

One Bad Night

A Collection of Short Stories in the Beasts of Vegas Universe

Written by Anna Abner

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“One Bad Night: Dominic”

A Beasts of Vegas Story

Dominic Hull was having a bad night.

“We’ve all been there,” Ben assured, slapping him between the shoulder blades.

Dominic danced away from the unwanted touch as the pair of six-foot tall shapeshifters weaved against the flow of pedestrian traffic crossing Las Vegas Boulevard and headed toward one of Ben’s favorite clubs.

“Really? You’ve had two shots and walked around the rest of the night with puke on your pants?” Dominic retorted sarcastically.

Jesus, he was turning into a lightweight. It hadn’t been that long ago that he could take shots all night, dance in superheated clubs, and wake up the next morning as if nothing had happened. What the hell was wrong with him?

“Whatever,” Ben said. “I just want to have fun. This curfew has been a nightmare.”

Dominic agreed. His dad, the alpha, was going a little overboard recently with the check-in’s, the curfews, and the rules about going out in pairs. Dominic, being dominant himself, followed the directives only about half the time.

“Why don’t you be the alpha?” Ben gave Dominic a scrutinizing look. “Have you ever thought about it?”

Of course, he’d thought about it. As eldest son of the alpha, he was born to lead, but it didn’t interest him. It meant he’d have to challenge his father and force him to submit.

“I don’t want it. All that bureaucratic bullshit. Listening to everyone’s problems. No, thanks.”

“It’s a responsibility to care for and protect a pack,” Ben countered. “A lot of shifters would gladly take that responsibility. And it would get your dad off our backs.”

Dominic’s phone buzzed in his pocket, and with a curse of pure aggravation, he yanked it free. A text from his friend Lukas Larsson, a bear shifter from the Netherlands currently residing in Vegas.

Have you seen Mercy tonight?

Dominic’s guts twisted. A strange thing to ask. Mercy hadn’t left her suite at the Le Sort Hotel since she’d been dug up from a twenty-year, forced slumber in the earth. Hell, she hadn’t even left her bedroom.

Dominic stalled on the sidewalk and struggled through another wave of nausea before texting back.

What are you talking about? Isn’t she in her room?

Lukas didn’t immediately text back.

Isn’t she??

Dominic pictured the petite young woman with white-blonde hair and eyes perpetually registering panic.

“We gotta swing by Lukas’,” Dominic told Ben. “Something’s come up.”

“What’s wrong?” But Ben’s tone made it very clear he wasn’t thrilled with cutting their night short.

“Lukas can’t find Mercy.” Not willing to waste time, Dominic pushed his way

back through the crowds toward the way they'd come. "It'll only take a couple minutes."

"Which one's Mercy again?" Ben asked with a sigh.

Dominic didn't answer. He'd purposefully kept Mercy's name and story out of pack gossip. She was too fragile, too vulnerable, and frankly too important to him to share with anyone else.

"Just hurry up," Dominic growled.

The only sign of pandemonium on the team's floor of the Le Sort Hotel was Kayla. Mercy's best friend and self-proclaimed protector visibly shook with agitation when Dominic and Ben strolled into the room she shared with Mercy.

"You called *him*?" she demanded of Lukas, sending Dominic a disgusted look.

"I'd take his help before I let anyone else know we have an unstable vampire on the loose," Lukas replied. He sent Dominic his own look of frustration. "She was here—"

"When I fell asleep," Kayla cut in. "She was in the other bed, rocking."

Dominic knew Mercy's emotional issues were sometimes calmed by rocking back and forth. When he came to check on her, he often found her in that position.

"And?" Dominic prompted.

"Something woke me up around 11:30," she continued. "That's when I noticed she was gone."

"Did you look for her?"

"Yes, you moron," Kayla snapped. "I searched the entire floor, then the hotel lobby, the promenade, and I was running up and down The Strip when I finally

texted Lukas for help.”

“No one else knows yet?” Dominic asked.

“They’ll overreact,” she said. “They’ll hunt her, or something, when all she really needs is to see a friendly face and she’ll come right back.”

“Which is why I called Dominic.”

Kayla rolled her eyes. “He’s obsessed with her. The feelings are not mutual.”

That stung. Dominic recalled Mercy’s cool, soft hand folded within his much larger one. She’d trembled everywhere but at their point of contact.

He wasn’t obsessed.

And the feeling was *very much* mutual.

“I’ll help you look,” he said, though he realized too late he hadn’t been asked. “I know her scent. I can track her more quickly than you can,” he said to Kayla. To Lukas, he said, “I’ll let you know if I find her.”

Ben’s phone chirped, and he reappeared from the corner he’d been hiding in. “Oh, shit. It’s the alpha. He wants me back inside the compound.”

