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## *Enemy Mine*

“God, how I love you. My life would be empty without you,” he breathed. He deepened the kiss, exploring the softness of her mouth, driving her wild with wanting him. His mouth was sweet, his breath as cool as mint, becoming more demanding, insisting upon a response from her.

By this time tomorrow she would be gone. Gabrielle would never be able to see him again, touch him, love him the way she so desperately wanted to love him. Shattering images of countless nights alone sliced through her thoughts.

A dozen lifetimes spent without the man to whom she’d given her heart and soul so many centuries ago. It was too much to bear, too much to endure, but endure it she would for his sake.

There was no other way.

But no one could deny her a glimpse of happiness, of completeness—no one in heaven or hell.

Her body shuddered as he stood, her arms wrapping tightly around his neck, surrendering herself to his hungry kisses. Just one more night, she silently prayed, one more night of loving him, and I’ll give him up.

# Enemy Mine

by

Jewel Dartt

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# DSP

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## Dedication

*For Kay Hooper, my teacher and my mentor,  
but most of all thank you for  
being my friend.*

*For my husband who helped and supported  
me in my endeavors—*

*and to my beautiful daughters, they never  
stopped believing in me.*

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## *CHAPTER 1*

She knew someone was watching her. The question was ... who was he? And what did he want?

Gabrielle Warlick's preternatural abilities couldn't tell her, but the shiver of alarm running down her spine could only mean one thing. She was in extreme danger. Her hand tightened on the frosty, smooth surface of the glass of beer she'd ordered for the sake of appearance.

She stood, carefully, scanning the smoky nightclub, her eyes scrutinizing one person after another, until her gaze fell upon a man sitting at the bar in the far corner.

The red neon lights from the beer sign behind the counter gave his lean handsome features a more sinister look. Yes, he was the one;

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there was no doubt in her mind.

He appeared to be in an intense conversation with a voluptuous redhead, although his eyes kept returning to Gabrielle again and again.

Fear gripped her, and her senses screamed, *he knows*.

He glanced her way yet again, his gaze hardening into the stare of *one who stalked*.

Frantic, she jerked her gaze away from him, her hand slipped, and the beer mug crashed to the floor. She let out a startled choked cry as the smell of sour beer swept over her, sickening her with its overpowering stench.

*Escape.*

Gabrielle had to escape before it was too late.

She wove her way through the slow-dancing couples, making sure to give the long, smooth mahogany bar a wide berth. Stay calm, she told herself, don't let him see your fear—never let any human see your fear. Gabrielle had learned that valuable lesson two hundred years ago from her mentor.

Gabrielle never should have come to the club tonight, but her self-

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imposed isolation sometimes got the best of her, as it had tonight. She brushed by a scarred wooden table, and almost bumped into a couple of dancers who'd stumbled into her path. The couple laughed and apologized before they danced off, and for a moment, she felt a brief longing to know again the joys of dancing, the sheer delight of simply being alive. Mortals didn't know how fortunate they really were, she thought wryly.

"Hey pretty woman, let me buy you a drink."

Gabrielle felt a hand on her shoulder and her spine stiffened with fear, a cold lump forming in her throat. She turned to face a man, and a sense of revulsion swept over her as a bluish haze of tobacco smoke engulfed her, stinging her eyes and burning her lungs.

He was short and bald; a sheen of perspiration covered his heavy, jowly face. He took another puff of his cigarette, blew the silver smoke cloud at her, and smiled foolishly. "Come on, little one, let me buy you a drink."

Instinctively, Gabrielle called forth a *shimmer* of the *voice*.

"Don't touch me."

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The man's bleary eyes widened in alarm. He jerked back his hand as if she'd burnt him. "Sorry ... lady ... didn't mean no harm." He backed away from her, one chubby hand held out as if in protection.

Gabrielle ignored him, brushed past, intent on reaching the plush, red portal doors before it was too late. As she reached out to push them open, the band struck up another old country tune, the music calling her back inside, but she didn't dare stop to listen. She had to escape before he realized she was gone.

A giddy sense of relief bubbled up inside her as she caught a glimpse of the star-punctured night sky—until she felt the slight pressure on her shoulder. The bubble burst into a thousand shattered pieces, spilling out dread and the darkness that tortured her every night.

Gabrielle turned slowly to face the same man she'd seen at the bar. Everything about his appearance bespoke money, from the stylish cut of his burnished gold hair to the faded stone-washed jeans that she knew cost a pretty penny, despite their ragged, worn appearance.

She knew it would do no good to call forth the voice. It couldn't

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help her this time ...

“What do you want?” she whispered.

His fingers slid down her arm and tightened around her slender wrist. “We have to talk.”

The man stared into her face. A face he’d seen in his dreams many times before. An impossibility, he knew, but a fact nevertheless. With her tumble of dark curls, amethyst-colored eyes, and finely sculpted features, he could almost imagine her as a southern belle in the days before the Civil War.

Gabrielle pushed a stray, dark curl from her face. He saw a hint of fear in her eyes, and then it was gone. She defiantly tilted her chin and gave him a haughty stare. “We have nothing to discuss. Now if you will excuse me, I must go.”

His grip tightened into an iron hold. “You have to listen to me. You’re in danger.”

Her body stiffened. “If you don’t let go of me right this second, I’m going to scream.” Her eyes narrowed. “And let me assure you I can scream loud enough to burst your eardrums.”

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He gave her a hard look. "Scream all you want, but we're going to talk unless you want to die."

Gabrielle jerked away angrily. "Not if you're in jail, and if you persist in bothering me, that's exactly where you're going to end up."

Preston Adams couldn't believe her attitude. But then again, what had he expected? That she would come with him without questions, trust him without reason? In his dreams, her purple eyes were always filled with happiness, not fear and anger. But that was only in his dreams.

*Dreams were not reality.*

She began to walk away, her heels clicking loudly against the asphalt, but he quickly caught up and spun her around. "You know who I am?"

Gabrielle felt the stirring of fear anew as she glanced around the now-empty parking lot looking for somebody, anybody to come to her defense. The sound of a train whistle echoed in the distance, a lonely sound that made her only too aware of her vulnerability. Streaks of bright light lit the dark clouds overhead. Okay, she was on her own;

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somehow she would have to deal with him herself. For a split second, Gabrielle wished she had her full range of powers back, then maybe she would have a chance.

No, there was a price to pay for those powers, a price she had no intention of paying.

God, but she wished Angel were here; he'd know how to handle this situation. *You can do this.*

She forced herself to give the man a steady gaze. "Yes, I know who you are, *Mr. Adams*, and I'm not going anywhere with you."

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a glint of gold in the folds of his shirt. Her heart thudded painfully against her ribs.

*The medallion.*

Gabrielle had suspected—no, dammit, she'd *known* he would be wearing one. He was an Adams, and therefore her enemy; but she had hoped she was going to get lucky just this once. She hated the constant running and hiding to keep away from his kind. But the Adams clan never gave up.

Gabrielle should have known better. After all, when had good

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fortune ever been given to her kind? The curse of all mankind—an abomination that walked the earth against the will of God.

And it looked as if her time had finally come, after all these years. The hunters had found her, and it was a well-known fact among her kind, that when they cornered their quarry, they were merciless in dealing out death.

After all these years of searching every dark, musty corner of Europe and then the New World, a normal family would have given up, run out of resources or hate, she thought bitterly.

But not this clan; for years, the church had officially sanctioned their profession, even paying bounty fees for each vampire they destroyed. But after a hundred years, the church had withdrawn its support and had gone after livelier sport.

Witches and heretics became better known than vampires, and the church switched its attention to them. It had been such a blessed relief to finally be free, to not have to look over her shoulder constantly.

Gabrielle had believed the hunters would stop without the church behind them, find something better to occupy their time.

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She had been wrong.

It was only later through Angel's network that she found out about the shrewd investments made by the clan; investments that allowed them to pursue their enemy at leisure. Gabrielle had known then that the undead would never be free, not as long as one Adams male existed.

"If you don't come willingly, sweetheart, then I'll drag you, but come with me, you will; we need to talk ..."

Preston's threat yanked her attention back to him and the present. His hand came down over her wrist again, this time tighter than before. A chill seeped through her skin as she stared into his face, and saw the hint of an indomitable will in his gaze. There was no doubt in her mind. He wasn't taking "no" for an answer.

Gabrielle didn't let it scare her. She wasn't giving in that easily, not yet, at least. She yanked her arm away from him and rubbed her wrist.

The sound of a woman's laughter floated her way and she looked instinctively toward the sound, but before she could scream for help, the woman disappeared back inside the club. No help from that

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quarter, she realized with a sinking sensation.

Gabrielle shoulders slumped for a moment before she realized she was signaling defeat. No ... not this way.

Her expression grim, she squared her shoulders and turned back to him.

“Then you will have to drag me. Because I’m not going anywhere with you,” Gabrielle said, her eyes narrowing. “But let me warn you: I will be kicking and screaming all the way. I think it’s entirely possible that someone may come out of the club again and see us and no doubt come to my rescue.”

Preston frowned. “I’m warning you, Ms. Warlick. Don’t make this more difficult than it has to be. We need to get this over with.”

Gabrielle frowned, hiding her fear and hatred for this man the way Angel had taught her. “Let’s get this straight, Adams. I’m not going anywhere with you, now or ever. If you are going to kill me, it will have to be in front of the whole damn world. Now, get the hell out of my way.”

She started walking toward her small car. When she didn’t hear him

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coming after her, a heady sense of triumph shot through her. These hunters were not so tough. There had once been a time when she wouldn't have been able to bluff her way out of an encounter with a hunter.

Obviously, over the centuries, they had become weak and ineffective. That was the only answer she could come up with, or else why would he let her go so easily? This question made her pause. It didn't make sense. What about the increasing number of vampires killed in the last few years, and even more recently?

It would have taken the same dedication and fervor the Adams clan was famous for two centuries ago to accomplish what they had in the present.

Something about this hunter didn't ring true. The Adams clan were vampire hunters. They never let their victims get away—*never*. She was about to turn back and question him, then thought better of it. Best to take advantage of the chance he'd given her, why borrow trouble? she asked herself, breaking into a run.

Gabrielle shuddered as the chill night wind grabbed at her clothes

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and hair, reminding her of the peasants who had torn at her flesh two centuries before, during the Blood War.

Gabrielle forced back the unpleasant memory. This was no time to be thinking of the past, not if she wanted to live. Almost there, just a few feet and she'd be safe in her car.

Suddenly, her heart plunged to her feet as she felt herself lifted into the air by bands of hard steel. "Let me go," she screamed, struggling against his strength as he opened the door on the little red sports car next to hers and shoved her inside.

