



Generation V

By M.L. Brennan

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Reality Bites

Fortitude Scott's life is a mess. A degree in film theory has left him with zero marketable skills, his job revolves around pouring coffee, his roommate hasn't paid rent in four months, and he's also a vampire. Well, sort of. He's still mostly human.

But when a new vampire comes into his family's territory and young girls start going missing, Fort can't ignore his heritage anymore. His mother and his older, stronger siblings think he's crazy for wanting to get involved. So it's up to Fort to take action, with the assistance of Suzume Hollis, a dangerous and sexy shape-shifter. Fort is determined to find a way to outsmart the deadly vamp, even if he isn't quite sure how.

But without having matured into full vampirehood and with Suzume ready to split if things get too risky, Fort's rescue mission might just kill him....

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Editorial Review

Review

"I loved M.L. Brennan's *Generation V*. Engrossing and endearingly quirky, with a creative and original vampire mythos, it's a treat for any urban fantasy lover!"--*New York Times* Bestselling Author Karen Chance

"Full of vivid characters and terrific world building, *Generation V* is a fun, fast-packed romp of a story that kept me glued to the pages to the very last word. Loved it! Bravo, M.L. Brennan, bravo!"--National Bestselling Author Devon Monk

About the Author

M. L. Brennan lives in Connecticut with her husband and three cats. Holding a master's degree in fiction, she teaches basic composition to college students. After spending years writing and publishing short work in other genres, Brennan decided to branch out and write the kind of book that she loved to read, resulting in *Generation V*, her first full-length work of urban fantasy.

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Chapter 1

I knew the moment that my brother, Chivalry, walked into the coffee shop. I always know whenever a member of my family is around. I'm not sure whether it's because we're family or because we're vampires, because I've never met a vampire I'm not related to.

But even if I hadn't been able to sense Chivalry with a bone-deep certainty, I would've known by the way that Tamara at the register and my boss, Jeanine, suddenly snapped to attention. Two of the buttons on Jeanine's blouse came undone with a speed that I've never seen her demonstrate in any of her administrative duties. Tamara's top was already pretty low, but she leaned down over the counter in a way that now had her very ample breasts spilling out in a manner that I was certain the Health Department would find concerning. I was able to observe all of this from my crouched position behind the counter, where I'd been retrieving more stacks of paper cups. I occupy the low end of the totem pole of power at the unfortunately named Busy Beans coffee shop, which managed to remain marginally profitable despite grimy floors, hard scones, and truly terrible coffee owing entirely to the free wireless connection and the high level

of chain-store-eschewing college dissidents in Providence. It was the latest in the series of crappy jobs I'd held since graduating from college with a degree in the shockingly unemployable field of film theory.

I stood up, paper cups in hand, and watched my brother move through the crowd of ironic cardigans, horn-rimmed glasses, and vintage dresses. Heads were turning, and the hum of conversations dimmed as everyone looked him over. Even with all eyes on him, though, Chivalry seemed completely unaffected, letting the adulation of women and envy of men roll off him with complete aplomb. Just over six feet tall, with perfectly tousled chestnut hair and chiseled good looks that would've made a casting agent weep, Chivalry wore black slacks, a white collared shirt, and a perfectly tailored dark car-length jacket, all designer. He had just enough of a tan to suggest a life lived outdoors, but not so much that he looked like he spent all day lazing on the beach. He looked expensive, restrained, and capable of seducing every woman in the coffee shop.

I, on the other hand, was cringingly aware of my ratty jeans from Walmart, the tomato sauce stain on my T-shirt, and the duct tape that I'd used to reattach the sole of my left sneaker this morning, all topped off

with a green Busy Beans apron that did not do wonders for my ego. My hair is a bit darker than Chivalry's, and prone to sticking up in weird little tufts no matter how much hair gel I use in the mornings. Height that is imposing and impressive on Chivalry is gawky and awkward on me, and my face is forgettable at best. I'd once been with my girlfriend, Beth, when we were looking for some friends of hers we were supposed to meet up with, and had reached the level of cell phone calls along the lines of "Do you see the blue sign? We're standing right under it," and Beth had finally said, "Look for the tall, average-looking guy." That had been about a month before she'd suggested that it would be good for our relationship if she had sex with other people.

