

What Forever Really Means: No Sappy Vampire Stories, Please

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I never saw you look at me. Not at first, anyway. It was more of a feeling; a hair standing on edge, skin prickling, throat siezing kind of feeling. And although that was a blazing warning all in itself, I found the sensation not entirely disagreeable. I welcomed it in fact, wanted to know where it came from.

Could I have forestalled the inevitable had I not looked for you? Was it inevitable at all or was I asking for it, even then, without even knowing what the question was?

Maggie and Lucy were still talking, passerbys still milling, unaware that I was caught in a private, fractured moment of time. My eyes skimmed over the crowd for a precursory second before snagging on yours like I knew exactly where to find them all along.

Your eyes were so *grave*. So deep and dark and intense. They were the kind of eyes one could fall into, try to climb out of, but never quite succeed.

I liked them.

You smiled at me then, quick and unsure, waiting to see if I'd smile back. I did, only half of my mouth quirked up, lending myself a mysterious, winsome air. But I think you knew, even before we locked our gazes, who I was. I could see it in your face. I was not a mystery to you, nothing you had to figure out, nothing you had to crack. And right then I made myself believe that I knew you, too. I told myself it was Familiarity I felt crackle between us, hot and sharp and biting like the snap of a whip as you smiled fully now, bright teeth flashing.

Then time sped back up, casting us out of our moment. And I might've looked away, turned my head and never thought about you again. I *did* look away, for a few seconds, as mallgoers impeded my view and I remembered I had company. This was not me. I did not do things like share moments with strange men and get caught in time. I went to the mall and window-shopped and gossiped with my friends. That was me.

Still, I looked up for you, if only to assure myself that I'd simply imagined your pull.

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Want shone so clearly in your eyes. The kind that ran deeper than just a guy checking out just a girl at the mall. It was like you saw further than my body and wanted something more that I didn't even know how to give. Oh, you didn't want what the other guys wanted. No, it was Want that ran as deep and as dark and as intense as your eyes, shining under the fluorescent mall lights. It was a bit alarming; apprehension jolted through me, quick like a flash of lightning, resonant like a peal of thunder. But I looked closer, and your mouth pushed up, and my caution melted away. But the Want was still there, rabid but simmering on a barely controlled leash. The kind of Want girls read about in books about Everlasting Love and The One and Love At First Sight--and occasionally vampires, if they were into that sort of thing.

This Want, heady and captivating, was more like Possession. You looked at me not like you wanted to own me, but like you already did. Your gaze seared me, made me lose my breath and my surroundings until it was just you and me, alone, again. And looking into your eyes, I was inexplicably reminded of the time I'd gotten lost in my own house. I was four, and after wandering around my home for an hour I'd proceeded to wail until my parents came running. Even then I knew it wasn't about being lost, but wanting to be found. Those eyes of yours said that they found me. Found me now that I didn't even recognize I was lost.

I liked that, too.

Even then, I didn't know anything was wrong.

And, yes, now I see it all. Hindsight may be twenty-twenty, but it's also a raging, vindictive bitch. I suppose it was some perverse pleasure for you to see that I wasn't entirely unreceptive. That it would be fairly easy to get me apart from my friends, charm me away from common sense and into some fantasy world where a guy could look at a girl with such deepdarkintense eyes and have it not mean something

deepdarkandintense. It was a great little act, I admit. I fell for it, hook, line, and sinker. I never had the chance to ask, but how long had you been watching me? Was that the very first time? Or had your eyes followed me on the way to school, the supermarket, the Laundromat? What was it about me that sparked that instinct in you? The one that said you needed to Covet? To Possess? To Want?

Part of me knew this was not normal. It was not normal to look at someone and feel so strong a connection. But I *did* read those books--the ones about Everlasting Love and The One and Love at First Sight (--and occasionally vampires). And while it wasn't normal in those books either, when the characters locked eyes it was always like that, wasn't it? That searing brand on their soul, like a steaming prod to cattle flesh? It only happened once. It was always forever.

It never occurred to me that it always began one-sided, that deep-rooted 'love'. That the male character could look at the girl with his soulful eyes and then, only then, did she feel something, too. Neat little trick, I suppose. It was always he that Wanted and if it was she it was never quite to the same sweltering degree. But by then she's stuck with all this Want and nowhere to put it but inside of her, convincing herself that his Want is more than the sun and more than freedom and more than holding her own soul in her own hands and keeping it just because she goddamn wants to...

...But he Wants her, and that's all that matters--never mind that blood never quite tastes as good as it seems.

Without breaking eye contact with you, I spoke to Maggie and Lucy. I hoarsely proclaimed I was heading to the bathroom and jackknifed up and away from them. I probably didn't have to lie. I knew they watched me walk away, towards you and your bright teeth and your Wanting eyes. When I reached you, we stood face to face, smiling softly at each other. *I don't do things like this*, my mind supplied with a whisper. But it shouted that I should play it cool and so I flipped my hair as you opened your mouth to speak.

I remember this moment with such clarity, even now. This is the moment right before you tell me that I'm special. And more than that, this is the moment where you make me believe it. And I'm going to smile and roll my eyes and call you corny and you're going to say that you spoke the truth, then--touch my arm, just slightly, as if I make you nervous. That touch is going to spread like wildfire through my system, blinding me to the fact that being consumed by fire is often more terrifying than it is enjoyable. You will suggest leaving--just to talk, only to talk, I'm not that kind of guy, you say--and I will go. I will not think of my friends, watching with puzzled frowns adorning their faces. I will not think of my family, waiting for me to come home. I will not think of that moment I felt you watching and my hair stood on edge. No, I will look into your eyes and I will fall hard, down to where it's just so deepanddarkandintense. And just like you planned, I will fall, try to get out, but never quite succeed...