\\""
969. n "I swallow the burning sensation in my throat, taking a deep breath."
970. mcp "\"I won't run away from you, Rex.\\""
971. mcp "\"If this is what you want, and you've given up on everything else...\\""
972. mcp "\"Then drain me.\\""
973. r "\"...\\""

974. n "He stares at me wordlessly, and the only thing that breaks the silence is his heavy, labored breathing."
975. mcp "\"I already decided that I wouldn't give up on you, no matter what.\""
976. mcp "\"So I won't turn my back on you, Rex... even if you turn away from me.\""
977. n "I swallow the burning sensation in my throat, taking a deep breath."
978. mcp "\"I can't believe it...\""
979. mcp "\"I thought you were better than them, Rex!\""
980. r "\"...\""
981. n "He freezes, watching me with a strange, dazed look."
982. mcp "\"You were stronger, kinder, more human – that's what I wanted to think.\""
983. mcp "\"But like this, you're just another beast out for blood... not the Rex I know.\""
984. mcp "\"Maybe that's who you were all along... and I just couldn't see it.\""
985. n "...The alley goes deafeningly quiet."
986. n "Everyone stares at Rex, who gazes only at me – his lips trembling helplessly."
987. n "For a moment, he looks almost like his old self again.{w} Is it possible?{w} Did I get through to him?"

988. mcp "\"...\""

989. n "But when I see his eyes fill with desperation, with hunger, with confusion..."

990. n "I realize he's too far gone."

991. rp "\"...\""

992. n "Rex rushes forward, his eyes fixated on my bleeding shoulder."

993. n "His arms lock around me in an iron grip, and I know I won't be able to escape."

994. n "But there's no one else to blame but myself, is there?"

995. mc "\"Ngh—!\""

996. n "I feel his fangs messily cut into my throat, almost tearing it up, causing fresh
blood to stream free."

997. n "It hurts. {w}It hurts so much."

998. n "But I don't have the will to struggle as Rex starts to drink, eagerly panting and
lapping at the wound."

999. n "The world starts to get blurry, and the jeering and laughter of Rex's clanmates
sounds muted, distant."

1000. r "\"Haah... mmh...\""

1001. n "I hear Rex's strained voice, too, somewhere in between agony and delight."

1002. n "He sounds so different... {w}So different from his normal laughter."

1003. n "Before long, my vision goes dark."

1004. n "Unlike the first time he fed from me, it feels peaceful... like I'm floating away."
1005. n "No pleasure, no pain. {w}Just darkness."
1006. n "Finally, only a single thought remains in my mind..."
1007. n "This one last moment –{w} at least we can spend it together."
1008. n "...The alley goes deafeningly quiet."
1009. n "Everyone stares at Rex, who gazes only at me – his lips trembling helplessly."
1010. rp "\"...\""
1011. n "Slowly, the beastly light in his eyes starts fading away."
1012. n "Before long, I can recognize his normal self flickering back, but –"
1013. mcp "\"...\""
1014. n "...Rex starts to move towards me, causing his clanmates to growl encouragingly."
1015. n "Is he...{w} Is he still going to go through with it?"
1016. n "My feet feel frozen in place, and even when Rex steps before me, curling his arms tightly around my waist... I'm unable to move away."
1017. n "I close my eyes, taking in a deep breath."
1018. n "I must've said something wrong.{w} I made a mistake, didn't I?"
1019. r "\"I can't...\""

1020. r "\"I can't hurt you, [mc]... damn it.\""

1021. mc "\"...\""

1022. n "His soft, guilty voice makes my eyes fly back open."

1023. n "Did I hear him right?"

1024. mcp "\"Rex...?\""

1025. n "He buries his face against my neck, drawing in a shuddering breath."

1026. r "\"I won't d-drain you, even if it means we –\""

1027. mcp "\"...\""

1028. n "The sudden sound of footsteps forces my attention away for a moment."

1029. n "A decent-sized group passes by on the street, and I can see their silhouettes
moving at the end of the alley."

1030. u "\"...\""

1031. u "\"Hey, isn't...\""

1032. n "...The two Helgen vampires suddenly start to shift uneasily, staring past us."

1033. n "I can't understand why at first, but then, I realize the group up ahead has
stopped."

1034. n "No, not stopped.{w} They're coming towards us."

1035. n "Just as I'm about to hiss to Rex that we should try and bolt, the man at the
front of the group steps into view."

1036. n "—It's Isaac, surrounded by an entourage of intimidating figures in dark clothing..."
1037. n "Including Dominic."
1038. mcp "\"...!\\""
1039. n "What the... Are those Dominic's clanmates?"
1040. i "\"Please excuse us! We were just on our way to some business negotiations.\\""
1041. i "\"...Oh, dear. We've interrupted something, haven't we?\\""
1042. n "Isaac blinks at me, then Rex, and finally the two vampires beside us."
1043. n "...A moment later, though, a wickedly amused smile crosses his lips."
1044. u "\"It's — it's the Helgen!\\""
1045. u "\"Only a couple of them, too... let's rip them up!\\""
1046. i "\"Hold on, hold on, gentlemen, you can't just —\\""
1047. n "Like hounds breaking off their leashes, the group charges away from Isaac —
{w}straight towards us."
1048. rp "\"Ngh! [mc]!\\""
1049. n "Rex grabs me, pulling me away from the oncoming vampires."
1050. n "Luckily, we don't seem to be their targets... unlike Rex's clanmates."
1051. u "\"Grrk—!\\""
1052. u "\"Get off me, you...!\\""

