



Wicked Kiss (Nightwatchers)

By Michelle Rowen

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I used to be ordinary Samantha Day, but that's changed. Now, after one dark kiss from a dangerous boy, I can steal someone's soul...or their life. If I give in to the constant hunger inside me, I hurt anyone I kiss. If I don't...I hurt myself.

Bishop is the one whose kiss I crave most, but if I kiss him, I'll kill him. Then there's another boy, one I can't hurt. One whose kiss seems to miraculously quell my hunger. They're both part of a team of angels and demons that's joined forces in my city to fight a mysterious rising darkness, an evil that threatens everyone I know and love. I just wonder if I'll be able to help Bishop—or if I'm just another part of the darkness he's sworn to destroy....

NIGHTWATCHERS: When angels and demons must work together, something beyond evil is rising...

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Editorial Review

Review

"Gorgeous angels, suspense, and romance...this book has everything I love." (Richelle Mead on Dark Kiss)

About the Author

Michelle Rowen is an award-winning, national bestselling author of paranormal books for both teens and adults. She lives in Southern Ontario. Visit www.michellerowen.com for more information about Michelle and her books.

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Crave used to be a prime hangout for dangerous monsters, but tonight I seemed to be the only one here.

A week ago, I lost my best friend in the whole world in this very club. Literally lost her, in a swirling black vortex that opened up and swallowed her whole, and took her...somewhere else. Somewhere horrible.

I didn't know how yet, or when, but I clung to that small yet resilient hope that had taken firm root inside of me: I *would* find her.

Carly had loved this all-ages nightclub and came here every weekend like clockwork, dancing till the place closed down. If I shut my eyes I could still see her on the dance floor, the one place she could forget her problems and let the music become her entire world.

Damn, I missed her.

But I had to come back tonight. I couldn't wait any longer.

There was somebody I had to find who used to hang out here a lot. Somebody I'd been searching the city for. Somebody who'd stolen something from me that I needed back before it was too late.

I had no real idea when "too late" was going to be. But I had a sick, gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach that we were getting really close.

"You look *way* too serious, Sam," Kelly said lightly from across the booth. "And you're not even listening to anything we're saying."

"Sorry," I began, my head still in a fog. I forced a smile to my lips and looked at Kelly and Sabrina—both blond and perky cheerleader types. I wasn't blond, nor was I particularly perky or cheerful. But they were both good friends of mine, anyway.

Well, maybe *good friends* was pushing it. We usually ate lunch at the same table and we had gym class together. I think they liked me. That totally counted.

After their invite earlier today, I'd decided to join them here for a "girls' night out." At least, that's what they thought it was. For me, it was an excuse to be here on the off chance I might find the boy who'd literally stolen my soul.

"Yeah," Sabrina agreed. "Like, earth to Samantha. What's up with you?"

"Nothing. I'm just a bit distracted tonight."

Understatement, table for one.

Kelly took a sip of her Diet Coke and eyed the remains of the nachos that sat on the table between us. There wasn't much left, thanks to me—just a bit of cheesy sludge and a couple soggy tortilla chips. A single jalapeno pepper remained, lying there mournfully after the battle its friends had lost.

I couldn't help it. I was really hungry tonight. And when I was hungry I needed to eat so my *other* cravings didn't kick into overdrive.

Unfortunately, the plate of nachos hadn't helped a bit.

"FYI, we were talking about Halloween," Sabrina reminded me. "Do you know what you're wearing to Noah Tyler's party?"

"Noah's having a party?" I asked absently, keeping my eyes on the club over her shoulder while still trying my best to appear attentive.

"Yeah. And he did tell me that he *really* wants you to be there." She grinned. "I think *somebody's* got a crush on you."

It took me a moment to clue in to what she meant. I cringed at the thought, and also the vague realization that Noah had been checking me out lately. I'd tried to ignore it. "He doesn't."

She shrugged and the girls shared a knowing look. "Whatever you say. But you're coming, right?"

"Wednesday night?" I forced a look of interest as well as a cheery smile though I felt anything but. "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

I was definitely going to miss it. No question.

They discussed their costumes. I half listened. The jalapeno pepper died a quick and painless death.

Then I stayed behind as a song came on that they got incredibly excited about and they made their way to the nearby dance floor. A sprinkle of colorful lights fell across their faces as they joined the swell of other kids dancing to the throbbing beat of the techno song—from a close bump and grind to a frenetic waving of arms and legs. I used to do a kind of uncomfortable shuffle thing when it came to dancing. I had always been hyperaware that somebody might be watching, judging, laughing. All of the above.

"*Dance like nobody's watching*," Carly always insisted.