“Then go. I’ve got this.”

“It must be nice having an alpha for a dad,” Ben grouched.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Though faint, Mercy’s scent—a mix of blood and calla lilies—lingered around the elevator doors. Without a thought for anyone else, Dominic took a big breath of her scent and stepped into the next elevator heading down.

As he crisscrossed the busy lobby, Dominic asked himself what a vampire fresh off a two decade long dirt nap would do next. The lights on The Strip were calling to

him, but to someone like Mercy, they'd be terrifying. The crowds, too, would intimidate her.

Dominic scanned the lobby for the least populated, least lit area of the hotel. He started away from the glittering main lobby, away from the promenade full of shops and restaurants, and deeper into the bowels of the hotel. Down a long hallway, her scent grew stronger. He followed her footsteps through an emergency exit door, across a patio covered in twinkle lights, and into a garden area that must be meant for smoking or doggie relief. It was unlit and probably free of CCTV cameras, too. The perfect place for a traumatized vampire to hide.

"Mercy?" Dominic hissed, following the ever-increasing scent of fresh blood. "Don't be scared. It's Dominic." He still couldn't see her, but he scanned and scanned, edging nearer the source of the blood. "Mercy?"

A rustle. An intake of breath.

Dominic zeroed in on a corner in the block wall, a junction made darker by a vine-covered lattice. There, crouched Mercy.

"What are you doing out here?" he asked gently, pausing ten feet away, not wanting to spook her. "We were worried about you."

"I'm so hungry," she whispered.

Dominic's sight began to focus more clearly in the dark. "Mercy, are you bleeding?" He blinked, and her entire figure came into focus. Her face and hands up to the elbows were coated in blood.

"I'm so hungry," she cried.

"Where did the blood come from?"

Mercy pointed off to the right. Immediately, a crumpled shape became obvious. Dominic rushed over. “Buddy?” he urged, shaking the man.

He caught a pained groan, and relief like Dominic had rarely known flooded his system. *Thank God.* “You’re gonna be okay, buddy. Just sleep it off.”

There was no reply from the man, but Dominic was confident he’d survive, the feeding marks would heal, maybe before he woke up, and Mercy wouldn’t be implicated.

“Mercy?” Dominic returned to her murky corner. “Are you ready to leave here?”

She raised her big, blue eyes to him. “I’m so hungry.”

Dominic crouched down low. “Then feed from me.”

His words seemed to startle her. “But you’re a shifter. If I infect you, it’ll kill you.”

It was true. As far as legend went, shapeshifters couldn’t survive the vampire infection. If they were exposed to the virus—transmitted through blood—in their human forms, they’d die almost immediately. In their animal forms, however, they were immune the same as any other animal.

“Then don’t infect me.” He lowered himself to the cool lawn, crossing his legs. “Come here.”

Mercy crawled hesitantly from her hiding place, her eyes locked on his.

Touch was a tricky concept for Dominic. Most of the time, it repulsed him. It didn’t matter who touched him or why. But there was something different about Mercy. She was so damaged, he felt compelled to protect her. Hers was the only touch he sought.

Now, he held out a wrist to her, staying absolutely still otherwise, to avoid spooking her.

He'd never been bitten by a vampire. Mostly, he was excited by the thought of Mercy's red lips on his skin, of her pointed white canines sinking into his flesh, of her sucking his life blood down her throat...

Dominic expected her to take his hand, but she pounced instead, biting deep into the fleshy part of his arm. It was quick, like a snakebite. And then she slithered into his lap, curling into a soft, blood-soaked ball.

The first few pulls only hurt a little, and he recovered from his initial surprise. He pet her silken hair, one long stroke from scalp to the middle of her narrow back. Her heart raced in her chest, thumping like a bunny's.

"Better?" he prompted.

Her only answer was a re-shifting of her weight and a guttural groan of assent. He caressed her hair again, tangling his fingers among her tresses and digging his fingers in.

"I got sick tonight, too," he said into the quiet. "I took a couple shots at a club and threw up. You can probably still smell it."

Tiny nod.

"It happens to the best of us." Oh, his legs were numb. He clenched his jaw through a dizzy spell. "Maybe drinking so much bagged blood made you..." What was he saying?

Dominic's spine softened, and he would have hit the turf if Mercy hadn't reacted so quickly. She grabbed him by the shirt and shook him gently.

His mind cleared only enough to see into her eyes and sigh in pleasure. “Your eyes sparkle.” Good Lord, had he said it aloud?

She stood and hauled him to his feet, but when he swayed into her, his body brushing hers, she stepped away and forced him to hold his own weight. Luckily, his shifter DNA included rapid healing. Already, he was feeling fractionally stronger.