Like a fool, she'd been duped by his apparent willingness to let her walk away. But he'd only been waiting until she came abreast of his car to make his move. Gabrielle had been so deep in thought, she'd not heard any warning that he had followed her. Because of his strange ways, she'd underestimated him. She should have known better. Angel had told her dozens of times not to trust humans.

\* \* \*

"Sit still, dammit!" he said as he tried to buckle the seatbelt against her flailing legs and arms. Gabrielle butted him in the gut; she heard a

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whooshing sound and gloated with satisfaction. “After all these years of living, Gabrielle, I thought you’d be better mannered by now.” She heard the amusement in his voice and it only made her more furious.

“Go to hell,” she shot back. She got one hand free and slapped him hard before he could recapture it.

Preston’s jaw hardened; his eyes grew angry. “Okay, since you won’t come peacefully, I’ll tie you in. Fortunately, I’m a man who comes prepared for anything. I had a feeling you might react negatively.” To her horror, he pulled a coil of shiny new rope from the back floorboard.

Gabrielle renewed her struggles against him, but to no avail. *If only I had fed before coming to town*, she despaired as her remaining strength waned. *At least then I wouldn’t be as weak as a human female. I still couldn’t defeat him, but perhaps I could have gotten away.* But it was too late to look back now. Gabrielle stilled, exhausted, unable to fight any longer. A tired sigh escaped her. “If you’re going to kill me, do it now and get it over with. There’s no reason to make me suffer the agony of waiting for the actual moment

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of my death.”

Preston riffled his long, lean fingers through his hair with a frustrated motion. “I’m not going to kill you.”

“*Yet*, you mean,” Gabrielle said quietly. Despair slammed into her; it made her feel as if somebody had butted her in the gut and she thought of the ways he could make her death slow and lingering ...

“I’m not going to kill you.” This time his voice was harsh; yet somehow she could hear a tinge of compassion in it.

For a fraction of a moment, hope soared, until she realized he was lying to her so she would quietly go with him. It would stand to reason he wouldn’t want to do the deed in the middle of a parking lot; traffic was whizzing by on the interstate only a hundred yards away. And not to mention the off chance that someone could come out of the club and see him plying his trusty wooden stake.

No, he’d want privacy to do his dirty work.

There was not a chance Gabrielle could get away. Even if an opportunity arose and she did get away from Preston Adams, he would follow wherever she went and eventually capture her. That’s what a

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hunter did best. Once they set their sight on you, inevitably, they always found you.

Long ago, when she was still in the full swing of power, she could have overpowered him quite easily, despite the medallion. Gabrielle could have made her escape and had a chance to flee from certain death, but not now ... that was two hundred years ago. Not since she'd sworn a vow never to partake of human blood again. Human blood ... the elixir of life for her kind.

Preston tied off the last knot, and then pulled at the rope to make sure it was good and tight. Satisfied with his handiwork, he grinned and patted her hand. "Comfortable?"

Gabrielle averted her gaze and remained silent; she forced back the numbing fear that swept her as she stared out the bug-splattered windshield. Her shoulders slumped in defeat. Perhaps it was time to stop clinging to a life that held no meaning. She'd lived too long, seen too much, and lost too many loved ones to death. Now her turn had finally arrived.

Gabrielle shook her head, rebellion welling inside her. No, not yet.

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*She* would choose the time and place of her demise. There had to be a way to get out of this mess.

She'd bide her time and if she saw a chance she would take it, damn the consequences. Now that she'd formed some kind of plan, she slid down into the leather seat, inhaling the male scent of him that pervaded from the leather interior. Gabrielle knew her powers had diminished from lack of proper nourishment, but her preternatural senses were still as sharp as they had always been, she assured herself, feeling more than a few butterflies in her stomach.

*Oh, yeah? Then how did he get the drop on you?* She grimaced at the thought. As he walked around to the driver's side of the car, she couldn't help but notice his movements were swift, full of grace and virility.

"Just like Damon," she said aloud. Her throat tightened, swelled up, hurting her to swallow. She could feel the heat of her blood pounding in her ears. No, she dared not think about him. It hurt too much.

She had to stay alert. She couldn't afford for the past to cloud her thinking.

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“I want to go to your sanctuary,” he said, sliding under the steering wheel with one smooth movement.

She froze as her senses leapt to life at his nearness, aware of the harsh, uneven rhythm of her breathing.

Impossible, human males were not, nor would they ever be, of interest to her in that way. And certainly never a *hunter*.

*Only Damon.* It had always been Damon. She pushed back the forbidden thoughts.

“Your sanctuary. Where is it?”

“Why?” she asked, giving him a bleak look. “Is it some kind of rule with you people to kill us in our homes now?”

He hit his fist against the steering wheel. “Dammit, I don’t want to kill you. I tried to tell you—” He glanced at her, his eyes dark and tortured. “I only want to talk to you, warn you of the danger—”

Gabrielle smiled, but it was a strained, hurting expression. “That’s something different. Members of the infamous vampire hunter clan warning a vampire of impending doom. I must say it is original.” She paused for a moment. “As a matter of fact, I can’t recall a time when

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one of you phenomenal Adams actually warned your victim of his or her forthcoming death.”

“Look, Ms. Warlick,” he said, running an impatient hand through his hair. “I don’t intend to sit in this parking lot and discuss my ancestors’ shortcomings. Now, tell me where your sanctuary is. I’ll take you there. I’d rather discuss this matter in private, if you don’t mind.”

Why was going to her refuge so important to him, Gabrielle wondered, feeling a shiver of disquiet. She’d been told a few weeks ago of Damon’s death at the hands of one of these bloodthirsty assassins, but Angel had made no mention of Damon being killed in his inner sanctum.

It was only in the movies that vampires were reputed to be especially vulnerable in their dwelling place, mainly a coffin. With today’s modern weapons and the right kind of wood, they could be killed anywhere if caught unaware.

*What a joke. Hollywood hype that never died. There wasn’t one self-respecting vampire she knew that would be caught dead in a*

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*coffin.* She almost laughed aloud at the thought, until she remembered the seriousness of her situation.

She studied her unwanted companion for a long moment. “Belmont Cove,” she said at last, though she knew she shouldn’t.

What did it matter anyway? A weary sigh escaped her. If he was going to kill her, it might as well be in her own beloved inner sanctum. Anyway, she had to admit she was curious to hear what he had to say.

There were no accounts of a hunter trying to have a conversation with one of her people before slaying them. *Perhaps this one just happens to be weirder than the others,* she thought wryly. *And there is the possibility I can buy myself a little more time to think of a way to escape. What do I have to lose?* The car rumbled underneath her as Preston revved up the engine, and then with an angry squeal of rubber, he shot out of the parking lot.

Gabrielle settled back in her seat, and fixed her gaze onto the dark wall of interwoven trees that bordered the highway, determined to enjoy the ride. She had no desire to strike up a conversation with the enemy. She loved fast cars, and if she was going to die—well, she was

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going to make the most of the time she had left.

Thunder rumbled overhead, surprising her with its intensity. In the early evening, the night sky had been cloudless, filled with countless tiny pinpoints of white lights.

Gabrielle glanced upward to see the thick cloud cover. Another jagged sharp-edged sword of brilliant light flashed. Although it hadn't actually begun to rain, the air had a charged, electric feel, and the sullen purple-black thunderheads gave the sky a nightmarish look.

*Just like in the movies ... the perfect setting for a vampire killing.*  
The thought made her shudder.

## *CHAPTER 2*

Preston Adams wasn't surprised by Gabrielle's choice of sanctuaries. The old mansion with its stately columns and wide sweeping verandahs seemed to suit her somehow.

Preston couldn't help wondering why she had chosen to live in North Carolina—the Blue Ridge Mountains, no less. The enforced isolation would bother most people ... even vampires.

But then wouldn't that be the perfect place to live for someone like her? A place where, for the most part, people minded their own business. That is, if you live on the top of a mountain, he thought with a wry grin.

There wasn't much that Preston didn't know about Gabrielle

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Warlick. His ancestors had been very thorough in their investigations of the undead—even in an age before modern technology brought in computers.

He knew she'd been born in the latter part of the seventeenth century, and left an orphan at a very young age. The village's *wisewoman*, trained to be a healer of sorts, had taken her in before she was changed into the creature she was now. And that was only the beginning of the file the family had on her.

For all their faults and fanatical ways, he had to say one thing about the Adams' clan—they were certainly damn good at ferreting out information that, for most people, would be impossible to obtain.

Although that was to be expected. They had had hundreds of years, and countless generations. Not to mention plenty of money to perfect their talents to a fine art.

Preston pulled the car around the white-graveled circular drive and parked it right outside the main entrance. "Nice place."

Gabrielle managed to sit up straight, despite the rope, and give him an angry glare. "Glad you like it."

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He chose to ignore her sarcasm, opened his door, and climbed out. The rising wind whipped at his clothes and hair, and the first splatter of raindrops fell as he walked around to her side to open the door. Silently, he untied her, and then offered her his hand.

Before she stepped out, she smiled up at him in a way that made his heart skip a beat. “And here I thought the days of chivalry were past.”

He didn’t bother to respond. What could he say? She was right; the days of brave knights rescuing damsels in distress were long gone. Then what was he doing here, he asked himself, following her up the steps to the verandah?

Gabrielle didn’t bother to scramble for house keys in the black clutch bag she carried. Obviously, she had little fear of anyone breaking in, way out here in the boonies, away from the mainstream of humanity, so to speak. Preston followed her into the foyer, trying to think about what he could say to convince her that he was on her side. That he had no intention of killing her.

She flicked on several lights and gave him a wary look before she gestured him to follow her into an immense old-fashioned parlor.

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The first thing he noticed were the books—hundreds of them lined the walls, stacked neatly side by side on dark, burnished wood bookshelves. Bookshelves that brushed the high ceiling. “You must like reading—a lot,” he said, hiding his amazement.

Preston wondered if she’d read all of them. It would have taken several lifetimes. And then he remembered just how many lifetimes she’d already lived. Yes, she would have had more than enough time to get through her extensive library.

With his own love for books, he felt a strong surge of envy wash through him. He could never read all the books he wanted to in the time allotted him.

In that moment, he felt sadness for the shortness of human life. So many things he wanted to do—dreamed of doing. But there was never enough time for anyone to do them all before the grim reaper put in his appearance.

Oh well, that was all part of the process—living and dying—except for Gabrielle and creatures like her, to whom the rules of nature didn’t apply.

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His gaze wandered to his right. He noticed the latest in stereo equipment, with hundreds of CD's and cassettes stacked in nearby crates. With all of her books, she had no room for shelves to house her music collection, he thought with amusement. Preston noticed a grand piano in the corner; stacks of music were placed haphazardly on its shiny top. He wondered if she'd learned all the pieces.