If Chivalry looked like someone who could put on pancake makeup and play a vampire in a movie, I looked like the guy who'd be fetching that guy coffee. Of course, Chivalry actually *is* a vampire—I'm still just *mostly* a vampire. As my family is always reminding me, I have a lot of human left.

By now Chivalry was at the counter and placing an order for a hazelnut cappuccino. He was smiling politely at Tamara and looking completely unaffected by her borderline toplessness, much to her apparent frustration as she managed to lean over even farther, with the result that two men seated at tables behind Chivalry but with good eye-lines to the counter choked on their drinks, and one unlucky guy spilled coffee all over himself. Chivalry didn't so much as glance below her collarbone. I felt a little bad for Tamara, despite her tendency to leave me stuck with all the cleanup work. The elegant but extremely expensive wedding ring on Chivalry's left hand meant that Tamara could strip down right in front of him, beg him to take her, and Chivalry probably wouldn't even blink as he strolled away.

Now Chivalry was smiling at Jeanine and politely greeting her. "What a great little coffee place," he said, prompting preening. "I just stopped by to say hello to my younger brother."

Now everyone was staring at me—my coworkers with

shock that I could be related to this god among men, and my brother with that calm steadiness that made me squirm inside at the memory of the sixteen calls of Chivalry's that I'd dodged over the last month and a half. Nothing in Chivalry's face suggested that he was pissed off at having to trot his thousand-dollar shoes into one of the mangier areas of Providence and over what was certainly one of its most disgusting floors to track down a brother who was avoiding him. I felt that very familiar sensation of gut-wrenching guilt and embarrassment that was my almost constant companion when I was with my brother.

"Hi, Chiv," I said lamely.

"Hello, Fortitude," Chivalry said, his voice grave and calm. "Would it be possible to have a word with you before you return to your"—and just the slightest flick of a glance to the collection of coffee bags, filters, and paper cups that lined the soiled workstation—"endeavors?"

I felt color creeping up my neck. The madder Chivalry was, the more he tended to show his age. Chivalry might look like he was in his early thirties, but he'd been born just as the Civil War was winding down. When he forgot himself, Chivalry sounded like a soldier's letter home read in a Ken Burns special. At twenty-six, I'm not an infant compared to him—I'm a fetus.

"Fort, you bad boy," Jeanine cooed, giving me a swat that might've looked playful but still packed some punch. "Why haven't you ever mentioned that you have an older brother?" The unspoken *stud muffin* part of her statement hung in the air. "And"—here she turned to Chivalry, giving him a full-on eyelash batting—"of course Fort can take a break and talk to you. The little darling has been on his feet all day."

That was laying it on a bit thick, I thought, but I wasn't going to turn down a break, especially since Jeanine

was usually of the thankless-taskmaster school of management. While I walked around the counter, ignoring Tamara's glare of death, I watched while Jeanine leaned even farther toward Chivalry on the pretext of giving him a little pat on the chest. She failed to notice when Chivalry's expression went from glacially polite to frigidly homicidal. Of course, she wasn't the one who was going to have to deal with it—I was.

I picked a table as far away from the register as possible, and even as I waited for the ass-ripping to follow as Chivalry settled himself in front of me, I couldn't resist giving a little grunt of pleasure at the sensation of sitting. Jeanine didn't allow stools behind the counter, even during slow days, and my sneakers were so worn down that I could actually feel the curling edges of linoleum through my soles.

Chivalry glowered. Sometimes I wondered if that was his default expression or if I just brought it out in him. "That woman," he pronounced, "is a whore." He dropped a crumpled piece of paper onto the table and gave it a glare that should've ignited it.

"That's harsh," I said. "You're acting like no one ever slipped you their phone number before." He chose to ignore that, giving only a very regal sniff of distaste, and cautiously sipped the sludge in his paper cup. Nothing in his face gave any outward indication about his feelings, but then again, he came from a more mannered time. Anyone born in this century would've given a spit-take. Rinsing out the machines between batches was Tamara's job, and it hadn't been done since she was hired.

Chivalry set his cup down with exquisite care, another reminder that the places he preferred to eat at would've served it to him in a nice mug rather than a partially recycled paper cup. A small part of me felt hurt at how disgusted he was by where I was working. Not that I didn't spend half of my own time being disgusted by it, but that wasn't exactly the point.