He cleared his throat, folding his arm closed over the bloody wound. “You okay?”

Rather than answer, she hung her head, no doubt listening to everything, but reacting to nothing.

“Well,” he inhaled deeply, sensing the blood, the victim across the way, and her unique lily scent. “Let’s get upstairs, then. I’m not feeling so good.”

She followed him into the main lobby, keeping to his shadow, using him like a walking shield from the lights and crowds they encountered the nearer they got to the bank of elevators. Dominic pushed for the fifty-first floor, keyed in the access code, and wavered slightly.

“You’re a heavy drinker,” he said, attempting a playful tease.

She glanced up at him in concern, however. “You tasted so delicious,” she told him in a small voice. “I couldn’t stop myself.”

On the team’s private floor, the elevator doors swept open, and Dominic recognized Kayla and Lukas at the other end of the hallway. Without a word of thanks or farewell, Mercy scurried away to her waiting friends, leaving the scent of blood and lilies heavy in her wake.

Read more about Dominic and Mercy in *Shapeshifter's Prophecy* (Beasts of Vegas #5)—available at all major online retailers and your local public library.

“One Bad Night: Carly”

A Beasts of Vegas Story

Carly Alvah was having a bad night.

Gaining consciousness in an ambulance headed for a Las Vegas hospital wasn't even the worst of it. Because when she came to, she remembered everything—the overgrown bear shifter named Lukas Larsson she'd been running from, his beefy hand clamped around her throat, and oxygen becoming a limited commodity. That son of a bitch had snuffed her out. *Her*. Like he had any right to raise his eyes off the ground in her presence, let alone put his dirty hands on her.

She was a goddess among mortals, a monster, a blood-worshipping *vampire*, for God's sake.

Speaking of...

Carly quickly took stock of her current situation. She lay in an undignified sprawl upon a gurney inside a slightly smelly ambulance. A bored EMT swayed beside her with every bump and roll of the vehicle.

“You're okay,” the man said. “Take it easy.”

Not going to happen. She needed to get back to her minions among the Four Sons. *Now*.

She sat up, tearing at the blood pressure cuff around her arm and the oxygen cannula in her nose.

“Nope.” The EMT sighed in annoyance. “Lie back. We're almost to the ER.” He pressed on her chest and, with an embarrassingly small amount of force, held her

flat to the gurney.

She snarled and attacked, striking like a cobra for the tender, blood-infused flesh below his jaw.

Rather than eat his throat out and bathe in a gush of warm, slick blood, Carly lurched half off the gurney and landed with her head in the EMT's lap.

What the hell?

Had she been drugged? Lobotomized? Where were her enhanced speed, strength, and senses? Come to think of it—she ran the tip of her tongue along her teeth—she had no fangs, either.

Stunned, Carly allowed the EMT to settle her back onto the gurney and reattach the cuff and cannula, clucking under his breath the whole time.

What was happening?

“What did you give me?” she demanded. God, even her voice sounded pathetic.

“Nothing,” he said. “But you were unconscious when we found you. Do you remember what happened?”

“Where did you find me?” she asked, narrowing her eyes.

“In a white van. Is that ringing any bells?”

That tricky, tricky shifter. He must have dosed her with something debilitating and dumped her back in her own vehicle. She'd be tempted to ride out this little annoyance, but she couldn't let anyone draw and test her blood. They'd discover she was infected with vampirism and she'd never see daylight again. The US Army, in particular, was known for imprisoning and experimenting on infecteds indefinitely.

She had an empire to run. She was too powerful for captivity.

The ambulance slowed to a stop and, before she knew what was happening, the doors were open, her gurney was in motion, and she was whisked against her will down a wide corridor lined with ill humans and medical equipment.

“No,” she complained. “I’m fine.” Her enhanced healing abilities would take care of any lingering damage the shifter had caused in short order. She didn’t need help, she needed out. “I can go.”

Carly sat up and attempted to leap from the gurney to land like a cat before sprinting away. The reality was much more humbling. Again, she reeled forward and a firm hand held her down.

“No,” she repeated, struggling. “Don’t touch me. I’m fine.”

A restraint latched around her left wrist, another around her right. “Settle down, honey, we’re only trying to help.”

“Fuck you,” she screamed. “I’ll eat your heart. I’ll swim in your blood.”

“No one’s going to hurt you,” a calm voice instructed.

She fought so hard against the restraints, her back bowed off the gurney. God damn it, she hadn’t felt so helpless in years. “I’ll kill you all,” she bellowed. “I’m a vampire queen, you bitches. I’ll eat every single one of you.”

“Five of Haldol,” another voice directed. “Call for a psych eval when she wakes up.”