Preston lightly brushed his fingers over the piano keys. "You've got quite a collection here. Do you know how to play?"

Gabrielle's face flashed with anger, then she quickly composed herself. "Oh I see, you're interested in my possessions. Do you plan on taking these things when you destroy me?"

"So much for pleasantries," he said with a tightlipped grin.

What else interested this mysterious creature? If he peeled back the layers of mystique that surrounded her would he find the monster his grandfather so fervently believed in?

It was more than clear to him that she had to have a tremendous thirst for knowledge. Why else would she surround herself with such items? It was hard to hold onto the image of the homicidal beast,

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pounded into him from almost the day of his birth, when everything about Gabrielle Warlick belied that fearsome image.

His admiration for her grew in leaps and bounds as Preston realized the concepts he'd been taught about her kind were false. At least they were in regards to Gabrielle, for he saw no damning evidence that she spent her nights planning the destruction of mankind.

He wondered what other lies he and the rest had been told by their teachers? Could there be others like her, vampires that didn't kill to satisfy their need for blood? And if that were the case, why were the hunters *still* hunting and executing them?

Preston watched as Gabrielle pushed a pile of books to the end of the couch before she sat on one of the russet-colored sofas that flanked a marble fireplace. He couldn't help but notice they were all medical books.

"You wanted to be a doctor?" he asked, his voice incredulous. It seemed Gabrielle still retained a thirst for knowledge in healing despite the centuries that had passed since she had been an apprentice. She brushed away his question with her hands.

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“Never mind that, Adams. All right ...” She paused as a shadow flitted across her lovely face. “I’m sorry ... I don’t know which one of the Adams’ you happen to be.”

Preston brightened up, knowing it was time to formally introduce himself.

“I’m Preston Adams.” He smiled an irresistibly devastating smile that would have caused most human females to melt at his feet.

But not Gabrielle.

Fortunately, she wasn’t most human females—or even human, for that matter. Although Gabrielle had to admit she could feel the sexual magnetism that made him so—desirable?

That was odd. She’d never felt any attraction for any male, be he human or vampire ... not since Damon.

“Preston,” she repeated. She liked the name; it suited him. “You’ve told me several times you have no intention of harming me, so would you tell me what you *do* have in mind?”

“I was sent here to kill you.”

“You lied,” she said, her voice bitter. “I should have known.” A

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harsh laugh escaped her. “I did know, but I had hoped—”

“I said I was sent to kill you, Gabrielle. I didn’t say I was going to carry out my assignment.”

Gabrielle stared at him in disbelief. “What kind of sick game are you playing? Is this some new torture technique your family has dreamed up, to lull me and mine into a false security so you can enjoy our deaths more?” She rose to her feet, feeling sick. “Do you think the others are as gullible as I?”

His eyes widened in surprise. He opened his mouth to speak.

She angrily tossed her head and waved him silent. She wasn’t finished. She’d have her say before she died. He owed her that much.

“Well, let me tell you something, they’re not. They feed on human blood. They are at the peak of their powers, not the end, like me. I may be easy pickings for you. But let me assure you, I am the only one of my kind who is. So enjoy yourself, because it will be the last time you have such an easy kill.”

No more delaying the inevitable. She’d said what she had to say; now it was time to die. Call her a coward, but she preferred not to see

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her old enemy, death, coming for her. She moved to the fireplace and turned her back to him, gripping the mantel so tightly her knuckles bleached white from the strain.

She felt his hand touch her hand, and she stiffened, readying herself for the killing blow.

“I’m not playing any sick game with you, Gabrielle,” he said, his voice soft and husky. “You don’t understand. Yes, my assignment was to seek you out and eliminate you. But I can’t do it.”

Gabrielle turned to look stupidly at him. “You’re absolutely right. I *don’t* understand.”

Preston frowned. “I’m not sure I do either, to tell the truth. You may not believe this but, Gabrielle, you were—are—my first assignment.”

She snorted her disbelief. “Are you trying to convince me you’re a rookie? Aren’t you a little long in the tooth to be taking up vampire slaying for the first time?” She walked to the French glass doors and stared out at the dark, rain-swept night.

“You could say so. My brother, Cameron, joined the family

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business at the age of twenty. I turned thirty last month. I had a lot of doubts about whether I wanted to spend my life devoted to such a dubious cause. My mother was always against the idea, but my grandfather got his way and put me into training when he thought I was old enough.”

Gabrielle turned back to him, careful to keep her face expressionless. “Cameron is the one who killed Eamon,” she said in a matter-of-fact voice that belied the pain the words caused her. “Eamon had been one of the good guys. It was a shame the hunters didn’t know that.”

Preston nodded. “My brother is very good at what he does.” He paused, giving her a bleak look. “He enjoys it. That indisputable fact bothered me so much I managed for years to be inept enough in my studies and training to keep myself from becoming a hunter.”

Gabrielle found herself interested, despite herself. She came back to the sofa and sat down. “What happened to change your mind?”

“I didn’t. My grandfather grew tired of waiting for me to improve. He decided it was time for me to join the family tradition. I set out

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with the intention to do what I had to do, no matter how many doubts I had, or how much I disliked it. It was my family duty. But when I arrived, and I saw you for the first time ...” He faltered, his blue eyes darkening with an emotion she couldn’t identify. “I couldn’t do it. I watched you for days on end, but I just couldn’t bring myself to destroy you. I saw nothing in you that resembled the homicidal, bloodthirsty creatures I’d studied about for so many years.

“You made me realize my mother was right all along. It is wrong to kill all of your kind simply because we believe all of you are evil. She always said there could be exceptions to the rule. And you, Gabrielle Warlick, are definitely that.”

Gabrielle rose from the couch and edged away from him, her violet eyes narrowing in suspicion. “Why didn’t you tell me you already knew where my sanctuary was? And just how long *have* you been spying on me?”

He started toward her, but she held out both hands. Preston halted and held her eyes with his own for a long drawn-out moment. “I apologize for not telling you from the start, but I needed to know if

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you had the ability to be honest. It's necessary if I am to help you. We are taught that you lose all human emotions from the time of your transformation. That your people will lie, cheat and kill to survive." He paused for a moment. "As for your second question, I've watched you long enough to know you're not a monster. I've yet to see you take a single human life."

She let out a bitter laugh. "You misjudge me. I am a cold-blooded killer ... just not in the last two hundred years or so, give or take a few years. Perhaps you ought to rethink your decision."

He adamantly shook his head. "I don't need to. Whatever you did in the past has nothing to do with the here and now."

Gabrielle tilted her head to the side, a gesture he felt was somehow familiar to him. Almost as if he'd seen her do it a hundred times before. He impatiently shook his head. The thought was ridiculous. Why, he'd never even seen her before a few days ago. Except in his dreams, but he couldn't tell her that.

"So, what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'm going to do everything I can to protect you from my family."

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“Why?”

Preston slumped down on the sofa. “I’m not sure. Maybe my mother’s earlier training stuck. Who knows? Or perhaps—I know this sounds completely off the wall, but for some inexplicable reason, I feel ... connected to you. I felt it the first moment I saw you, and then more strongly again in the nightclub. I can’t explain it.” He laughed to cover his embarrassment. “Because I don’t understand it myself. Maybe it’s fate, who knows?”

Gabrielle didn’t say anything. What could she say? He was a hunter and she was the hunted. Never had she heard of anything but enmity between the two ... until now.

*He reminds me so much of Damon.*

*Stop it, she sternly told herself. He is not Damon. Damon is dead.*

Instead, he was a member of a family that had sought out and destroyed her people for centuries. She couldn’t trust him ... or could she? Uncertainty stabbed through her.

This was ludicrous. Here she stood, conversing with the enemy as calmly as if it were an everyday occurrence, while the dawn was

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breaking across the gray horizon. It was time to rest; she'd deal with this later.

"Preston, I must go to my room now." She tilted her head. "If you like, you may stay. We will discuss this in more detail tonight."

Preston shot her an odd, but gratifying look. "You trust me enough to let me stay in your house while you sleep?"

She met his eyes with a level gaze. "I don't trust you at all, but if you were going to harm me, I suspect you would have done so by now. I'm sure you've had more than ample opportunity in the last few days. Anyway, I don't see I have any choice. I assume you know the limit of my powers. It's not like I could kick you out."

She walked to the arched doorway and glanced back at him, an unreadable expression in her incredibly intense purple eyes. "You may choose any of the guest rooms on the second floor. We can talk more tonight before you leave."

"Thank you," he said, unable to take his eyes off her. He still had a hard time believing this was the woman he saw in his dreams. But there was no doubt in his mind that it was Gabrielle. What did it

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mean?

She inclined her head in a regal manner, flicking one long, stray dark curl back over her shoulder, then disappeared.

Preston scowled as he walked to the French glass doors to gaze into the night. The rain had finally stopped. Plumes of pink and purple streaked the sodden gray sky, giving it an almost unearthly glow.

Why hadn't he told her the whole truth? She was still in danger, more than she could ever realize. How could he leave her alone to defend herself when she was helpless against the hunters? *Why in the hell do you care?* a voice inside him asked.

"I don't know, but I do," he said to the empty room, breaking the silence. Perhaps his reasons had something to do with his mother, or fate, as he had told Gabrielle. But somehow deep inside he knew there was more to it. *The dreams*. Something in his dreams ... that made him want to protect her.

He inhaled deeply and let it out slowly. He'd really had every intention of going through with his job when he'd arrived, almost convinced by timeless tradition and family conditioning that vampires

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deserved to be eliminated. Although he found it distasteful, to say the least, he knew he couldn't deny his heritage any longer. For once, he wanted to feel a sense of belonging to his family. Something he'd never felt.

But when he'd seen her that first evening, he was struck speechless by her beauty ... and a strange sense of *déjà vu*. And then he'd had another dream, and he knew then it would be impossible to drive a stake through her heart, but he'd kept on following her.

He fingered his medallion, a Roman coin reputed to provide some protection against the creatures of the undead. The coin served one purpose—to keep his quarry from killing him. Much in the same way the symbol of the cross was supposed to, but in reality did not. His grandfather had cautioned him never to take it off.

For the next two days after the dream, Preston was torn between guilt for not fulfilling his mission and an inexplicable relief that Gabrielle was not your ordinary, everyday vampire.

Tonight, he'd followed her again, expecting her to do as she always did. But this time she had surprised him by getting into her road-

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hugging, Carolina-blue sports car and speeding down the mountain.

It took him a frenzied ten minutes to get to his own vehicle, parked out of sight on a dirt road some distance away. Was she finally going to reveal her true colors, he had wondered? The thought left him feeling, strangely enough, let down. He'd wanted so much to believe this beautiful, delicate creature of the dark was different, that his grandfather was wrong.

