



Covet (The Clann Book 2)

By *Melissa Darnell*

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Dangerous to be together. Painful to be apart.

Savannah Colbert knows she broke up with Tristan Coleman for the right reasons. Most of all, to keep from killing him with her new vampire abilities. But try telling her heart. Now, lost in a sea of hostile Clann faces, Sav tries to come to terms with what she's becoming and what that means for her future. And that someone is doing their best to bully her into making a terrible mistake.

Tristan can't believe Sav won't even talk to him. If being apart is her decision, fine. Just don't expect him to honor it. But even as he prepares to fight for the girl he loves, forces beyond their control take them both in directions neither could have foreseen or prepared for.

A reckoning is coming...and not everyone will survive.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Melissa Darnell is the author of a growing list of adult and YA fiction and nonfiction books, including The Clann Series #1: Crave, The Clann Series #2: Covet, The Source, and The Ultimate Guide to Making Cheer/Dance Gear & Gifts. Born in California, she grew up in Jacksonville, Texas and has also called the following states home since then: Utah, West Virginia, Louisiana, Alabama, Kentucky, Iowa and South Dakota. She currently lives in Nebraska with her husband Tim and two children, Hunter and Alexander, where she enjoys watching *Whale Wars*, *Glee* and *True Blood*, designing digital graphic products for the virtual world of Second Life, and of course writing her latest book. Visit her websites for news, online playlists for each of her books, and more at MelissaDarnell.com and TheClannSeries.com.

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Savannah

The vampire council's private jet, a giant cocoon of white leather and exotic wood trim, hummed a false lullaby around us, trying to lure me into sleep. But even though I was warm and safe within the arms of the only boy I'd ever loved, I couldn't give in to the exhaustion dragging at my body. Not yet. There was so little time left to enjoy this doomed illusion of peace and perfect happiness. I needed to fight the urge to sleep as long as I could.

Beside me, Tristan Coleman had already lost that battle. He sat slumped in a corner of the sofa we shared near the rear of the cabin. Though his chin with its dusting of three-day-old whiskers rested awkwardly on his chest, a slight smile deepened the corners of his lips, and his arms, so solidly wrapped around me, never budged. Trying to protect me even while he dreamed.

I should have been protecting him instead.

Despite the soft leather beneath us, Tristan had to be uncomfortable. After all, unlike me, he was human and his body could only take so much abuse. When his eyelids had first begun to droop hours ago, I'd tried to convince him to move to one of the reclining chairs or to at least take the entire sofa for himself so he could stretch his long body out properly. But Tristan had refused, insisting on sleeping upright so we could continue to sit close together.

Knowing what was coming for us, I'd given in. Selfish though it was, I didn't want to let go of him yet, either.

One stray golden-blond curl, rebellious like its owner, flopped over his forehead. Carefully I reached up and smoothed it back, forcing my eyes to look past the sharp contrast between my pale skin and his rugged tan.

In a few hours, even the right to that small touch would be lost forever.

I tried to memorize every detail of his face, normally so hard with determination or blinding everyone nearby with one of his infamous grins, now softened at the edges by sleep and his mistaken belief that everything was okay. He had no idea what sacrifices I'd made to get the vamp council to release him after they had used him and his powerful, magic-laced Clann blood to test my self-control. Handcuffed to a chair in a cement-lined interrogation room next door, he hadn't heard the torturous promise I'd made to that circle of cold

beings. A race I was slowly but surely turning into.

I could have told Tristan the truth after the council released us from their Paris headquarters. But I hadn't, partly because I was dreading his reaction, but mostly because I wanted to be with him, as happy as possible, every last second that we had left together.

The muscles in my chest tightened, refusing to let my lungs expand fully, and another tear slipped down the side of my nose. Stupid tears. My eyes hadn't stopped leaking for more than a few minutes at a time since Tristan and I had safely exited the council's underground labyrinth of tunnels.

Knowing what I had to do for Tristan's own safety once we returned to our hometown in Jacksonville, Texas, I feared the tears would never stop.

There were so many perfectly logical and good reasons why I was all wrong for Tristan, why *I had* to do as promised and stop seeing him. My mind understood. Why couldn't I make my heart agree?