"I am concerned," Chivalry said.

"Don't be," I snapped.

"Mother is also concerned," Chivalry continued as if I hadn't said anything. To him I probably hadn't. "You haven't come home to feed in over five months."

"I don't need to. Not yet."

"At your age, you should be feeding every month, if not more often."

"I'm fine," I insisted. I hated visiting my mother's house to feed, and I always put it off as long as possible. I hated what it involved, and what it meant to me. I hated the way it made me feel. The longer I could go between feedings, the weaker I became, but I preferred it that way. It made me feel human. If I tried very hard, I could even pretend that vampires were all make-believe, and that I wasn't turning into one.

Chivalry made a low grumbling sound and pushed his cup away from him. "If you wait too long, your instincts will take over. Even as young as you are, you will become a risk to all around you."

"You don't care about the people around me. You wouldn't care if I snapped and went on a murder spree."

Chivalry's mouth thinned. "A murder spree would be most inconvenient. Our mother has better things to spend money on than covering up your foibles."

"But that's all you care about, isn't it? People's lives don't matter at all to you."

One second Chivalry was tapping the table in irritation, and the next second his hand was around my jaw. He'd moved too fast for my eyes, or any of the humans around us, to follow. The palm of his hand was against my chin, and his fingers were wrapped almost gently around my face. I waited, not moving—one squeeze and I'd be sucking Ensure out of a straw for the next twelve weeks.

Not that he'd do it. My sister, Prudence, fantasized about breaking all of my bones to kindling (as detailed to me last year at Christmas), but Chivalry wouldn't. He was just giving me a reminder of what I wasn't. He was a full vampire, and could break a person's neck before the person even realized he was moving. I was still mostly human, and sucked at sports.

"You wouldn't even care if I killed everyone in this building. Lives don't matter, just your convenience." Talking was difficult, but I managed. Another reason to avoid my family was that I almost routinely manage to piss them off. He didn't move his hand, just looked at me. "Chiv," I nudged, "this is getting weird and you have an audience." Already people from other tables were sneaking glances.

Chivalry didn't bother to look around, but released my jaw slowly, leaving me with a pat on the cheek that managed to convey both fondness and a warning.

"You're right, baby brother," he said softly, his voice enough to put my freezer to shame. "I wouldn't care. Not really, or at least not for long. But you would."

He stood up, and made a show of smoothing the

wrinkles out of his jacket. His dark eyes gleamed like ocean water under a full moon, and the cold part of me that is entirely vampire seemed to sit up in response. I could hear the heartbeats of all the humans around me, smell the blood running through their veins. I pushed that part of me back down hard, until the people were only people again, and I could fool myself that I was one of them. Not feeding does sometimes have its drawbacks, especially when I pushed it to the edge.

Chivalry gave a soft snort, unimpressed. "Mother has asked me to invite you to dinner tomorrow. It's not a command . . . yet." He turned and walked out the door, not having to push through the crowd, since everyone took a few steps back when they saw him coming, unintentionally creating a path. They probably didn't realize they were doing it, or if they did, they thought it was because he was good looking. They didn't realize that it was because he was a predator, and that lizard part of their brain that was in charge of keeping them alive knew enough to get out of his way.

I finished the rest of my shift, ignoring Jeanine's not-so-subtle questions about my older brother and refusing to let it rile me when Tamara left ten minutes early, making me stay twenty minutes late to do both of our cleanup work. The sun was just starting to set when I finally left Busy Beans, and I gratefully inhaled a few breaths of air that weren't permeated with the smell of coffee grounds. As I waited at the bus stop, I looked over the tops of the buildings and enjoyed the last few sunbeams.

True vampires prefer overcast days, but I can lounge on the beach all day and the only price I'll pay might be a slightly worse sunburn than the human next to me. Time leeches away at our more human traits. At his age, Chivalry will avoid the afternoon sun, and he spends a lot of time complaining about how hats have gone out of style. My sister, Prudence, was a little girl when the British blockaded American ports during the Revolution. She sticks to the shade as much as possible, and carries both an old-fashioned parasol and a ready set of excuses about a family history of skin cancer.