He drove around the hairpin curves at a speed he normally would never attempt, the tires of his car squealing in protest.

His heart thundering in his ears, Preston prowled the main strip of highway that sprawled at the bottom of the mountain.

He searched the parking lots of every mini mall, every gas station, and even went so far as to drive around the one and only liquor store, thinking that would be the best place for her to attack some poor drunken slob, pouncing before the guy knew what hit him.

Preston had been wrong about her. He had to kill her now, despite his dreams. The thought sickened him. He wasn't cut out for this vampire stuff, he knew that now, but it was too late to turn back. He

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couldn't let her get away with murdering innocent people.

But she wasn't at the liquor store, nor did he find any dead, bloodless bodies. He had despaired of finding her at all tonight as he drove back up the highway, wondering where she could have gone. Then, to his surprise, he spotted her car parked in the lot of a tiny nightclub, right off Highway 11.

Feeling an overwhelming sense of relief, he pulled in next to her car, parked, and went inside. It took a few moments for his eyes to adjust to the dim, smoky lighting, but when they did, he immediately spotted Gabrielle.

His heart contracted oddly as he observed her from his vantage position at the bar. She sat at a small table, isolated, alone, though the place was filled to capacity with people, laughing, talking and dancing, generally having a merry old time.

Not Gabrielle; there was an air of vulnerability about her ... a loneliness even in the midst of a bustling nightclub, somehow so familiar to him ...

It suddenly hit him like someone had punched him hard in the

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stomach. She was longing for contact ... even humans were a solace of sorts. It touched an echoing chord deep inside him. Preston knew what it was like not to belong, to be an outsider. He'd been one all his life. That was the moment he knew for certain he couldn't kill her ... not now ... not ever. Perhaps, deep in his heart, he'd always known he couldn't kill someone simply because it was his duty to do so. He wasn't sure. But he did know he would not allow anyone to harm Gabrielle Warlick, not as long as he lived.

He cursed the day his family had gotten into this business. Oh, he knew the legend of how his ancestor, Corbin Adams, had lived in the dark ages. A time when vampires openly roamed the earth, defying man and his God—taking what they wanted without any sense of remorse—recruiting among the living until their ranks swelled to such a proportion no human was safe.

He knew of the vow this long-lost relative had taken after the destruction of his village by the monsters. The loss of his wife and all his children except for one, his youngest son, evoking a need in him for revenge—a blinding obsession to put an end to such evil doings.

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But what he didn't know or understand was how the obsession had thrived throughout the centuries. A rooster crowing in the distance brought his attention back to the present. He let out a weary sigh as he rubbed the back of his neck. Perhaps he'd never know; he didn't really care. It wasn't important. The only thing that was important right now was keeping Gabrielle safe.

It had been one helluva long night and a new day was dawning; he watched the sun rise from behind the blue haze of the mountains in the east. They would send another to do the job he couldn't do.

Someone who excelled in his profession.

His hands balled into fists at the thought. He had to convince her to leave with him tonight. He would find her another sanctuary—one that couldn't be traced, at least for a while.

Then, and only then, would he be able to negotiate with his grandfather for her life.

## *CHAPTER 3*

Gabrielle walked down the steps, wondering if Preston had already left. God, but she hoped so. As far as she was concerned, they had nothing left to say to each other. His presence made her feel uncomfortable as hell, to say the least. To be on speaking terms with the enemy wasn't her idea of normal. It felt weird, and she didn't like feeling that way.

As she gained the bottom of the stairs, a sound from the dining room drew her attention. Her brow furrowed into a frown. Apparently he hadn't left—yet.

“Well, we'll just see about that, Preston Adams,” she said, heading for the dining room. She'd just have to convince him it was time to

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leave. After all, it was her house, and he'd told her all she needed to know. She saw no reason for his continued presence in her sanctuary.

She came to a stop at the doorway, frozen in place by the shocking tableau taking place before her. He was robbing her?

"What are you doing?" Gabrielle asked.

Preston turned from his task to give her a searching look. "I'll reimburse you as soon as we get far enough away, and I can figure out how to access my accounts without alerting the family to our whereabouts." He turned back to his carryall, continuing to shove into it all the sterling silver knickknacks he could find in the buffet.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Please tell me what's going on," she said, striving to keep her voice even. "What are you doing?"

He didn't bother to look up this time. "I told you already, Gabrielle. Now get your things together. We're leaving tonight."

"Have you gone mad?" she asked, coming into the dining room. She placed both hands on the polished surface of the dining table and leaned toward him. "I haven't agreed to go anywhere with you."

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Preston turned to her, and she noticed that his blue eyes had a sheen of purpose. “Be that as it may, we still have to get out of here.”

She felt confused, not quite understanding what was happening. His sense of urgency was beginning to frighten her. And why was he stealing her silver right before her very eyes? “Why on earth are you packing all my silver?”

“I told you. Money,” he said abruptly. “I have some cash, but the rest is credit cards. Won’t do us much good on the road with my family after us. They will be able to trace us through the cards if we are stupid enough to use them.”

“Money, credit cards?” she repeated, feeling like a dull child who still had yet to catch on to whatever it was that was happening. Gabrielle gave him a wide stare. “Will you please stop, and tell me what the hell is going on?” She swung out her arm in a sweeping gesture. “You said nothing about any of this last night.”

He stopped packing and turned toward her with eyes as flat as stones. “We have to leave, unless you want a run-in with another member of my family.” He looked at the shiny sugar bowl in his hand.

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“As for the silver, it’s very easy to trace someone who creates a paper trail. We can sell the knickknacks to a pawnshop. That way we get money that is clear and free—in other words, it will buy us some time until I can make other financial arrangements with my bank in New York. I have to make sure my grandfather can’t trace us through my bank.”

“Trace us ...” she whispered faintly. Gabrielle felt even more confused and disoriented. This situation was getting out of control way too fast for her liking. First, he’d had the audacity to kidnap her, and then practically forced her to hear him out last night, and now he expected her to pick up and run away with him? Did he really think she was that stupid?

She’d not lived this long by behaving recklessly, and she wasn’t about to change now.

Gabrielle took a deep, calming breath before speaking. “Why would they send someone else when they’ve already sent you? None of this makes any sense.”

Preston shot her an exasperated look. “I’m a rookie, remember? If I

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haven't reported in by nine tomorrow morning, my grandfather will automatically send someone to investigate."

Gabrielle gave him a worried look. "This is crazy. Why should I believe you? I have safely lived here for years. How do I know you're not trying to trick me?"

"Think about it, Gabrielle. What reason would I have to lie to you or trick you into anything? I'm trying to help you, if you will let me."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

She bit her lip to keep from yelling. "Why do you want to help me? Why am I so important to you?"

He looked away, returning to his packing. "Maybe I just don't think it's right to kill someone who hasn't done anything to deserve it." He looked up. "Or it could be I like rescuing damsels in distress. It doesn't matter. Come on, get packed. We don't have much time."

"I just can't pick up and leave right this moment," she said, stalling. "I don't think I even remember how to pack. I haven't gone anywhere except into town in the last fifty years."

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“That’s why you’re eventually tracked down,” he said wryly. “Most of you don’t even have the sense to change your names, for God’s sake.” Preston grinned, knowing it was time to take the sting out of his criticism. He tossed her a neon-orange tote bag. “The moving part is easy. It’s like riding a bicycle. Once you learn, you never forget.”

“I, for one, never did learn how to ride those ghastly contraptions. And, for the sake of necessity, it took me forever to learn to drive an automobile,” she muttered, giving the garish bag a look of disdain. “I don’t care for so much change in such a short length of time.” She gave him a look of reproach. “It isn’t natural and it could be dangerous. It doesn’t give me time to think and get used to the situation before reacting. I do not want to do this, Preston.”

“Would you rather die?”

Flustered by his blunt question, she tried to speak. “No, of course not, but—”

He abruptly cut her off. “Gabrielle, put a move on it, now. We don’t have the luxury of thinking anything through. If we don’t get out of here within the hour, I can’t guarantee we will make our destination

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before the sun comes up.” He gave her a long, hard stare. “You’re going to have to trust me whether you want to or not. I’m all that’s standing between you and my brother.”

“That’s not saying much.”

He gave her another hard stare. “The sunrise, Gabrielle, remember?”

She waved an impatient hand. “Oh for God’s sake, will you please quit worrying about the sun? I can’t think if you keep distracting me. I’ll bring my special-treated window coverings. I can wrap myself in them in an emergency.”

“Will that be enough to protect you if we don’t make it before the sun rises?”

Gabrielle smiled at the concern in his voice. Of course, he had to be pretending. She’d met very few humans in her lifetime that really cared about her. But she’d let it go, humor him for now. At least until she could figure out what he was up to, and what he wanted from her.

“I don’t know for sure,” she finally said, “but it can’t hurt to try. Best way I know to find out.”

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He shot her a horrified stare. Another pretense, she thought. “My God, I don’t want to take a risk like that if you’re not sure of the outcome.”

This time she let out a sigh. “Preston, from what I’ve been told by the others, the most I will suffer is a mild sunburn. I think I can handle that if I have to. It’s not really any of your concern. You’re taking for granted I’m going with you when I’m not.”

“Good God, woman, why do you have to be so damn stubborn? I’m trying to help you.”

Gabrielle shrugged. “I’m not being stubborn. I just don’t choose to join forces with a hunter.”

She turned to leave, then looked back with a puzzled expression. “By the way, where were we going?”

“To the beach.”

Gabrielle cast him a look of dismay. “The beach. I hate the beach. I’m glad I’m not going with you.”

“You *are* going, and I *know* you hate the beach,” he said between clenched teeth. “So does my family. It’s common knowledge you

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people hate the sand and saltwater.”

“Not to mention the bright sun,” Gabrielle added dryly.

He grinned a wide smile, revealing perfectly even, white teeth. “That’s why we’re going there.”

Gabrielle tilted her head to one side, shooting him a questioning stare. “Because I hate it?”

“No, not that,” he said with an impatient shake of his head. “Because my grandfather would never suspect we might hide out at the coast. There’s an old college friend of mine who owns a cottage on the beach. He gave me a key sometime back and told me to use it any time I wanted. I figure now is a good time to take him up on his offer.”

She shuddered at the image his words conjured up. “Sounds charming. But I’m not going.”

He picked up the bulging canvas bag and slammed it onto the polished surface of her dining table. “You’re going, Gabrielle, even if I have to rope you into my car again. And you’ll just have to put up with the accommodations. It’s the best I can do in a pinch.”