"*Did you see that embroidered on a cushion somewhere?*"

She'd give me a grin. *"Probably. But it's still true. Gotta enjoy every moment because you never know when it's going to be your last."*

The memory of the eternal optimism of Carly Kessler made my throat too thick to swallow down another gulp of my ginger ale. I returned my full focus to scanning the club, the entrance, the dance floor.

We'd been here for an hour. An hour to consume a plate of nachos, chat with a couple girls who generously tolerated my company, watch a couple hundred kids having a good time on a Saturday night, remembering that I used to be one of them, and to realize that this wasn't getting me anywhere.

The scent in the air was intense and it made it increasingly hard to think. Not sweat or perfume—something else. Something deeper that slithered around me like a boa constrictor, squeezing painfully tight.

While I might look like a normal seventeen-year-old girl to anyone who didn't know otherwise, without my soul I was now a "gray," someone that had the ability to steal someone else's soul through a kiss.

It was a mistake to come here. It's only getting worse.

"Relax," I commanded myself.

But it was hard to relax when you couldn't let yourself breathe deeply. Shallow breathing was the best way to maintain control in a busy place like this. I'd come here to find a missing person, not to pick out a potential victim.

Finally, desperately needing to keep my mind off my unnatural but growing hunger, I pushed away from the booth and moved toward the brass railing that surrounded the dance floor and separated it from the seating area. I gripped the smooth, cold metal hard enough to make my knuckles turn white. After a few moments, my aching hunger finally eased off.

And then it spiked back up to maximum.

"Why are you here, Samantha?" His deep voice, edged with displeasure, came from right behind me.

I clutched the railing tighter and squeezed my eyes shut, trying not to breathe at all, but that was kind of impossible. Even soulless, voracious monsters like me needed oxygen.

When I inhaled this time, his familiar scent—warm, spicy and totally devastating—slid over me. Finally, I forced myself to face him.

Bishop's dark brows were drawn tightly over intense cobalt-blue eyes. He towered over me—a full foot taller than my short five-two. Broad shoulders. Sinewy muscle rippled down his arms under his long-sleeve black T-shirt, which was drawn tight across his chest. His mahogany-colored hair was messy tonight. I had a sudden urge to slide my fingers through it and push it off his forehead. I clenched my hands into fists at my sides to keep from automatically reaching toward him.

"Why am I here?" I forced myself to say it casually. "Why wouldn't I be? Crave's a great place to hang out with friends."

"You're looking for Stephen."

I shrugged a shoulder, tore my gaze away from his and studied the dance floor. "Samantha."

The way he said my name always made me shiver. Still, this time my gaze shot back to his with more annoyance than nonchalance. "I know you want me to stay home every night with the door locked, but I can't do that. Besides, I haven't heard from you in a few days. I figured I was on my own again."

Bishop's expression remained frustratingly neutral. "I've been looking for him."

"Found him yet?"

His jaw tensed. "Believe me, you'd be the first to know if I had."

"Well, if you haven't found him, then it sounds like you need help. That's why I'm here."

He hissed out a sigh. "Seriously, Samantha. You need to go home and let me handle this."

Hot anger ignited inside of me, helping me resist my automatic pull toward him. "I'm not going anywhere."

Bishop's brows were drawn together, but a smile now tugged at the corner of his lips. "Feisty tonight, aren't we?"

"Define feisty."

"Samantha Day. Seventeen years old. Normally a realist who knows right from wrong, but is currently glaring at me like she wants to punch me in the stomach."

"Good definition." Something suddenly clicked for me. "You seem strangely okay tonight. What happened?"

The smile fell from his lips completely. "I'm not okay. But I've found another way to deal with my problem when I have to."

"How? I didn't think your particular problem came with a multiple choice solution."

"Neither did I."

He might look like a gorgeous eighteen-year-old boy, but Bishop was actually an angel who'd been sent here to Trinity to take care of the gray problem. But something went horribly wrong when he left Heaven. Another angel who wanted to sabotage his mission had made him a "fallen" angel—one with a soul. The soul was a punishment to those truly fallen. It wreaked havoc with their mental stability, causing them to go slowly insane. But it was also necessary for their ongoing survival. A soul to a fallen angel was a true double-edged sword. It messed up their minds, but without it they would perish.

I'd kissed Bishop once and taken part of his soul—it had been the most amazing and horrible kiss of my entire life. Now I instinctively wanted more. And part of him—like any gray's victim—wanted to be kissed again.

Yeah. You could say it was a complicated relationship.

"Well, I'm glad," I said. "I guess now I know why I haven't seen you lately. If you don't need me to help you

find your sanity, then you can focus on the mission instead. Sooner it's completed, the sooner you can find a permanent solution to your problem. Right?"

