



Her Vampire Husband (Wicked Games)

By Michele Hauf



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When Blu uncovers her pack's secret plot to destroy the vampire nation--and Creed--she is forced to confront her growing feelings for her sexy undead husband. Will she choose the only life she's ever known or accept his vampire bite?



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Michele Hauf lives in Minneapolis and has been writing since the 1990s. A variety of genres keep her happily busy at the keyboard, including historical romance, paranormal romance, action/adventure and fantasy.

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"I would rather be home dyeing my hair."

Blu Masterson peeked between the heavy red curtains that stretched two stories high. She searched for her groom, but no particular man stood out amongst the huge crowd on the first-floor atrium of the Landmark Center. The room was ninety-percent male. The few females were vampires.

She saw that the room's inhabitants had divided, as if magnetic filings to opposite poles—vampires to the right, werewolves to the left.

The dais toward the back of the ballroom had been decorated with a ridiculous white pergola tucked with red roses, and a string quartet played an adagio entirely too upbeat for her heavy heart at this, her wedding.

"But your hair is such a pretty color tonight." Blu's best friend, Sabrina Kriss, smooshed her friend's thick bob with both hands and delivered her a glitter-frosted wink. "You're just nervous."

"Nervous? Is that what you call it? I'm marrying a freaking vampire, Bree. A vampire I've never met. A vampire I've been told is nine hundred years old. And in case you still missed the point—he's a *vampire*."

Bree rolled her violet eyes. She was sidhe, so did not relate to Blu's ingrained disgust for vampires.

Faeries got along with pretty much all the various paranormal nations. Werewolves did not.

As far as Blu was concerned, vampires were vile, blood-hungry creatures. They flaunted aristocratic snobbery that manifested as entitlement, and were possessed of an inhumane fixation on mortal man. They *needed* mortals for survival, while the species wasn't worth her time.

Bree asked gaily, "What do you think Ryan—"

"Don't say his name. Please, Bree. It'll only make the night more difficult to get through."

Blu bowed her head and wandered to the window. Tugging aside the curtain, she looked over the dark street outside.

She'd agreed to this idiotic farce of an arranged marriage to appease her father and pack leader, Amandus Masterson. "To show the werewolf nation we are capable of putting aside our differences and embracing the

vampire nation," Amandus had proclaimed, but not without a wink.

Yeah, but he wasn't the one being forced to marry a vampire.

And it was force.

When presented with the marriage proposal, Blu had staunchly refused. For weeks. She was a princess; no one told her what to do. That argument held little weight within her father's pack. Blu hated all the Northern pack members. The only one she could tolerate was Ridge, her father's right-hand man.

And Ryan.

Don't think of him.

After the engagement had been inflicted, Blu had pleaded and pouted and even went on a hunger strike for two days, but she did love to eat, and self-denial was not her strong suit.

How she wished her mother was still around. Someone to stand on her side. Someone Blu could tuck her head against and sniffle out a few tears to. At the very least, someone who would nod encouragingly as Blu walked down the aisle tonight.

The door opened and a man poked his head inside the room. Blu stiffened and clasped her fingers together.

"There you are." Amandus Masterson crossed the room to her. The standard proud-father smile was absent from his long, drawn face. Blu would have been surprised had he shown her any sign of pride. He inspected her hair. "What is that ghastly color?"

She looked down, eyeing Bree surreptitiously. The faery had retreated to the wall, arms across her chest and eyes seeking anything but Amandus.

"I should have expected nothing better," he said grumpily. "Why must you always challenge me, daughter?"

"Challenge? I haven't said a word since you stepped in."

Blu had tried every trick in the book to convince Amandus she wasn't marriage material, until her father had threatened to have Ryan removed from her life. She should have protested more. But she never could find her strength in Amandus's presence.

And she knew what *removed* meant. Blu didn't want her lover harmed because she was too stubborn to play along with Daddy's game.

No doubt about it, this fiasco was a game.

She had her orders. And now the dread night had arrived.

"Here." He dropped a heavy ring onto her palm. "The jeweler delivered it moments ago. Don't lose it. And don't give me your disdain. Tonight you will not act as your mother so frequently did. You will do as you've been told."

Startled, Blu shook her head minutely. So rarely did he mention her mother. She wanted to grab him by the shoulders, shake him and ask him for more information. Her mother never did as she was told? Had she irritated Amandus, as well? Why had she left?