Shocked, she stepped back. “You wouldn’t dare tie me up again.

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What are you, some kind of wannabe cowboy?”

He shot her a grim smile. “No, I’m a English teacher, or I was until Granddad decided it was time I quit fooling around and do the job I was reared to do. But make no mistake; I’ll do whatever it takes to get you in that car. We are leaving here, together, tonight.”

They were going around in circles, she thought in disgust. Although she hated to admit it, he could very easily force her to go with him. She just wished she knew why he was so adamant about it. Could it be pity for her lack of powers that motivated him? No, that couldn’t be it, he was an Adams, and the Adams men did not allow their better emotions to interfere with the hunt. But then again, Preston wasn’t your typical Adams. Or was he?

Without warning, blood hunger beat through her, hammering at her brain, forcing back her uncertainty and confusion. Gabrielle hadn’t eaten in two days, but so far she’d managed to keep the bloodlust at bay. She’d eat soon, she promised herself, just as soon as she talked some sense into Preston. But she already suspected it was a lost cause. Okay, she’d try one more time.

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Reluctantly, she looked at him. “Preston, do you have some kind of plan in mind, other than just keeping one step ahead of your family for the rest of your life, and possibly mine?”

Preston paused in his packing. “Yeah ... I do. But I don’t think you’re going to like it.”

Gabrielle regarded him with a level gaze. “Why don’t you let me be the judge of that. Tell me what you have in mind.”

“Okay, my plan is to get you somewhere safe. Then I’m going home and talk to my grandfather. Somehow I have to convince him to grant you amnesty.”

She snorted in disbelief. “He’s not going to do that, Preston. As far as I know it’s never been done. And from what I’ve heard about Will Adams, he gives no quarter to his enemies, and we expect none. What makes you think he will allow *me* to be the exception to the rule?”

Preston’s lips pressed into a tight line. “I realize more than anyone that it’s never been done. I know my grandfather is as stubborn as the very devil. But don’t you think it’s about time someone tried to stop this insanity?”

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“Well ... yes,” she said, “but my opinion isn’t going to count for much with your grandfather, since I am the enemy, so to speak. What happens if your plan goes astray?”

“I haven’t thought that far ahead yet. I just know I have to at least try to change his mind, because If I don’t ...” His voice trailed off, his jaw tightened. “Let’s just say for argument’s sake—your life isn’t going to be worth a plugged nickel.”

“Very eloquently put, Preston. Just what every woman wants to hear,” she remarked dryly.

“Sorry,” he said, his gaze meeting hers. “I’m trying to be honest.”

“Don’t you see it would be better if we parted company? Your plan will never work.”

He turned back to his packing. “You’re going with me, and that’s final, Gabrielle.”

Gabrielle studied him thoughtfully. She could feel an air of sadness about him, as though he knew what he was doing was right, but having to go against his family was killing him inside. What would make a man like him do such a thing?

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She realized that, even with a family like his, there would have to be a certain amount of pain and loss in going against them. Lord knew how much she missed her own relatives and friends over the years, people that had been dead for centuries.

She couldn't stop herself from wondering whether he felt it was worth it. Or for that matter, did she think she was worth it? There were times ... Her thoughts veered away from that particular subject. There had been too many times over the years that she had contemplated putting an end to her meaningless existence.

But that was in the past ... this was now, and the idea of her enemy taking the decision from her made her angry.

"Preston."

"Hmm ..." He didn't bother looking up from his task.

"You don't have to do this, you know," she said in an even voice. "I can go away by myself—find a new sanctuary. There is no reason for you to risk alienating your family because of me. I will be perfectly safe without you playing bodyguard."

"They would only track you down again," he said, fastening the

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snaps on the bulging tote bag. He looked at her, his expression hooded. “Oh, it might take them a few years, but, eventually, they would find you. Only next time, more than likely, you won’t be offered a chance to escape.”

“They can’t be all that good, or it wouldn’t have taken them fifty years to find me.”

He smiled. “We have known where you were for the last twenty years. You were just not one of our top-rated priorities. That’s why you were assigned to me.”

She closed her eyes and rubbed the sides of her temples. “Okay, say I believe you’re telling the truth and you want to protect me from your family. God only knows why you feel you must do such a crazy thing. I certainly don’t.”

“I told you—”

“Yes, yes, I remember. Damsels in distress, your mother and all that stuff, I know. I just don’t choose to believe you. Anyway, now that I know how your family operates, I can stay on the move.” She opened her eyes, her hands falling to her sides. “See, I don’t need your help.”

## ***ENEMY MINE***

*“Yes, you do. “*

*“Why, dammit?” she asked defiantly.*

His expression hardened. “Because Cameron is the best hunter to come out of the Adams clan in over one hundred years. When he discovers I’ve failed to carry out my mission, he will come after you to show me up, and when he catches you, he will make you suffer terribly before he finishes you off. I can’t let you die like that—the dream—” A shadow crossed his face. “I won’t stand by and let it happen to you.”

“I think you’re overestimating your brother’s abilities,” she said with a wry smile. “Now listen, I don’t want to be responsible for you losing your family ... any kin, even crazy ones like yours, is precious. I can go to Angel’s. He’d be more than glad to put me up for a while. At least until I can figure out what to do next. You could tell them I escaped. That would release you from any responsibility, then you could go home with a clear conscience.

Preston suddenly grew very still. “He’s Cameron’s next assignment.”

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“I don’t understand,” she said, confused. “I thought we were discussing—”

“Angel is Cameron’s next assignment,” he said, his voice harsh.

A look of alarm played across her face. “I have to warn him.” She turned to leave.

He moved to stop her, reaching out to grab her wrist, knocking the bag off the table with a loud clatter. “No, wait, Gabrielle. I can’t let you tell him, not yet.”

She gave him an incredulous stare. “You can’t let me tell him? Who the hell put you in charge of my life?”

“I never should have said anything. You don’t understand how vital it is to put as much distance between us and the hunters as we possibly can before they know what is happening. Every damn second counts.” He let her go and rubbed the back of his neck. “I can’t save all of you, although I would like to save the ones like you, if there are any more. But—”

“There are.”

“But this is more complicated than you know.”

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“So all your talk about changing things is just a lot of hot air, isn’t it?” she asked in a taut voice.

“Of course not. You have to be reasonable, Gabrielle. It’s going to take every argument I can think of to save you, much less save anyone else. Perhaps in time—”

Her mouth thinned into a tight line. “So let’s see if I have this straight. It’s okay for you to warn me, to try and help me escape from your clan. But it’s not okay for me to warn Angel of the danger he’s in?” She crossed her arms in front of her and tapped one foot. “Could you possibly explain this discrepancy? I think I must have missed something in the translation somewhere along the way.”

Preston stiffened. “You just don’t understand the danger you’re in. We don’t have time to warn your friend. Besides, you’re not an ... active ... vampire, and he, no doubt, is.”

“Oh, now I get it,” she said in a sarcastic voice. “Because I don’t go around biting people in the neck, I deserve your help. On the other hand, vampires of Angel’s ilk should be hunted down, be destroyed like some kind of wild animal. Is that what you’re trying to tell me?”

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“Of course not ... I mean ...” A frustrated sigh escaped him. “Will you please stop being so difficult? I don’t know what the hell I mean anymore—if not for that goddamn dream.”

“What dream?” she asked, watching him intently.

“Never mind. Gabrielle. It’s not easy to shrug off all my years of conditioning. Try to understand my side. I was taught that all of you were an affliction against mankind, that, given time, if we didn’t eradicate you, your kind would take over and rule the world. Although I didn’t really agree with the concept, some of it nevertheless sunk in. Enough so that I came on this mission with the intent of fulfilling my duty as an Adams.”

Surprisingly enough, Gabrielle *did* understand his dilemma. After all, she knew from firsthand experience the dark reputation creatures of the night had acquired over the centuries. A reputation based on truth, she had to admit, though it pained her to do so.

A sigh escaped her. “Preston, I won’t deny that what you’ve said is true ... except for the part about us wanting to take over the world. That’s just plain silly. But nowadays there are a few of us willing to

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forsake the warmth of human blood for the cold sterile blood provided by our very own blood banks.” She paused for a moment, giving him a meaningful look. “Angel happens to be one of those few.”

A puzzled expression flitted across Preston’s expressive features. “If human blood is available to you, why do you take only the blood of small wildlife?”

A frown marred her forehead. “I have my reasons.” She took a deep breath. “Now, I must tell you, in all fairness, that I’m not about to stand by and do nothing while a dear friend of mine is slaughtered.” She fixed him with an unwavering stare. “Do you understand?”

Gabrielle could almost see his mind ticking away, trying to absorb everything she had told him. In the foyer, the grandfather clock chimed out the hour, reminding her she didn’t have much time. If she just had something to bargain with—anything. Then it hit her.

“Let me warn my friend, and I will go with you willingly,” she said quietly.

“All right, one phone call,” he said in a low voice. “That’s all. You tell him nothing about where you’re going, understand?”

### *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle nodded with a satisfied smile. “Angel will be one vampire you can’t add to your list of accomplishments, Cameron Adams,” she whispered as she left the room to put in a call to her friend.

Her side had won a victory this time, but what about next time?

## *CHAPTER 4*

Packing her belongings to leave was just as bad as she remembered it to be ... perhaps even worse, she thought gloomily, watching her house disappear from sight.

Gabrielle sighed with regret, wondering if she'd ever see it again, and turned around in the bucket seat. The night sky tilted to the left and then to the right, as an unexpected wave of dizziness assailed her. She braced herself against the seat, ready for the needling pain of blood-hunger to make itself known.

"We should be able to make Oceanside a couple of hours before dawn," Preston said, giving her a sidelong glance.

Gabrielle nodded, unable to speak as the pain-edged bloodlust came

## *ENEMY MINE*

over her. This time it was worse than when she had been inside the house arguing with Preston, worse than anything she'd felt in a long while.

Gabrielle tried to force it down, bring it back under her control, but it raced away from her, spreading throughout her body like wildfire. A moan escaped her before she could stop it. *Dear God, not now. Please, not now ...*

She could feel the dim throbbing of Preston's heart, smell the blood coursing through his body. The blood-hunger lunged forward and she fought hard to keep it in control.

*No ...*

In the dim glow of green light from the dashboard, she lifted shaking hands to push the raven-black hair out of her eyes. She had to fight it.

Preston raised one eyebrow in inquiry. "What is it? Are you sick?"

She tried to laugh, but it came out strained and stilted. "In all the rush I forgot to do one very important thing before we left."

"What's that?"

## *ENEMY MINE*

“Eat,” she whispered, closing her eyes against the ravaging hunger inside her. She clamped down hard on her self-control, determined not to let the insidious blood-thirst get the best of her. A damp sheen covered her face.

