

GIANNA'S DEMISE

I was talking to Alice the other day and we got onto the topic of fashion, as is not unusual with my sister, and wouldn't it be great to have an outfit you could wear when you might or might not need to go out in the sunshine? Like an emergency kit that humans keep in the trunk of their cars, vampires could keep the clothing in their trunks in case of sunshine emergencies.

I commented that the Volturi should start selling their capes on the internet. "It would be a useful item to have," I admitted. "I bet lots of people would buy them."

"Sure they would," Alice said sarcastically, "if they wanted to look like Count Dracula, though it would be fun to wear for Halloween."

Despite her dismissive response, I'd given her an idea for a line of vampire wear, beginning with hooded capes, "...but in fashion colors," she noted, "that would change every year. Detail them differently so that people could collect them, like Manolos or Fendi bags. Hmm..." Her mind was churning with inspiration for a new fashion product, maybe even a business, or the beginnings of one, anyway.

Maybe I'd call it "Vamping," she thought, which made me smile.

"What?" she half-asked, half-accused.

"Oh, nothing," I grinned. "I just like the name."

"Oh, right." Even Alice could forget now and then that her thoughts weren't private...not often, though.

"Who would be my target market?" Alice mused, mostly to herself.

"Vampires, for starters," I offered.

"Ob-vi-ous," she said, one syllable at a time. "I meant, after that."

"Oh, I don't know. Goth teenagers or adults like that receptionist in Volterra, what was her name?"

"Gianna. She's dead, though. I saw it."

"Dead? You never mentioned it before."

"Never came up," Alice replied, but she was still thinking about colors for next year. Pumpkin, cinnamon, warm brown, maroon... Fall colors for cool weather.

"So?" I prodded.

"What?"

"How did she die?"

"Oh. Well, it's kind of funny, actually, in an awful sort of way, you know."

"Of course," I humored her, as she purposefully dragged out the story.

"You knew that Gianna was always hoping to find someone in the guard to change her?"

"Yes, every time I saw her," I remembered, "she was wondering when it would finally happen. She was starting to worry about her age. She wanted to be young and pretty for eternity."

"Don't we all?" Alice smirked.

"Anyway..." I led.

"Anyway, she would have been happy whoever changed her, but she really wanted it to be someone as high up 'the corporate ladder' as possible." Alice chuckled at her own joke, then dropped into silence again.

"I can see that you're pretending to lose track of this conversation just to irritate me," I reminded her, reading that in her thoughts.

"Oh, right. She always put out the bait, but nobody was 'biting.'" Alice stopped to laugh again.

"And..."

"And so she decided to pick someone to 'work on,' Felix being an obvious choice because he always flirted with her at the desk, winking when he went by and such. But Felix is basically a cad at heart."

"I knew it," I commented to myself. "He flirted with Bella too, though I think he had an actual crush on her."

"He did, all right!"

"What do you mean by that?" I pressed. Now I was intrigued. Well, intrigued isn't the right word. Irritated would be more accurate, or possibly, instantly and homicidally jealous.

"Don't get all bent out of shape, but he decided he wanted to act on it and that gave him away to me, though in the end, he changed his mind. You actually scared him."

"I did?" I repeated, surprised.

"Yes, of course! You must be aware of the 'scary face' you get when someone is flirting with your wife!"

"I do?" I hadn't been aware of that. I notice when anyone flirts with Bella, but I generally keep my thoughts to myself.

"Trust me, you don't have to say a word. The message is delivered loud and clear."

I just grunted. "Can we get back to Gianna?"

"Sure. So she set her sights on Felix and decided to try working him into enough of a crush that he would agree to change her. It didn't work, though, you want to know why?"

"Yes, Alice," I replied, humoring her.

"Because she is too tall!" Alice laughed.

"You're kidding!"

"Nope."

"But he's 6'7"! Wouldn't he want a tall woman?"

"You'd think, but no, he likes them small, like Bella," she taunted me.

"Alice...", I growled a warning.

"Okay, okay. Months of effort didn't pay off in the slightest indication that he might change her, though he did think about doing something with her," Alice said suggestively. "She would have let him, too, but he was afraid he'd lose it and get in trouble with the 'masters'."

Alice finally gave up teasing and continued without prodding. "So, her next pick was Alec."

"Little Alec?" I repeated superfluously.

"Yes, she started being extra nice to him, doing special favors for him, like making sure he got his paycheck the instant it was issued, et cetera."

"The guard gets paychecks?" I said, surprised by that for some reason.

"Of course! How do you think they shop?"

"What was I thinking?" I rolled my eyes.

"Anyhoo, Jane started to notice, which is kind of funny, because Gianna would have done the same thing for Jane, if she thought she had any chance with her, but Jane never gave Gianna any indication that she would be soft toward anyone, let alone a human, so she didn't try. But Jane notices Alec's special treatment, even though Alec doesn't notice he's being singled out at all.

"Then one day when Jane had had about enough of it, Gianna smiled at Alec and asked him, 'How are you today?' Jane absolutely lost it and

gave Gianna the x-ray eyes. When she stopped, Gianna was on the floor writhing and Jane hopped over the tall desk and was on her in a second. When Alec saw that Gianna's goose was cooked, he said 'Save me some, sister' and grabbed a wrist for himself.

"If it had been anybody but Jane, the other guards would have complained because lots of them had their eye on Gianna...for dinner...but were too timid to act on it without permission. When word got back to the Volturi, Caius and Marcus couldn't be bothered with the death of a trivial human, and Aro is so indulgent with Jane that he didn't do anything either. That really pissed off the rest of the guard."

"Is that all to the story?" I inquired.

"No," Alice replied. "Before she expired, Gianna asked 'Why?' and Jane said, 'Because I suck.'" With that punch line, Alice burst into laughter.

"Good one, Alice," I said with irritation. "You really had me going there. Ha ha."

"Gianna really is dead, though."

"Is she?" I asked skeptically.

"Yes, because Jane is a sucker, just like you!" With that, Alice skipped off to her computer chuckling all the way.

I'm still not sure what happened to Gianna or whether she is actually dead. Probably she is. It was always just a question of time.

Edward