Persia Masterson had disappeared when Blu was eleven. No trace left behind, no trail to follow, completely vanished. And with the father/daughter relationship as impersonal as it was, Blu would never have the chance to learn the answers to her aching questions.

"The wedding march begins in five minutes," Amandus stated. "You've your instructions, Blu. Don't let me down."

"Yes, Father."

Jiggling the ring in her cupped palm, she waited until Amandus exited and closed the door before she exhaled and caught her shoulders against the wall behind her. Her heart raced and she winced to realize how quickly her anxiety had shot through the roof.

"Remember," Bree offered as she approached. "It may seem the most awful thing to marry a vampire, but with your vows tonight, you will be leaving your father's house."

"Thanks, Bree. I knew you'd be the one to point out the good in this disaster. Tuck this somewhere for me, will you?"

The faery took the ring and sought Blu's bouquet among the tissue paper crumpled in the florist's box.

Clasping a palm about her neck, Blu couldn't decide which was worse—marriage to a vampire or remaining at the pack compound. Neither offered the freedom she desired.

So she would seek a third option, when the time was right.

With a brush of her fingers, she confirmed the three-inch-wide choker was still in place at her neck. Though the gemstones resembled diamonds, they were cheap cubic zirconia. Blu had bought it as a treat for succumbing to her father's demands—and for protection. She didn't want any vampires getting ideas at the sight of her neck. It was a futile defense, but it did provide reassurance.

Tonight she needed all the support she could muster.

She wasn't afraid of vampires. Not that she'd been around many, or had held a conversation with one.

And she wasn't afraid of a creature because he or she was different. She'd accepted Bree; the faery was her best friend. Years ago she'd had a few witch friends. And her father had once dated a chaos demon; she'd liked her.

Moving in and playing wifey to a vampire? Bring it on. Just because she would sign the marriage contract did not mean she had to like him or go to bed with him.

She would go through the motions. Until her father determined those motions proved successful. But would compliance then see her back at the compound? That was not her ultimate goal.

"It's time," Bree said.

The faery hugged her from behind, snuggling her cheek on Blu's bare shoulder. Her violet-and-blue wings tickled along Blu's arm, warm with tenderness.

"You look gorgeous, honey. There's not a wolf in the house who won't shed tears over losing you."

"You think?"

Female werewolves were rare. Which was why this whole arranged-marriage thing was expected to mean so much and be the catalyst to bringing the two nations together. If the wolves could sacrifice one of their females to marry a vampire, then they could surely stand back and allow peace to reign.

Peace was a long time coming, she had to admit. For decades, probably centuries, the two nations had been at odds. The vampires were the cruelest; they'd hunted and slaughtered her breed without mercy.

And what were the vampires sacrificing? Nothing, as far as Blu was concerned.

Sure, this man she was to marry was some revered vampire lord who belonged to Nava, one of the oldest tribes around. He was called an elder, and there were supposedly but a handful of his ilk walking the earth. That meant little. Only that he was old. Old, old, old.

"Chin up," Bree whispered.

"It is." Blu lifted her chin and turned to her friend. "How do I look? I may attract all the male wolves but do you think I can bring a longtooth to his knees?"

"You're going to have to quit using that word. I don't think it'll go over so well with the new hubby."

"Whatever. Longtooth, bloodsucker, flesh-pricker." It felt good to rattle off the epithets one last time. "So do I pass muster?"

Bree shimmied her gaze over the tight black sheath Blu wore.

Her bridal shroud, Blu had named it. She'd had it specially designed. It plunged low in the front, clinging and only covering half her high, full breasts. The black silk was slit high on both thighs, clasped at her hips with tiny rhinestone chains. The back...well, there was no back. It plunged to her derriere, and revealed the intricate tattoo her lover—former lover, she amended—had etched into her flesh along her spine.

Ryan had claimed her as his own after her father had grudgingly agreed to consider their engagement. As the pack's scion, Ryan was the next in line as principal should Blu's father die. But Amandus thought himself immortal. No whelp was going to wrench away his command.

That had been a year ago. Amandus had reneged on their engagement when presented with a grander, more delicious proposal.

Her lover had been shattered, but that hadn't kept them apart. They had been together 24/7 until two days ago when Amandus had sent Ridge to retrieve Blu from Ryan's home.

"Do you think Ryan will ever have me again?" she asked Bree.

"Of course he will."

"But I'll be tainted. I'll smell like nasty longtooth."

"I thought you weren't going to let the vampire touch you?"

Blu lowered her lashes and looked aside. Her reflection in the night-dark...

Users Review

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