He glanced back at the road. “Look in the back floorboard.”

She gave him a puzzled glance before following his instructions and, to her surprise, she found a red and white cooler in the back. Upon opening it, she saw six pint-size plastic containers filled with a wine-colored liquid. She tilted her head to the side, eyeing him with a questioning stare.

He laughed at the expression on her face. “I visited a meat-packing plant while you were sleeping,” he explained. “You should have seen the look on the manager’s face when I offered to buy all the blood he had available.”

Lifting one of the bottles from the cooler, Gabrielle uncapped it and took a sip. She grimaced at the coldness. However, she couldn’t complain; at least it was enough to temporarily kill the craving. “That’s why I don’t indulge in buying what I need,” she said. “People

## *ENEMY MINE*

tend to remember such eccentric behavior. The first time someone dies mysteriously or an animal dies of unknown causes, you're the first one to come under suspicion."

Gabrielle took another sip before she continued. "Then, before you know it, you have the cops knocking at your door wanting to know if you're involved in some sort of satanic activity."

Preston lifted one fair eyebrow in surprise. "People really do that today?"

Gabrielle smiled. "We may live in a modern age, but superstitions still abound in the hearts of men. If they can't find a logical explanation for something, the next step is backward into their fear of things that go bump in the night."

"I suppose you've had a lot of that in your life."

Gabrielle clicked on the radio, fiddling with the dial until she had a soft rock station out of Asheville. "More so than Bram Stoker's vampire ever did."

The soft strains of a tender love song floated over her. She placed her head against the headrest, relaxing for the first time since Preston

## *ENEMY MINE*

had walked into her life so unexpectedly.

Preston laughed. “Yes, I would say you probably have, but real life is never like fiction.”

She leaned her head to look at him. “Oh, I don’t know, sometimes it can come awfully close—like now, for instance. I never really imagined I would be running for my life in the company of my sworn enemy.”

Preston frowned. “Try not to think of me as your enemy. I’m just a man who wants to help you. Okay?”

“That still remains to be seen,” she said, giving him a wary look. “I’m still not sure what your motives are in helping me.”

“I thought you were going to trust me?”

“I never said I trusted you. You assumed it.”

“Then why did you agree to come with me?”

“I thought it over and decided it was best to have my enemy in plain sight.” Gabrielle smiled. “Safer that way.”

Preston glanced at her, ready to argue the point, when, without warning, an image flashed into his mind. And before he knew what

## ENEMY MINE

was happening, he was inside the image, in a different world, a different time ... a place he knew only in his dreams.

\* \* \*

*Preston found himself in a field splashed with flowers of the purest white, the palest shade of purple, and a lush yellow gold. The colors were so vivid. He could even smell the flowers' heavy perfume. This can't be happening! his rational mind screamed.*

*He breathed in deeply of the fresh air. It had to be the dream. Dream? How the hell could he be dreaming when he was driving down a dark interstate highway?*

*He looked around to see a younger Gabrielle reclining on an embroidered blanket. She was dressed in a gown that appeared to be from a time long before he was born—probably a couple of hundred years before his time, he thought. Okay, he had to be having some kind of breakdown. This whole scenario was some kind of hallucination. But if it was his breakdown and his delusions, then what was she doing in his delusion? He accepted the fact that she was in his damn dreams, but not this.*

## ENEMY MINE

*Despite the fact that he knew he'd lost his mind, and none of this could be real, he couldn't take his eyes off Gabrielle. She was so breathtakingly beautiful it made his heart ache. Her hair was disheveled, a black aura encircling her head, and laughter danced in her eyes as she tipped the wine bag to her lips. A tiny trickle of red wine slid down her chin to her neck. Droplets of crimson stood out starkly against the paleness of her smooth white skin. Then he saw himself, or someone who looked remarkably like him, lean in, and trace the path of the liquid with his tongue. She moaned in pleasure ...*

\* \* \*

“What are you doing?” Gabrielle screamed, jerking the wheel hard to the right.

Preston's vision disappeared abruptly in a blare of car horns and blinking lights. He wrenched the wheel to the right, pulling sharply to the side of the road, slamming on the brakes with a brutal thrust of his foot.

“My God ...” he breathed, his hands tightening on the curved notches of the steering wheel, his knuckles white with the strain.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“What happened?” she asked in alarm. “Are you ill? Did you fall asleep?”

Preston was almost afraid to turn his head—afraid the hallucination would come again when he looked at her. And he wasn’t sure he could handle it if it did.

“Preston?”

Slowly, he turned to her, tensing against the unexpected, ready for anything. Nothing happened. He was still inside his car, and Gabrielle was intently watching him as if she wasn’t sure what he would do next.

He forced a smile. “I’m fine.”

*What had happened to him just now?* He had no idea, and he couldn’t expect her to understand what he could not. It was best to forget it—pretend nothing out of the ordinary had happened, unless he wanted her to know about the other dreams.

No, not yet. Maybe never.

“Well, you don’t look fine to me,” she stated in a firm voice. She pushed a golden curl off his forehead. Immediately, a shock of

## *ENEMY MINE*

awareness jolted through him. Apparently Gabrielle felt it, too, because her eyes widened in the shock of awareness, and she jerked back her hand as if she'd touched a live wire.

"Gabrielle," he whispered, his voice hoarse.

She cleared her throat, staring blindly at the blacktop caught in the sweep of headlights. "I suggest, that if you're feeling better, we should be on our way."

"Yes ... of course," he agreed in a husky voice.

What had just happened between them, he wondered? Could it have had something to do with the vision he'd experienced? No, that was crazy thinking. There had to be a logical explanation. Yes, he felt connected to her, but until now when she'd touched him, he didn't fully realize to what extent, and what effect it could have on him, physically and emotionally.

He could understand feeling compassion—yes, even an odd sort of bond. But this—this was different. He couldn't think of any way to describe it other than attraction. It was an incredible shock. Attraction for a vampire?

## ENEMY MINE

Disgust welled up inside of him. For God's sake, how could he feel that way about a woman who wasn't human? Gabrielle was a member of the undead. A living travesty who was a mockery to God's creation.

He shook his head and tried to focus on the gray ribbon unfurling in front of him. *Dammit ... no, get out of my head.* He recognized that horrific voice—the voice of his grandfather, not his. He would not be swayed by the nonsense drilled into him. As for the attraction he'd felt ... he was just confusing his emotions. After all, Gabrielle was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, and they seemed to share a few interests. But she was still, and always would be, a vampire.

Vampires existed, and that was a fact of life—his life, anyway. Most of mankind assumed they were only a legend, but his family and a few other select individuals knew the truth.

He didn't know, or even care, for that matter, how God figured in the equation. But what did matter was they existed, for whatever reason, and there had to be some way to coexist peacefully with them.

\* \* \*

Gabrielle stared off into the night, feeling the tension between

## *ENEMY MINE*

them. What was happening to her? He made her feel things she didn't want to feel ... not now ... not ever ... not for a human.

She reminded herself that he was nothing to her, he was a stranger who'd offered his help ... her enemy. Just because he put her in mind of Damon was no reason to think otherwise. An echo from her past, that's all she'd felt.

*Nothing more ... nothing less.*

"I saw your medical books back at the house," Preston remarked in a casual voice. "Is there a reason why you're studying that particular subject?"

His question came out of nowhere, jolting her out of her musings. She glanced at him. "I've always had an interest in healing. Even as a child, I was always full of questions about the field. I find it fascinating."

He glanced at her for a second, his gaze glittering strangely in the dim greenish glow. "Are there others like you?"

"I'm not sure what you mean," Gabrielle said, her voice uncertain.

He returned his gaze to the road. "You know, vampires who want to

## *ENEMY MINE*

learn the way you do.”

Gabrielle looked at him for a moment, surprised by the unusual interest he was showing in her kind’s pursuits. Could he have some nefarious reason for wanting the information?

Don’t be ridiculous, she scolded herself. How in heaven could the hunters use such mundane information about how they spent their time?

She shrugged. “With all those years stretching out endlessly in front of us, what else would we do? Of course, we don’t all have the same interests, and there are a few who do nothing but party throughout the centuries. But I would find that incredibly boring.” A slight smile played across her lips. “I need the stimulation of learning about everything I’m interested in—broadening my horizons, as you humans say.”

“Have you ever thought about putting your knowledge to good use? The world could always use a good doctor, and I have no doubt that, with all your knowledge, you’d make a damn good one.”

“I don’t think the world is ready for a vampire doctor, do you?” she

## ENEMY MINE

asked with a wry sideways glance in his direction. Gabrielle couldn't tell him how much his compliment meant to her, or how warm it made her feel inside. Funny, but she hadn't felt that way in a long time. Not since before she'd left Debra.

She immediately quelled the thought of her adopted child. *It hurt too much to remember.*

"Well, no, I suppose not. But I do think it's a shame to waste such a resource," he said, pulling her away from her distressing thoughts.

Gabrielle let out a laugh. "When you have as much time on your hands as I have had through the centuries, you become quite expert about a variety of subjects."

"I didn't mean—"

"I know what you meant. You think we should put our acquired knowledge to good use—to benefit mankind, for example. Correct?"

"Well, yes," Preston said, taking his gaze off the road to look at her. "Why not? People would know, then, that the majority of your kind is no longer a threat, with modern technology—that there is no need to kill anymore."

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle pushed back her hair and sighed. "It's a nice dream, Preston, but it's never going to happen."

He looked as if he was about to disagree, but instead he looked away, staring out the windshield, saying nothing, and once again an uneasy silence reigned between them.

She settled back in her seat and let out a tiny sigh. "Preston, it is sort of a nice idea. It's nice to hear a hunter talk about his dreams for peace between our people, but no way could it ever work. Imagine ... a world where vampires and humans lived together in harmony. Ha ... there's a better chance of it sleeting in Hell than something like that happening. No ... the undead were never meant to intermingle with the living." She fell silent before she said too much.

Gabrielle had to remember that in her dealings with him. It could be dangerous to let her emotions run unchecked when it came to Preston Adams, to let herself care about him ... very dangerous. Once this wild flight was over, they would go their separate ways, the way they should ... the way it was meant to be.

She sat up straight, determined to keep their relationship on a

## *ENEMY MINE*

bearable level of uneasy alliance and nothing more. “How about you?” she asked, making sure to keep her voice light. “So far, all we’ve done is talk about me. Have you ever wanted to be something other than a vampire hunter?”

He gave her a smile that made her catch her breath in surprise. “I have a degree in English. I wanted to be a teacher, but in my family it is not an acceptable occupation.”

Gabrielle leaned forward slightly. “How did you ever convince them to let you go to school in the first place?”