Dropping his head back against the sofa, Tristan sighed and snuggled me closer. And though I knew I should move away, keep him safe by putting physical distance between us, I gave in one last time to my heart. Closing my eyes, I nestled my forehead where his neck and shoulder met, a curved space of heat and strength that seemed to have been sculpted especially for me. Drawing in a deep breath, I could just make out the lingering crispness of his aftershave left over from Friday morning, the last time he'd had access to a razor. And beneath that, the barest hint of the precious and oh-so-forbidden Clann blood he had been forced to shed for my test. A test I almost hadn't passed. A test that had nearly cost him his life.

Swallowing hard, I pushed that dangerous memory away.

Soon. I would keep my promise to the council soon. Just...not yet. A few more hours while we were escaping the laws of gravity and the Clann and the vamp council in this plane together, a few more precious memories to make before we were grounded once more so I could be sure I would remember how it felt to be held and loved by him. How it felt to wrap my arms around his waist, feel the press of his hard chest against my cheek, hear his heartbeat pounding beneath my ear. To feel the illusion of safety while cradled within his arms, his strong hands on my hip and back cupping me as if I were a precious treasure instead of the monster that I truly was...

"Savannah," a familiar voice whispered like an annoying mosquito near my ear.

"Mmm," I mumbled, wanting that voice to go away. Only one male's voice was welcome right now, and that one wasn't it.

"Savannah, wake up," Dad insisted, his whisper slightly louder but still far too soft for Tristan's human ears to hear.

Scowling, I cracked one eyelid open.

"We are an hour away from the Cherokee County Airport, and the pilot warned that we will be landing in bad weather. You should call your grandmother and mother and let them know." Dad held out a black cell phone stamped For In Air Use Only in gold letters.

I took the smartphone, and Dad returned to his recliner at the front of the cabin.

Worried my talking would wake Tristan, I tried to ease out of his arms, intending to move closer to Dad's end of the plane. But as soon as I moved, he woke up.

"Sorry," I whispered. "I need to make some calls. Go back to sleep."

"I'm all right." He tugged me back onto his lap, brushing his nose against mine in a too-familiar, silent request for a kiss. At the last second, I turned my head so his lips touched my cheek instead. He leaned his head back to search my face, his heavy-lidded gaze hurt and confused.

"We shouldn't...not until we land and you can draw some energy." Thanks to the demon Lilith, the creator of my father's race of hybrid vamps, I could drain energy with a bite or a kiss, a fact I had only recently been reminded of. As long as we were away from the ground, my kiss could kill Tristan, despite his being the son of the most powerful family of witches in the Clann. His ability to pull energy from the earth through direct contact with the ground was the only thing that had saved him a few days ago after too long a kiss with me and a fight with his fellow Clann member Dylan Williams. If I hadn't been able to drag Tristan over to some nearby grass where he could draw replacement energy, Tristan might have died that night.

He frowned but nodded, letting me slide over to sit at the other end of the short couch. As soon as I was settled again with my legs curled up between us, he rested a hand on my ankles below the cuffs of my slacks. His unusual need to maintain constant physical contact with me over the last few hours made me wonder. Did he somehow know what the council had made me agree to? Or had the council's test simply left him on edge and worried about me?

I covered his hand with one of mine and tapped numbers on the plane's phone with the thumb of my free hand.

My home phone rang four times, then the answering machine clicked on. I glanced at my watch, which was still set on Central Standard Time. It was 10:00 a.m. on a Sunday. Nanna, whom my mother and I had lived with most of my life, should be home and getting ready for church. As our church's pianist, she never missed the Sunday service. Why wasn't she answering?

I tried again, thinking maybe Nanna was in her room getting dressed. Again, I got the answering machine. Unease crept in as I left a message.

I called my mother's cell phone next. At least her whereabouts weren't a mystery. She was probably still on her latest sales trip.

Mom answered on the first ring, making me jump. Unlike Nanna, Mom seldom had a signal while she was delivering safety products and chemicals to forestry clients out in the fields and woods.

"Oh, hey, Mom. Just wanted to let you know I'm okay and—"

"Savannah! Oh thank God. I, we, your grandma..." She was on the verge of shrieking, her normally low voice pitched high enough to hurt my ears and make me wince. "I'm on my way home now. But I'm still hours away from Jacksonville and—"

My hands convulsed around both the phone and Tristan's hand. "Whoa, Mom, slow down. What's going on?"

Eyebrows pinched with concern, Tristan flipped his hand under mine and laced our fingers together. Grateful

for something strong and solid to hold on to, I squeezed his hand.