Carly was asleep before she knew she’d been pricked with a needle.

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This time, when Carly woke up, she understood the irritating situation she was in. Somehow, the shifter Lukas Larsson had taken away her vampire powers. They

had to return soon. The infection flooding her system would put her back to normal in no time at all.

Carly tested her right restraint. She sensed it was a fraction looser than the other. She worked at the cuff. Little by little, her hand slipped out. Her thumb ached in pain, and the muscles in her arm quivered in fatigue, but she made progress.

Her right thumb dislocated, and her wrist slid free as a man carrying a clipboard close to his extended belly barged right into her curtained space. Carly cocked her hip to the side, concealing her free hand.

“Hello, young lady,” he greeted with a sickly sweet smile. “How are you feeling?” He checked his notes. “I’m Dr. Wayne, who do I have the pleasure of speaking with?” He waited, pen poised for her response.

“Get. Me. Out. Of. Here.” She rattled her remaining restraint. “I’m not injured. I’m fine.”

A little disappointed, he straightened. “I heard you were shouting about being a vampire.”

“Are you deaf?”

He talked on as if he hadn’t heard her. “First thing you should know, your blood was taken and tested by the hospital. You definitely do not have the vampire infection. I promise you that. So, why don’t you tell me why you *thought* you were infected?”

Finally, reality struck Carly, and she couldn’t respond. The shifter hadn’t dampened the infection. The fucker had *cured* it.

She blinked numbly at the well-meaning staff member. “You’re sure?”

The man seemed relieved he'd broken through her psychosis. "Absolutely, one hundred percent certain."

"You tested my blood for vampirism?" she repeated.

It couldn't be true. There was no cure.

Yet, it made sense. It explained her sudden weakness and the departure of her fangs. It explained everything.

Lukas had had a witch with him. Maybe... Could she...?

"The government," Dr. Wayne told her, "has mandated testing of all drawn blood for vampirism since the early two thousands when several stray infecteds popped up in U.S. hospitals. It's done automatically anytime blood is sent to the lab, and you tested negative for vampirism." He eyed her carefully. "Does that surprise you?"

No. Carly was more pissed than surprised. She barely controlled her rage enough to nod politely. Sanely. "I must have hit my head," she said through gritted teeth. "I was confused. I thought I was infected, but I can see that I was wrong." She forced a sneer of a smile. "I feel much better now."

"I'm glad to hear that." He didn't buy her act at all. In fact, he pulled up a chair and settled in. "Let's talk about why you thought you were infected."

Twenty-four hours ago, she'd have torn these restraints from their anchors and shoved them down the good doctor's throat. But then she'd come across Lukas Larsson, and now she was practically helpless.

Not completely helpless, only *practically*.

She discreetly scanned the room, searching out potential weapons. Not much. A plastic jug of water. The chair the man sat in. The sheet curled around her hips. But

Carly was creative, and she'd had lots of experience killing on the spur. She settled on the IV tubing connected to her arm via a needle.

Carly ripped off the final restraint, and a split second later, the doctor realized she was free. As he struggled upright in surprise, Carly launched herself onto the doctor's chest. She wrapped the tubing around his throat twice and yanked, silencing any attempted call for help and pinching off his air supply. They tumbled to the floor. He tried to kick the chair over to attract passerby, but Carly merely doubled the tubing around her forearm. She glanced at the IV pole that had fallen across the doctor's chest. A nice heavy weapon all its own.

Sneering, she leaned back on the crass garrote, refusing to be fought off until the man went first stiff and then limp. Even then, she waited another fifteen seconds before climbing to her feet and taking the IV stand in hand. Sore thumb be damned, she slammed the base into the doctor's face until his nose broke, his lips split, and one eyelid ripped away.

Alive with adrenalin, Carly swiped a hand through his bloodied face, and licked her fingers clean. Blood still ruled her, vampire or not.

Her heart pounding, she ran for it. Screw any further deception or subterfuge. She simply wanted out.

Through doors, down hallways, and finally into a loading bay. She was free.

And she knew exactly who to punish first.

**Read more about Carly in *Spellspeaker's Prophecy* (Beasts of Vegas #2)—
*available at all major online retailers and your local public library.***

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About the Author

Anna Abner lived in a haunted house for three years and grew up talking to imaginary friends. She married a tall, dark, and handsome United States Marine—her real life romance hero. Currently, she writes edge-of-your-seat paranormal romances from her desert hideaway in sunny southern California.

Her series include the Red Plague, Dark Casters, and Beasts of Vegas. Anna also writes fan fiction for ArchiveOfOurOwn.org as well as short, sexy LGBT stories set in high school under the pen name Sadie West.

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