He smiled. “I didn’t. My grandfather refused to pay my college tuition, declaring it a waste of my time. My mother left me a trust fund; unfortunately, I couldn’t get it until I turned twenty-five. But I managed to win a football scholarship, much to my grandfather’s amazement and dismay, and went anyway.”

She gave him a curious look. “Why was he amazed, if you don’t mind me asking?”

A wry expression crossed his handsome features. “Because he could never understand how I could be so clumsy on the training field

## *ENEMY MINE*

at home and excel in a sport that required almost the same coordination and skill.”

Gabrielle laughed. “Did he ever catch on?”

Preston frowned. “I suspect he did. He had to, otherwise he’d never have tried to convince me to exterminate you.”

Gabrielle shivered at his words, reminding herself again that he was her enemy. She couldn’t let her guard down for even a second. It was entirely possible that he was using her to gain access to the others, and she couldn’t let that happen.

She would wait patiently until he revealed his true motives for trying to help her. She had time. They had a truce for now ... but how long it would last, she didn’t know. These were indeed strange circumstances, beyond any she’d ever known in her long lifetime.

She could not trust Preston Adams ...

Gabrielle pushed down the unfamiliar longing that rose inside of her, alarmed by its presence. She didn’t want to—no, she couldn’t allow herself to wish—that she could trust him. That was an impossibility, something that would never happen, even if she lived a dozen more lifetimes.

## *CHAPTER 5*

“Damn.”

Gabrielle heard a gun go off and sat up straight, blinking in bewilderment. “What is it this time?” she asked in a sleepy voice. “Who’s shooting at us?”

“Nobody is shooting at anybody. Tire blew out,” Preston growled, pulling the badly listing car over to the graveled roadside.

“Where are we?” She glanced toward the horizon. He followed her gaze to see the faintest ribbons of pink etched upon the night sky.

Preston opened the car door and slid out from under the steering wheel. He shrugged off his suede leather jacket, tossing it onto the back seat.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“About fifteen minutes from the beach house,” he announced in a tone of disgust. “I can’t believe we have a flat tire this close to the house.”

“It’s not the end of the world, Preston.” Gabrielle smiled in amusement. “Unless, of course, you don’t know how to change it. Then we *are* in trouble.”

His gaze traveled to the horizon where he could see the gray waters of the Atlantic touching the clear night skyline. He breathed in deeply of the salt-flavored air, savoring it for a moment before he turned back to her. “Of course I know how to change a bloody tire. I’m not worried about that—I’m worried about you.”

“Don’t be,” she said flatly, reaching into the back for the cloak she’d made from her bedroom draperies. She wrapped herself in it until she was covered from head to toe.

Preston thought she looked like the grim reaper, needing only a wide scythe to complete the picture. He decided not to say anything. Instead, he got busy changing the tire. The sooner he finished, the sooner they would be on their way. Hopefully, with only a minimum

## *ENEMY MINE*

of damage to Gabrielle.

He didn't really put much trust in the protection of those damn curtains, even if they were specially treated. Specially treated curtains for vampires, he thought, what next? Hell, they might even come up with a way that they could stay out in the sunshine without anything on but a bathing suit. He wondered how many of them would be interested in such a product, and then smiled at the absurd turn his musings had taken.

Twenty minutes later he was finishing, counting himself lucky he hadn't lost a finger when the jack had slipped, when a battered station wagon pulled in behind his vehicle.

Preston pretended not to see it, hoping it would go away. He stood, put the ruined tire into the trunk, and shut the lid with more force than necessary to alert Gabrielle that they had unexpected company.

He noticed that the day was well underway as he caught sight of the sun stretching its fiery arms outward, sending forth a beam of soft light to warm him. God, he hoped Gabrielle was holding her own.

Well, he couldn't worry about that now. He'd get rid of the do-

## *ENEMY MINE*

gooder as quickly as possible, and pray he still had time enough to get her to safety before the sun could do any irreparable damage.

He pasted a friendly smile on his lips before he turned to face the tall, rawboned man dressed in jeans, a plaid shirt, and the shiniest cowboy boots he'd ever seen, coming in his direction.

"Hey there, need any help?" the man asked in a soft Southern drawl.

"No, but thank you for asking," Preston said. He mentally winced at the stiffness in his voice, and tried to relax. "Just a flat tire," he said. Good, his voice sounded more easygoing, friendlier. "It's all fixed now. Well, it's getting late, I'd best be on my way."

The man walked him to the front of his car. With curious eyes, he peered in at Gabrielle. "I know fall is coming on, but ain't your friend a little warm all covered up like that?"

Preston forced a smile. "My wife has a skin disease."

The man let out a whistle and tipped back his baseball cap. "Is that right?"

"She's allergic to the sunlight. I need to get her home as soon as

### *ENEMY MINE*

possible.” Preston jammed his hand into his pocket and pulled out his keys. “Don’t mean to be rude, but I gotta go.”

The man grimaced in sympathy. “Hey, I heard about that on a talk show. Some of those people got all kinds of sores from the sun. Sorry to hear your wife has such an awful thing.”

“Thank you.” Preston slid under the steering wheel. “I wish I could stay and chat, but I have to rush. You know how it is.”

The man stepped away from the car. “Sure do, and I hope your wife does okay.”

Preston smiled, nodding. With a sense of relief, he peeled out of there like the very hounds from hell were after them.

“Was it necessary to tell him we were married?” she asked from the confines of her dark protective coverings.

“It was the first thing that popped into my head,” he admitted with a grin.

“I suppose I can accept that. But did you have to tell him I suffered from a skin disease? The poor man looked at me like I was an alien from another planet.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

Preston let out an irritated sigh. “Would you rather I’d told him you were a vampire? It’s not like I had time to think of a better cover story, or check with you.”

“Of course not. Don’t be ridiculous,” Gabrielle said, her voice slightly muffled by the cloth. “He’d have probably called the police to see if any inmates from the local asylum had recently escaped.”

Preston touched a fold of the curtain. It felt slick to his touch, coated with some kind of chemical, he supposed. “The police are the least of our worries. My family is more dangerous. How are you doing in that thing?”

“I told you not to worry about me. I’ll be fine,” Gabrielle said stiffly. She moved in her seat, and Preston heard her gasp as she changed her position.

Preston spared a glance at her. Was she being honest? That gasp had sounded like she was in pain. His gaze returned to the road. She’d told him not to worry, but hell, he couldn’t help but worry.

Preston was more than glad when he finally pulled into the driveway of the redwood beach house. Relieved, he turned to

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle. "Thank God for Richard."

"Who's Richard? Another hunter perhaps?" Gabrielle asked.

"Of course not," he shouted. He counted to ten, then looked at her. "Will you please trust me? Richard is a friend outside the clan and we owe him our gratitude for letting us stay here, and having the foresight to board up all the windows because of hurricane season or vandals. Hell, I don't know why, but it's good he did, because you will be better protected from the sun."

"Then please extend my gratitude to your friend."

Alarmed, Preston picked up the weakness in her voice. He pulled the car to a stop, getting out almost before he put it into park and turned off the ignition.

He hurried to open the door for Gabrielle. When she emerged, she stumbled and let out a moan.

He reached out to steady her. "I thought you said you were all right."

"Please, just help me inside," she rasped in a thick, pain-filled voice.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“Dammit Gabrielle, you should have told me the sun was getting to you.”

She could see the muscle in his cheek jumping as he helped her inside. She leaned heavily against him as he guided her to a small bedroom right off the living room.

The cool darkness of the house was already reviving her somewhat, although she knew it would take some time for her to completely regain her strength.

“Would it have done any good?” she asked him when he eased her onto the queen-size bed. “You couldn’t have gotten me here any sooner than you did.”

Gabrielle pulled off the makeshift cloak with some difficulty. It had not been quite enough protection, despite the manufacturer’s claim.

Preston stared at her, aghast at the damage the sun had managed to do, despite her covering. There were already lesions on her face and arms, and he suspected there were a few on her back and thighs, also from the heat. Not much longer, and she would have been in more serious shape from the pain she was experiencing. At any rate, she had

## *ENEMY MINE*

gotten off comparatively easier than he would have thought possible.

Preston reached out to touch one of the weepy wounds on her cheek. “Dammit, this is all my fault. I should have checked those tires before we left your house.”

At his touch, a spurt of hungry desire spiraled though Gabrielle. Somehow it seemed right and natural, something he had done many times before, and she momentarily leaned into his hand, until she realized what she was doing. God’s teeth, she was reacting to the feel of his hand like a love-starved puppy. She pulled away, lying back on the bed.

What was it about him that made her feel emotions—desires, she hadn’t felt since Damon?

She raised up on one elbow, wincing slightly. “It’s not your fault, Preston. Any one could have had a flat tire; things happen when you least expect them. Murphy’s Law, you know.”

“Things don’t happen to me,” he said in a husky voice. “I think Richard might have some aloe cream around here somewhere.” He hastily pulled away his hand. “He’s a firm believer in using natural

## *ENEMY MINE*

products and vitamins.”

He left the room, returning a few scant seconds later bearing a blue and white tube.

“Take off your clothes,” he ordered, brandishing the medicine as if he was touting some kind of miracle drug.

She sat up, leaning on her elbows. “I beg your pardon?”

He walked to the door and removed a green robe from a hook. “Okay, if you don’t want to do that, strip down and put this on.”

She looked at him speculatively, and then at the robe. Did she really need his help in applying the cooling medicine? The burning in her back and legs seemed to flare hotter at the silent question, making up her mind for her. “Turn around.”

He tossed her the robe and did as she bid.

After quickly slipping out of jeans and shirt, she shrugged on the robe, wincing when the rough terry cloth rubbed against her shoulders. “Okay, I’m decent. You can turn around.”

“Lie on your stomach,” he said, eyeing her with concern as she moved clumsily to comply.

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle let the robe slip down to bare her back, but she tightly held the front when she rolled over on her stomach. At the first touch of his warm fingers, she jumped, startled by the rush of excitement that roared through her veins like a runaway train.

“Relax Gabrielle, I’m not going to attack you,” he said dryly.

“I know,” she snapped, trying to regain her composure. “The cream is cold, that’s all.” She couldn’t tell him that, in truth, she didn’t feel the cooling substance he was kneading into her back, as much as she was feeling the heat in his hands. God, it felt good ... too good, she thought, trying to regain control of her turbulent emotions. He is only being nice. Stop reading something into nothing, she firmly told herself.

It didn’t work.

Preston’s hands, relentless in their self-appointed task, with sure steady strokes removed the pain she felt, replacing it with an aching, pulsating desire for more of his caresses.

Gabrielle breath turned into short gasps that burned all the way up her throat as his hands descended to the curve of her hips.