"Sav, they took Nanna! They called me, and—"

"Wait a minute. Who took her?" What little warmth my body had drawn from Tristan's drained away. Had the vamp council gone after my grandmother now?

"The Clann. They called me, asking about that Coleman boy as if I would know where he is. For some reason, they think you two are involved. I tried to tell them it was a mistake, that you'd never break the rules like that. But they didn't believe me."

Oh God. The Clann knew. Dylan must have told them he'd caught Tristan and me kissing after dance team practice Friday night.

I eased my hand away from Tristan's and back into my own lap. Frowning, Tristan sat forward on the edge of the couch, resting his elbows on his knees as he watched me.

"They insisted he was with you," Mom continued. "I told them he couldn't be, that you were on a trip with your father, and they went crazy! They said they have your Nanna, and they won't release her until we bring the Coleman boy back. I tried calling her, but she's not answering."

Holy crap. "Mom, hang on. Let me get Dad."

Dad must have been listening at the front end of the cabin, because he immediately joined us and took the phone. While Mom filled him in, I returned Tristan's stare and tried to absorb my mother's words.

"The Clann...they've kidnapped my grandmother," I whispered, hardly able to believe the words coming out of my mouth even as I said them.

"They wouldn't do that," Tristan insisted. "There's been a mistake."

I told him word for word what my mother had said. By the time I finished, his face had turned pale and his left knee was bouncing out a rhythm only a hummingbird could appreciate.

"I'll fix this," he promised. "Let me use the phone and I'll call my parents."

"Joan, we are half an hour from the Rusk landing strip now," Dad told my mother. "I will straighten this out and call you back when I have news." He ended the call then handed the phone to Tristan.

Tristan tried reaching his father first, then his mother and even his sister, Emily. Scowling, he tried a few other descendants' home and cell phones. No one was answering.

"I don't understand. Wouldn't they be waiting for your call?" I said.

"Yeah, they should be. Unless..." Tristan looked away for a moment, then his gaze snapped back to mine, his jaw clenching. "Unless they're already meeting at the Circle and using power. If they've raised enough power together, sometimes it blocks incoming radio and cell phone signals."

"Why would they be raising a lot of power?" I asked, hopeful the Clann did this at all their meetings for

ceremonial purposes or something.

Tristan stared at me in silent answer, and my stomach twisted.

This wasn't the norm for the Clann. Which meant they were doing something to Nanna...

Bile burned the back of my throat, and I couldn't look at him anymore. If anything happened to Nanna, if Tristan's fellow descendants did something to her to try and find Tristan, the fault would be ours. We'd broken the rules to be together. I'd thought the vampire council was our only real worry, that the Clann couldn't do anything more to my family since we'd already been cast out due to my Clann mother marrying my vamp father before my birth.

I was wrong. And now Nanna was paying for it.

"Take your seats and put on your seat belts," Dad muttered, breaking the long silence. "We are landing."

I avoided making eye contact with both him and Tristan as we moved to the recliners and belted in, then gripped the armrests as my heartbeat hammered in my chest.

Please don't let it be too late, I prayed.

As soon as the jet touched ground and finished a short taxi, I unbuckled my seat belt and jumped up. Dad was faster, though, reaching the door before I could even blink. He got it open and the stairs unfolded so we could run down them to the rental car he'd called ahead and had delivered. The sky, which should have been a bright spring blue, was an ominous shade of dark gray, the storm clouds blackening out the sunlight so much it appeared to be almost dusk. Wind whipped my curly hair into an untamable red cloud, using the strands to slap first one side of my face then the other.

I got into the rental car's backseat, Tristan right behind me. Automatically I reached for his hand then froze. We were six miles outside of Jacksonville now. I'd promised the council I would break up with Tristan once we were home.

Not yet. Not till we sorted out this situation with Nanna and the Clann.

At my hesitation, Tristan glanced at me and frowned. "We're going to fix this, Sav." He squeezed my hand.

Forcing a nod, I swallowed hard against the knot tightening in my throat and looked out the window as Dad took off north on Highway 69 for Jacksonville, going fast enough to make the pine-tree-covered hills feel like a roller-coaster ride through the woods.

I spent the trip into town silently wrestling with the guilt crawling over my skin and clawing at my insides.

What had I done?

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Alvarez:

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