

inner voice



PART 1

Haley Gottardo

My room was cold on that January night. I shivered as I updated my Facebook status with the message: *Going to bed. Wow, my room is freezing.* I glanced at my alarm clock on my night stand. It was one o'clock in the morning. Not super late for a Saturday night, but definitely not early, either. I shut down my laptop and started to prepare my bed for the night. I added an extra blanket to make me warmer and protect me from the chill of the night.

I felt tired, but not really tired. My eyes hurt from being on the computer for so long. I sat on my bed for a while, just thinking. I lied back against my pillows, wondering what I should do tomorrow. I knew that I should probably study for finals because they were coming up that week, but I didn't feel motivated to study. Maybe I could go job searching because God knows I need to make some money. I closed my eyes for a moment.

Suddenly, something didn't feel right. Anxiety overwhelmed me for some unknown reason. My stomach lurched and I gave in as I rushed to the bathroom. I sat on the toilet, leaning over in pain. I took deep breaths to try to calm my stomach. I started to wonder what I ate that day that could have caused such heart burn. It was just anxious nausea for no apparent reason.

This sort of thing happened to me often. I had felt sick and ended up stuck on the toilet for a half hour. I had thought it was because I had a bad digestive system, but little did I know that my anxiety or heart burn pain went beyond that.

I was shivering and shaking. I felt fear rush through me. Every sound and feeling irritated me. I thought I was going to puke. There was a high pitched ringing in my ear. The sound felt as though it penetrated my skull. My eyes clouded over with what reminded me of static on a TV, except more colorful. The sparkle in my fringe vision gave everything an almost dreamlike quality, like a hallucination. It ended abruptly when I heard a knock on the bathroom door, causing my heart to jump into my throat.

“Jess, are you okay in there?” asked my mother. Concern filled her voice like ice water filled a glass.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just a little stomach ache,” I replied modestly.

“You’re not sick, are you? Should I bring some Tums?” she offered.

“No. It’s alright. I’m feeling better already,” I assured her.

“Okay. Goodnight, honey.” She walked back to her room.

“Night,” I said as she closed her door. I got up and walked quietly down the hall and into my room. I closed the door behind me and plopped down onto my bed. I wrapped myself snugly in my warm and fuzzy blankets, thankful to finally catch some shut eye after the Hell of a stomach ache I experienced.

* * *

“Jessica...Jess....”

I jolted awake because I thought I had heard my name. It was probably just a dream, but the wind that had started up outside was making odd noises. It was really creepy and I was starting to wish I had bought earplugs.

I decided to cover my head up with the blankets. I know that’s something only a little kid would do, and I’m seventeen and too old for stuff like that, but honestly, it made me feel just a little safer. Safer from what? I had no idea. It was almost three in the morning. What could possibly sneak into my room and hurt me?

Besides burglars...rapists...murderers, maybe, but definitely not the boogie man. Not that there would be any of those people outside my window or even in the house at that moment. It seemed pretty unlikely, at the time, that anyone would want to break into my small home or even kill me.

There was a constant buzz in my ear. It was annoying me and making it hard to fall back into a deep sleep. I concentrated on the sound of my breathing, ignoring the scrape of the bushes on the side of the house, the whistling wind and the ringing in my head. I closed my eyelids and stared at the safe blackness behind them.

* * *

Safety can only last so long. Soon enough, I was in REM. Of course, I didn’t know it was a dream until *he* appeared. There was a boy about my age, maybe older, who appeared in front of me.

I looked around my lucid dreamscape. It was oddly familiar, but maybe that’s because we were in front of my house. There was snow the ground and I was wearing my pajamas, but I wasn’t cold.

The boy, who had dark hair and silvery blue eyes that reflected the moon above us, reached out to me silently. His bluish eyes met my hazel ones. I took his hand without question. As soon as our fingers touched, a tingle ran up my arm and my heart felt as if it had melted and dripped all over the sidewalk. “Jessica,” he spoke my name in a voice filled with love and music. My heart evaporated off the ground.

If only I knew his name, so I could say it with all the wonderful emotions I could conjure up. Love. Hope. Desire. But there was a feeling on the edge of the good emotions. Fear. I felt afraid. He pulled my body to his, as if he was going in for a kiss. His hands embraced my head of

auburn hair. His eyes gleamed silver and a sharp noise cut through my mind. The aim of his mouth shifted from lip to neck. Right then I knew. I shifted my body away from him as fast as I could. "Who are you?" I demanded.

"I'm your soul mate," he replied in a voice that dripped with honey. It was hard to not believe him after the strong emotions I had experienced. I wanted to be with him. My inner voice told me otherwise. He was dark and dangerous. He was a vampire. Whether he was real or just a nightmare created by my subconscious was another story.

