

# But, I Did

*by* Jaym Gates

I wasn't supposed to do that. I listened, and I touched, and I begged, and look what happened. I wasn't supposed to do that, was I?

I read the runes, the cards, the signs, the sticks. I consulted tarot cards and read tea leaves. I listened to you, deconstructed every word and look and tone with the harshest logic and cynicism I could muster. If there was some way to decipher what you said, I tried it. I wanted so badly to understand you.

I wasn't supposed to do that. I wasn't supposed to know.

Is there anything I can do? Will you ever forgive me? I looked in your windows, saw your sanctuary. I broke down your doors and stripped you naked. I poked and prodded until I knew every secret, until you trembled, terrified and ashamed.

I wasn't supposed to do that. I wasn't supposed to see.

You traded in your soft shirts for a bullet-proof vest, your sandals and socks for steel-toed boots. You hung a cross around your neck and preached religion, salvation, forgiveness, genocide. You shoved me into the night, left me huddled at your doorstep, begging for a scrap from your table. Begging for forgiveness, or lightning from heaven, or a gentle glance from your eyes.

I wasn't supposed to do that. I wasn't supposed to show weakness.

No scraps for me. You threw piss and coals, buried me in your trash and your bitter words. I cried as your lovely body eroded in that armor. Flesh turned to rust-eaten metal, to crumbling concrete. I kidnapped you, tied you up in a dark place. I mounted you and preached the pleasures of the flesh and blood and cold dawns as you cried pleasure and hatred.

I wasn't supposed to do that. I wasn't supposed to rise from the trash-heap.

When you escaped me, you left my belly burning with your fury. You left your furious marks on my face, my breasts and my broken

hands. I remember that. You broke every bone in them, hissed that people would know me for what I was when they saw these claws.

What am I? Why do you keep kicking me in the trash? Why do you still touch that cross at your throat? I can't hurt you more than you hurt me, more than you hurt yourself. You took the power from my hands and shoved it down my throat. Why do you despise me? All I wanted to do was show you yourself. I just wanted to know you!

I wasn't supposed to do that. I wasn't supposed to ask questions.

There was a scourging the other day. I saw you, remember? I stood in front of the stake and cried for you as they stripped your back of every shred of flesh, until you couldn't scream anymore. You couldn't fight when I buried your tear-streaked face against my belly as you lay, feverish, on the narrow bed. I asked why, why, why do you punish yourself so?

I wasn't supposed to do that. I wasn't supposed to comfort you.

You said it was so that I would be cleansed from your flesh. But you buried your face in my lap and cried until your stomach heaved. The pain did cleanse you. Blood and lust, hatred and anger mixed in that bile, maggots and piss. Your eyes were as empty as your belly. Your humanity lay in a stinking puddle on the floor.

I wasn't supposed to do that. But I don't know how I did it.

You kissed me then. Kissed me on the mouth and drank up my soul. Swallowed it whole. When it was done, when I was hollow and sick, you parted your lips and let a drop back in. Let my parched tongue soak up that drop of life.

I wasn't supposed to do that. I wasn't supposed to let you drain me.

Your kiss on my forehead, it was so gentle. So loving. It was all I had ever wanted. And then you dropped me on the ground and walked away. You left a shell, a leaf that might be blown about by any breeze. You left me empty and desolate; you left me at peace.

I wasn't supposed to do that. But I did.

You are the sin now. You are the tempter. You will do everything you can to see, to understand, to wallow in another's mind.

You aren't supposed to do that. But you will.