"You think that's why I've stayed away? You don't think it's hard for me to be this close to you right now?" He leaned dangerously closer. "Remember, it's not just you suffering here."

My hunger level shot through the roof.

Oh, yes. I remembered.

When his hand closed on my wrist, a shiver of electricity zipped across my skin. My eyes snapped to his. "You really shouldn't touch me if you don't need to."

"I know."

The rest of the club seemed to fall away so there was only he and I left behind.

Right now, Bishop was too close and smelled way too good.

"I haven't had any slipups since I last saw you," I said, my voice strained. "I can control this until we find Stephen."

"I know you've been on your best behavior."

I looked up at him, confused. Then clarity dawned. "Wait. Are you saying you've been watching me the past few days?"

"It's not always me. And it's not all the time."

I gaped at him, the thought that he'd been monitoring me made me feel like a potential shoplifter. "You don't trust me."

His brows drew together. "This isn't about trust."

"Sure it is."

"If Stephen tries to contact you when you're alone, then I need to know."

I swallowed hard. "I'm worried you—or one of the others—is going to find him first and stick your dagger through his chest with no questions asked. One less gray to clean up later. But that can't happen. I need him alive, so you need to back off."

That painfully sexy smile touched his lips again as he studied me. "Yes, *definitely* feisty tonight."

I snorted softly, but refused to let down my guard completely. "I need my soul back. I can't live like this."

"I know."

The music shifted to a new song, even louder than the one before, if that was possible. The ground shook

with the nearby dancers stomping on it. A waitress holding a tray of fried appetizers moved past us.

"Are you here alone?" I asked.

He glanced toward the far corner of the dark and noisy nightclub. "No. Brought some backup to help with the search while the others are out on regular patrol."

I looked to see who it was and cringed at the sight. Someone tall and blond and familiar.

Kraven worked with Bishop to save the city from things like me. At first glance I would have guessed that Kraven was another angel.

Nope.

Heaven and Hell worked together very occasionally on problems that threatened the integral balance of light and dark, good and evil.

Soul-eating monsters were just such a threat.

Kraven represented the dark side of the scale.

He was with a girl off in the corner and it was obvious that he was hitting on her. Heavily. He braced his hand over her shoulder, creating a partial cage she looked in no hurry to escape from. She grinned up at him as if in love. For all I knew, maybe she was.

As I watched him warily, wondering what his plans for that innocent—or not so innocent—girl were, he glanced over his shoulder at me. A cool smile curled the corner of his mouth.

"Yeah, he looks like he's really helping the search," I said with disdain. "If you're searching for slutty girls."

"Distractions happen."

I chewed my bottom lip and looked up at him. "I'm surprised that out of the whole team you'd pick your demonic brother to spend the evening with."

Bishop's expression tightened.

When he finally released his hold on my wrist, I grabbed the front of his shirt before he could move away from me.

"Are you ever going to tell me more about the two of you?" I'd come up with no reasonable explanation of how one brother became an angel and the other a demon, despite the tiny breadcrumbs of info I'd collected along the way.

"There's nothing to tell."

"Yeah, right. How about you at least tell me the name you had when you were human? I know one thing for sure—it wasn't Bishop."

"Okay." He eyed me. "It was Barbara."

"You're hilarious."

"And you still look like you want to punch me."

"I'm barely restraining myself, actually."

That smile returned to play at his lips. His gaze moved to the other side of the club and his expression grew grim again. "I need to talk to Roth. Wait here."

Another team member. Another *demon*. Roth, however, made Kraven look like a friendly teddy bear. And Kraven was not a friendly teddy bear by anyone's definition.

"I thought you wanted me to leave?" I said.

"I'll take you home when we're done here. Give me five minutes. Stephen's dangerous and I don't want you finding him by yourself."

"I can handle him."

Bishop returned my challenging look with one of his own. "Five minutes."

"Fine."

I watched as he walked across the club to where tall, handsome and hateful Roth stood by the long bar that only sold nonalcoholic beverages and appetizers. The crowd of kids swelled to cut off my view of the two.

Even with Bishop gone, my hunger hadn't faded one bit. Strange. I thought I'd get a chance to compose myself better.

"Hey, Samantha."

Damn. I glanced over to see Colin Richards standing right next to me. He was poised directly in what I'd termed my "orbit of hunger." Two feet or less. The danger zone.

"Colin," I squeaked out. "Hey."

I wasn't romantically interested in Colin at all, but unfortunately, the feeling wasn't mutual. He'd taken my rejection hard, especially when I showed very nonrejection behavior whenever he entered the orbit and I couldn't control my hunger quite so well. Most people respected your personal space. Colin wasn't one of them.

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