Our mother lives behind blackout curtains and can't go outside until hours after the sun sets.

The bus arrived, and I climbed up. I found a seat in the back and tried to keep my mind on good, human things. The vegetarian wrap that I'd pick up at the deli a block from my apartment for dinner. The Humphrey Bogart marathon that started tonight. The twelve hours between now and the next time I had to put on my green apron. But seeing Chivalry was tugging my mind back to all the things I spent so much of my time trying to avoid.

Unlike with Prudence and Chivalry, Madeline had decided that I would be raised among humans. Why she'd changed her parenting approach after two successful runs already remained a mystery that she'd flatly refused to explain to me, despite the many times I'd asked. My foster parents were named Jill and Brian Mason. Jill was a dental hygienist, and Brian was a cop. They were nice, normal people. Not much money, but a lot of love, and despite years of trying, no baby. They'd tried looking into adoption, but a misspent youth with a militant wing of the Sierra Club and a stack of arrests from chaining herself to redwood trees in the Pacific Northwest had left Jill with a record that Brian's decorated public service just couldn't offset. No one cared that Jill had never hurt a single person—forty-three arrests were enough to make sure that no adoption agency, public or private, was going to touch them. Then one day Brian and Jill got a call from a lawyer asking if they'd be interested in a special kind of foster care.

I don't think they listened to anything past the part where they'd be given a healthy infant. I was three months old, and the family that was giving me up wanted to retain a connection with me that required one dinner a month, unsupervised. But this was their only chance to be parents, and they thought that anything was worth getting me.

It was a long time before they learned how wrong they were.

But they took me into their little house in Cranston, and I had the kind of childhood everyone should have. Cub Scouts, Little League, dog in the backyard, and cookies in the oven—we were a Norman Rockwell painting. And when a black Mercedes pulled up in front of the house once a month and I was taken away from them, I was always back four hours later, no worse for wear.

Maybe if Brian hadn't been a cop, everything would've been okay. Maybe it would've ended in blood no matter what. But as I got older, I started whining about going to my relatives' house for dinner. For a while they were able to dismiss it, but when I was nine, my whining was getting worse, and one day I made a mistake. I told Brian that I didn't like the way my blood mother touched me. That it made me uncomfortable. He asked for details, which at first I was smart enough not to give. But he reassured me, told me that he could protect me, and I was dumb enough to believe him, so I told him what I had to do at those monthly dinners.

Brian was on the phone with my mother's lawyer within half an hour. The lawyer was expensive, and the first thing he started doing was threatening to take me away from them. Brian and Jill didn't have much money—that's why they'd been chosen to take care of me, just in case this happened. They didn't have enough money to fight for me, and maybe another couple would've backed down, would've believed what the lawyer was saying—that nine was a difficult age, I was an imaginative child, and that everything was just fine. Don't rock the boat.

Brian went to work and started looking into my mysterious relatives. He hadn't done that before—maybe he knew on some level that he wouldn't like what he'd find. He'd made a total of three phone calls before he got one of his own, from the chief of police. The message was simple—if you want to keep your job, stop looking into Madeline Scott.

At home, Jill got a call as well, from Prudence. She wanted to come over, to talk to them, to clear up any confusion that might've arisen because of my "story."

Maybe if she hadn't said it that way, it would've been fine and she could've smoothed things over. Maybe if Madeline had told Chivalry to handle it, everyone would've been okay. But maybe Madeline already knew what direction this was heading, because she gave it to Prudence.

Jill called Brian. He pulled all the money they had out of the bank, and Jill started packing.

I didn't really understand what we were back then. Maybe if Madeline and Chivalry hadn't shielded me so much, I would've known enough to try to talk Jill and Brian out of it, to calm them down, to lie. To save their lives.

Prudence arrived before Brian came home. I knew she was at the door and I begged Jill not to open it. She loved me enough to believe me, and she didn't open it, but it didn't matter. It's only in stories that vampires need an invitation.

Jill was dead when Brian came home. He saw her body before Prudence killed him.

Prudence made sure that I watched it all.

Then she brought me back to Madeline.

The bus jerked to a stop, and I realized that I'd missed my stop. I got off and walked an extra four blocks, trying to push the past away.