1053. n "The alley turns into complete chaos, blood splattering against the walls and coating the ground."
1054. n "We're surrounded by vicious brawling, but if we try to move, I know we'll get jumped on by one of these crazy monsters."
1055. n "Shit, shit, how can we find a way out of this...?!"
1056. d "\"Get going.\""
1057. mcp "\"...!\""
1058. mcp "\"Dominic...?\""
1059. n "To my surprise, a tall figure steps out of the fight, offering a quiet mutter to me and Rex."
1060. n "Is he... telling us to escape?"
1061. r "\"Y-you... I don't...\""
1062. n "Rex seems even more shocked than me, and he blinks at Dominic in disbelief."
1063. d "\"Go. I'll make sure no one chases you.\""
1064. d "\"...Don't come back.\""
1065. n "His voice dropping to a barely audible whisper, Dominic turns away from us – {w} though I catch a brief, wistful look in his eyes."
1066. r "\"...!\""
1067. n "Without wasting another second, Rex grabs my hand, and we dash down the alley together."

1068. n "I can't think of anything except getting away from the bloodbath, away from all these horrors."
1069. n "Before long, the screams and shouts start to grow distant, and eventually, I can only hear our frantic footsteps as we escape."
1070. n "Neither of us says a word."
1071. n "But as we run, Rex squeezes my hand almost tight enough to hurt –"
1072. n "–Like he'd sooner die than let go."
1073. n "The cool ocean breeze drifts through my hair."
1074. n "It's hard to find something prettier than the beach at night. {w}So peaceful and calm, even right next to a big city."
1075. n "The ebb and flow of the tide is so rhythmic that it's almost hypnotizing to watch..."
1076. u "\"Hey, stop starin' at the water like that! You're gonna make me jealous.\""
1077. n "A sulky whine comes from beside me."
1078. n "The moment I glance over, an arm drapes itself around my shoulders and pulls me in close."
1079. mc "\"Really, Rex? Jealous of the {i}ocean{/i}?\""
1080. mc "\"God forbid I looked at an actual human. You might go into cardiac arrest.\""
1081. r "\"Don't rile me up, baby. You know how I get when I'm riled up.\""

1082. n "Snickering, I hug my arm over Rex's own shoulders as we walk along the beach,
side by side."

1083. n "This guy just doesn't change...{w} not that I'd ever want him to, of course."

1084. n "After we fled San Francisco – on the last bus available that gory night – there
was one place Rex insisted we visit first."

1085. n "Phoenix, Arizona..."

1086. extend " so he could apologize to his old friends for leaving them behind."

1087. n "It turns out his old gang had split up, but Rex still managed to track them down.
{w}He couldn't fully explain what happened, of course, but they seemed to understand."

1088. n "Even if Rex can't get that \"family\" back, at least he made amends, and he's
found some peace in that."

1089. n "Now we've gone down to southern Cali, and here in San Diego, we've found a
little place cheap enough for us to stay."

1090. n "My freelancing's kicked off, somehow, and I'm making a decent wage between
actual stories and the occasional sell-out erotic novel."

1091. n "My freelancing's kicked off, somehow, and I'm making a decent wage from
writing scores for games and indie films."

1092. n "My freelancing's kicked off, somehow, and I'm making a decent wage from private commissions and bigger stuff, like book covers and game art."
1093. n "Rex, on the other hand, is still working the night shift. He's a bartender at another club – pretty seedy place, though he seems perfectly happy."
1094. n "We're almost like a normal couple... {w}yet there'll always be something that separates us from the normal world."
1095. n "The threat that Rex might give into his inner beast again if he doesn't feed from me each night..."
1096. n "It's scary, I can't deny that.{w} The frenzied look I saw in his eyes back in San Fran still haunts me to this day."
1097. n "But I'm determined to take care of Rex, no matter what. I'll share his burden with him, even if it means danger is only ever a few steps away."
1098. n "...Saying that kind of cheesy stuff to yourself is how you know you're in love, I guess."
1099. r "\"Guess what, [mc]? I made ya somethin' for when we get back.\""
1100. mc "\"...You tried to cook dinner again, didn't you?\""

1101. n "He's picked up this habit of trying to make me food, which was really doomed from the start, considering he can't eat normal meals – apparently it's impossible for vampires to digest them."
1102. n "Still, I try to choke down at least a little of whatever he cooks, since the happy grin on his face always makes it worth the indigestion later."
1103. r "\"Shit, yeah! How'd you know?!\""
1104. mc "\"The apartment smelled like someone tried to burn it down, that's how.\""
1105. r "\"Aw, man, I wanted it to be a surprise. Can't you just let a guy treat you for once?\""
1106. mc "\"Uh-huh... How about you mix up a drink next time, instead? You're pretty good at that.\""
1107. r "\"Yeah? You want a Bloody Mary so you can pretend you're cool like me?\""
1108. mc "\"Wow, how'd you know?!\""
1109. r "\"Ahahaha!\""
1110. n "Rex's delighted laughter melds with the sound of the peaceful waves."
1111. n "No matter how much I hear it, I can never get enough of his voice – always joyful, even in dark times."
1112. n "And, even if it means that I end up joining him in his curse one day..."