"No, I mean who are you? What's your name? What are you? What do you want from me?" I inquired. I was not letting him near me, real or not.

"My name is Evan. I'm a *vampiren*. I want you to be with me. I love you Jessica." A vampire, I knew it. Saying it in German isn't going to mask the fact that he's one of the undead.

"Okay *Evan*, if that is your name, would you mind telling me why you're intruding on my dreams?" I tapped my foot for effect.

"I already told you. I'm your soul mate and I've been looking for you," he said matter-of-factly.

Blood rushed to my face as another thought sliced through my brain. "You're lying. I can feel it." I glared at him in disgust.

"You have a gift, Jessica. That's why I've been looking for you. I need you. Now do you believe me?" he asked with a raised eye brow.

My mind tasted truth in his voice, but there was still something he was leaving out. "What is my gift? What do you need me for?"

"You're a Sensitive, Jessica. A psychic who can sense the dead as well as other things. Your powers are growing, and soon you will be ready. I need your help, and only yours."

"Are you sure you can't find another 'Sensitive' to service your needs?" I proposed.

"Look. I'm not anything special. I'm just a girl who's trying to get some sleep. You are the one ruining it for me. So, go back to wherever you came from, be it my subconscious or what ever imaginary world you're from."

"I'm real, Jess," I shuddered at the sound of him using my nickname. It was a beautiful sound, but once again, he's a *vampire*. "I'm not someone you could've dreamed up, and I'm sure you know that by now, too."

Yeah, right. You're a real vampire and I'm the queen of Spain. "But I am a Vampire. And you're a Sensitive. How else would you have been able to resist my compulsion?"

"*You* were doing that to me! All those feelings, that was you?" I felt violated.

"Yes. It's an ability vampires have. We can control people's emotions and their mind. We can make them do things that they don't want to do. Talk them into anything. But, not you. You broke out of my mind's grasp quickly."

"Oh, did I? Then why can't I break away from this nightmare?" I asked.

"Go ahead and try. Pinch yourself, even. And, when you do, you'll be in your own bed, and I'll be in your room, right in front of you," he said with a malicious smile.

"You're in my bedroom? How did you get in? I thought vampires had to be invited in?" I questioned.

"You see, a lot of what you see in movies or read in books about us isn't true," he said as he walked around me.

I stayed still and asked, "So holy water, crosses, silver stakes-"

"No. They don't work. You can try and see what happens." He brought his face really close to mine and his eye flashed with silver light. I suddenly didn't want to dream this any

longer, even if he was waiting in my bedroom.

I closed my eyes and pinched myself. Nothing happened. I opened my eyes and saw that his face was still there and something else. Fangs.

I screamed and my body jolted upward. All of a sudden, I was in my room. Evan was at my bedside, staring at me. My breath quickened and my teeth chattered. "Please don't bi--"

His hand clasped my mouth. "Shhh. You'll wake your mom," he whispered.

I tried to scream "Mom" through his fingers, but it came out more like a muffled version of "Muhmm."

"Your mother can't help you," he said with a laugh. "You won't need her. I'm going to turn you."

"What?" He moved his hand from my mouth down to my chest. "Turn me? Into a vampire?"

"Yes. Like I said, you have a gift, and as a vampire your gift would be significantly enhanced. All we have to do is exchange blood. I'll drink some of yours and then you'll drink mine."

"What if I don't want to become a vampire?" I asked weakly.

"Then I'm just gonna have to force you." He popped his fangs out and lunged at my throat. Then a voice screamed in my mind: *Stab him with the pencil on your night stand!*

I could feel Evan's fangs make contact with my throat causing a tingling sensation in my neck. He was distracted by my warm blood running down his throat. It wasn't painful, him drinking my blood, but I had to stop him before he took too much and I ended up wanting to drink his.

I slowly removed my arm from under the covers and inched it toward my night stand that was less than two feet away on my right. I fumbled for the No. 2 pencil that I left there after I was done studying Friday night. I never thought to put it back in my backpack. It was lucky that I left it there.

I grabbed it, accidentally dropping the notebook that was under it, and quickly drove the wooden pencil right through Evan's eye. He let out a cry of despair as I removed it and swiftly went for his neck. It seemed to magically slice through his skin like it was butter. I rolled my body away from him and his incapacitated state.

Now I knew what a vampire's weakness was. Wood. I Grabbed all the wooden pencils I could find off my desk. "No. Wait! Stop! I'll leave, Jessica. Just don't kill me, please!"

"I don't believe you," I firmly stated.

"Look. See? I'm going." He got up slowly and walked towards the window. He opened it and jumped out of it without another word, but I knew in my mind that I hadn't seen the last of him. He'd be back, and next time he'd change me. I knew this because I had a forewarning dream the next night.