My apartment was the third floor of an old Victorian that had probably been stately and grand when it was built. It was still pretty nice on the ground floor, which was a women's lingerie boutique, but the upper two floors were showing the wear and tear of about two decades of renters. I paid more than I could really afford for the apartment, but I liked the old woodwork, the big windows, and the hardwood floors. I had an only moderately overpriced parking space in the back where I kept my aging Ford Fiesta, which I'd bought at a police auction. I'd later learned that its suspiciously reasonable price was not because it was the older (and far homelier) model of Fiesta, but because at one point it had been Exhibit A for the state of Massachusetts. During my ownership it had shown no further murderous tendencies, however, and now seemed content to simply rust and drip oil. Because the bus lines were within walking distance, I even had the hope that I could baby the Fiesta into lasting another few years for me. I was close to Brown University, where I'd gone to college, and my expired ID card got me access to all sorts of college facilities.

The apartment had two bedrooms with a kitchen that had been updated in the 'seventies, and a bathroom whose peppermint pink amenities were authentic to the 'sixties. The wallpaper said *visually impaired old lady*, but my daring decorating mix of IKEA and roadkill furniture, plus the piles of DVDs, said *cheap student*.

I stepped inside, wishing that the memories would stay away. They waited in the back of my mind, and I knew that tonight I'd dream of blood.

There was nothing I could do about that, so I focused on the now. Specifically, my roommate, Larry, whose clothing was scattered all over the living room. If I could've afforded to live alone, I would've, but living here meant sharing space. And Larry was a philosophy grad student at Brown who had liked the apartment for all the same reasons I did, and who even seemed like he'd be an okay guy to live with. I'd gone through five roommates in four years, but I always thought that the next one would be different.

Larry had been different—he'd been the worst one yet. Since signing the lease he'd shown a noticeable tendency to avoid cleaning any of the common spaces, clog the toilet (and leave it for me to fix), have

obnoxiously noisy sex with a series of women (culminating recently with my girlfriend, Beth, after which they both found it useful to quote Sartre at me to explain how unreasonable it was of me to object), and lately a propensity of not paying his half of the rent. As of last count, he was four months behind, a weight that I was now having to pull double shifts down at Busy Beans to offset.

But worst of all was the meat.

I'd gone vegetarian when I started dating Beth, who was militantly vegan. At first it had just been a pacifying measure to sustain my likelihood of having sex, but after two weeks I noticed that it helped me keep that vampire part of me pushed down, and I stuck with it. I wasn't a particularly great vegetarian—I don't think I could give up cheese or eggs if I tried—and periodically I'd back-slide and eat chicken. But I avoided red meat.

And tonight, just as on many other occasions, Larry had left his leftovers in the fridge.

Not paying his part of the rent seemed to give Larry a lot more spare change, and he ate out a lot. For an unapologetic carnivore, that meant a lot of steak, ribs, rack of lamb, and burgers came home in doggie bags. Whenever his date didn't finish her meal, Larry brought the rest of it home so that he could still get his money's worth. That would've been hard enough, except Larry would take the food *out* of the nice foam containers, stick it on a plate, and put that in the fridge without a cover. He said it made it easier to eat at two in the morning when he got hungry.

I looked in the fridge. It was steak this time, still with a few leaves of parsley clinging to it. And even old and half-eaten, it was rich and red. Rare. There was some juice on the plate, making little red droplets.

Jill's blood had made pools. Brian's blood had made patterns on the walls.

I realized that I was licking my fingers, and that I'd dipped them in the steak juice. A minute ago I'd felt the warmth of a stuffy and un-air-conditioned apartment on a June evening, but now everything felt cool and comfortable.

I'm mostly human. But that leaves me a little vampire.

I pushed it down, all the way down, washing my hand off at the sink and wishing that it wasn't so hard to watch the last of the juice run down the drain.

Tonight I'd eat my vegetarian wrap and try to convince myself that it was everything that a nice *human* guy could want for dinner. I'd watch Bogey movies until I fell asleep. I'd nag Larry again about the rent, even if he had a girl with him when he came home. Even if it was Beth again.

Tomorrow I'd accept my mother's invitation.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gina Keller:

In this 21st centuries, people become competitive in each way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make these people survives, being in the middle of the particular crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that sometimes many people have underestimated the item for a while

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