## *ENEMY MINE*

*This is insane*, she thought dazedly. She wanted Preston more than she'd ever wanted anybody in all her many lifetimes ... *even Damon*.

The thought jolted her.

Gabrielle jerked away, sitting bolt upright, her body rigid with tension.

“What is it?” Preston asked in a low voice, thick with passion. His blue eyes burned with an intensity that took her breath away.

“Nothing—I—I can do the rest myself,” Gabrielle stammered, looking away, afraid she'd find herself in his arms if she didn't. And if that happened there would be no going back. She couldn't let Preston see the effect he was having on her.

Get hold of yourself, Gabrielle told herself firmly. Enough is enough; you don't have any business feeling this way with a human.

Preston stood, his face pale, and muscles stood out in his jaw. He seemed to be holding himself in check by only a hair-thin measure. “Yes, of course.” He turned to leave, and then looked back, uncertainty in his eyes. “I have to leave now if I want to reach the Folly by nightfall. Will you be all right until I return?”

## *ENEMY MINE*

“The Folly?” she asked. She shifted her weight on the bed, trying to ease the pain in her thighs.

He smiled a thin-lipped smile. “My grandfather, three times removed, built it. It’s an architect’s nightmare. But it’s been home to the Adams clan for many years.”

“How can you be sure I’ll be here when you get back?”

“You gave me your word.”

One finely shaped brow etched upward. “You believe the word of a vampire?”

“No—I believe in the word of Gabrielle Warlick and that’s enough for me. You will be here.”

*How could he be so sure about her?* Gabrielle wondered as she studied him thoughtfully. It was almost as if he knew her most inner self, what she held sacred. How could that be?

Preston frowned. “You didn’t answer my question.”

Gabrielle had to think a moment before she spoke. “Oh, don’t worry yourself about me. I’ll be perfectly fine.”

“I’ll always worry about you,” Preston said abruptly, before he

## *ENEMY MINE*

walked out of the bedroom.

A few minutes later, Gabrielle heard the car engine roar to life. A sense of loss assailed her upon hearing him drive away. Why in God's name was this happening to her? Why was she feeling emotions that she'd never before felt for any mortal? And why for Preston Adams—her enemy?

## *CHAPTER 6*

Preston was wondering the same thing as he drove down the winding road to get back to the interstate.

And what about that strange dream he'd had while he was wide awake? Never in his life had he drifted into a dream state while driving. If it was a dream, he thought grimly, it was in Technicolor, and the sound was in stereo. He wasn't an expert, but he'd bet there were few people who'd ever had such a bizarre experience.

He'd never believed in reincarnation, or any of that New Age nonsense, but now he was not so sure. From the very first, he felt as if he'd known Gabrielle before, and the dreams seemed to confirm it. But still he wasn't sure. Perhaps they were premonitions instead. His

## *ENEMY MINE*

head reeled with the staggering possibilities.

Against his will, his thoughts wandered back to Gabrielle, when he'd touched her cheek and applied the salve to her back. Christ, he'd felt his temperature soaring into outer space at the satiny feel of her skin beneath his fingers. He had only barely been aware that her skin was a tad cooler than human, but it hadn't made any difference in how she made him react.

It amazed Preston that, with Gabrielle, he had so little self-control. Why, if she hadn't stopped him when she did, he'd have been making love to her before either one of them knew what was happening.

That would never do. He wanted only to protect her from his kinsman, not have a relationship with her, for Pete's sake. What the hell was he thinking?

Disturbed by the emotions he felt, and what had almost happened back at the beach house, his mind turned to the meeting with his grandfather. He remembered what Gabrielle had asked him earlier. What was he going to do if all of his arguments for Gabrielle's life failed to persuade his grandfather to his way of thinking?

## *ENEMY MINE*

Preston shifted uneasily in his seat. He couldn't allow himself to think that far ahead because he had no idea what he was going to do.

By the time Preston turned into the drive that led to the Folly, he still hadn't decided the best way to handle his grandfather.

The Victorian house sat on the edge of a cliff out in the middle of nowhere. With its gingerbread trimming and high-arched gables, it had always reminded him of those houses that graced the covers of the gothic romance books his mother had read when he was little.

Preston parked next to an ancient gray subcompact that belonged to his cousin CeCe, and got out. He tried to brace himself for the battle ahead, but he was still uneasy about going against his grandfather. Oh, he'd done it before, but never about something of this magnitude.

He ran up the steps leading into the house, quietly opened the door, hoping he could sneak in to see his grandfather without alerting the rest of the family. He needed to see his grandfather alone without any interference.

To his dismay, CeCe was coming down the marble staircase just as he stuck his head around the doorjamb.

## *ENEMY MINE*

The staircase was the pride of the Folly, but he'd always thought it looked out of place. It belonged in a palace, not in a bizarre creation like the Folly, he mused. When he was a kid, he'd been fascinated by the corridors that went nowhere, and the secret rooms hidden throughout the structure.

It was only as he grew older and made friends that he realized just how weird his house was ... along with his family. There had been times he'd prayed God would give him another family ... a normal family.

"My God, Preston!" CeCe exclaimed. "Where have you been? Granddad has been worried sick about you."

Preston mentally shook off the past and stepped forward, closing the door behind him. "Where is Granddad?"

CeCe hurried to join him at the foot of the stairs. "In the study. He sent Cameron to see what had happened to you. Granddad's waiting for his phone call now." She fluttered her hands like a bird in flight. "You better have a good explanation for not calling in your report, young man. Or else Granddad is going to take your head off."

## ENEMY MINE

Despite his apprehension, Preston had to smile at her antics. Everything about his cousin reminded him of a wren. Her arms and legs were as thin as sticks, and whenever she was excited or upset, she wildly flapped her arms.

When he and Cameron were children, they had teased her about flying off one day if she wasn't careful. But CeCe was always a good sport about it, although she always gave them a stern look and told them they were bad boys. They knew she didn't mean it.

She is the only person in this house who is halfway normal, he thought bitterly. The only one who had offered friendship to his mother when she first came to the Folly as a young bride.

"Preston, are you listening to me?" CeCe asked in an anxious voice, wrenching him out of his musings. The Folly had a way of doing that to him—*remembering ... when he needed to stay focused, too much was at stake for his concentration to be off ...*

"Sorry, CeCe, I was thinking about my mother."

CeCe smiled. "I think about her a lot, too. You don't know how much I miss her company."

## *ENEMY MINE*

“Yes, I believe I do,” Preston said, eyeing her with affection. “But I bet you and I are the only ones who do miss her,” he added darkly.

“That’s not true, Preston. I’m sure Granddad and Cameron miss her, too.”

They had had this same discussion many times, and no matter what he said, he could never convince her she was wrong about their grandfather and his brother. He saw no reason to try now. “Come along, CeCe. I need to speak to Granddad and I need you to play buffer between me and the old man,” he added in a tight voice.

Preston noticed the look of anxiety that played across her features as she turned to follow him to the study, but he said nothing to reassure her.

He paused at the double oak doors to take a deep breath. He laughed. “I feel almost like that same little boy of long ago, who’d done something bad and had to face his grandfather’s wrath.” Preston glanced at CeCe. “How in hell did I ever let that iron-edged codger talk me into going vampire hunting in the first place? I’ll never know.”

CeCe hugged him. “Just remember he loves you, Preston. The

## *ENEMY MINE*

family is everything to him and he wants you to be a part of it.”

Before he opened the doors, he nodded at CeCe with a forced smile.  
*From her mouth to God's ear ...*

His grandfather sat in his customary position, behind a massive desk that dated back a couple of hundred years. Preston squinted to see him through the gloomy light of the old-fashioned light fixtures. Combined with the dark wood paneling, the effect was intimidating, just as it had been when he was a child.

*Well, he was no longer a child.*

Preston cleared his throat. His grandfather looked up. He thought he saw a hint of relief in his grandfather's faded blue eyes, but it disappeared as soon as it appeared, leaving Preston to wonder if he'd seen it at all.

“What happened to you, boy?” the old man asked. “Do you realize all the trouble you caused this family by disappearing the way you did? You had CeCe worried half out of her mind.”

Preston's gut twisted at the anger in his grandfather's voice. This was going to be even harder than anticipated. “I'm sorry to have

## *ENEMY MINE*

caused you so much trouble, Granddad,” he said, his voice calm and steady. “But special circumstances prevented me from calling.”

“Bullshit,” the older man said, giving Preston a hard stare. “Sorry don’t cut it, son. Cameron had to put off his own assignment because of your inept ways.”

Preston returned the glare, bristling at the insult. He’d be damned if the old man would intimidate him as if he were still a child. “Then I’m not sorry. Is that what you wanted to hear?”

“No, I want to hear how you handled Gabrielle Warlick,” Will Adams said in a voice that dripped ice. “Did you fulfill your assignment?”

“I did not, Granddad,” Preston replied, his own voice tense.

Will made a disgusted sound. “I knew it. For God’s sake, can’t you do anything right? Now your brother is going to have to finish the job you botched.”

“He can’t,” Preston said abruptly.

The old man stood. “Why not?”

“Because Gabrielle’s no longer there.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

“Boy, you better start talking fast. I want to know what you did to alert her to your presence.”

“That’s simple enough.” Preston gave him a grim smile. “I went up to her and introduced myself.”

“What? Have you lost your mind? One of the first rules of being a hunter is not to let the hunted know they’re being stalked. You know that, Preston.”

“Yes, I do. I deliberately broke your rule to warn Gabrielle of the danger she was in.” He leaned across the desk. “Don’t you think it’s about time to put a stop to the killing, Granddad? This insanity has gone on far too long. It has to end here and now, with us.”

Will stared at him. “I can’t believe a grandson of mine would say something like that. It’s downright sacrilegious. Let me tell you something, boy. My daddy headed this organization, and his daddy and his daddy before him. Each of them took a solemn oath to uphold the work against evil that Corbin Adams began, and they swore not to stop until the earth was cleansed of the demons from hell.”

“I know all of that, Granddad. That’s the speech you used to

## *ENEMY MINE*

convince me to go on this damn insane mission. I—”

“I took that same oath,” Will continued, cutting him off before he could finish his defense. “And by God, I intend to abide by it. I expect you to do the same.”

“I’m sorry, Granddad, but I can’t do that.”

Will slumped back into his chair, his wrinkled face going gray. “My God, where did I go wrong with you? Your stupidity has cost us years of hard work tracking that creature down. Hard work that will have to be done all over again because of your crazy actions.”

“It won’t have to be done again. Gabrielle Warlick is off our list as of right now.”

“On whose authority?”

Preston walked away from the desk. “Mine.”

Will snorted. “The hell you say, boy. No vampire comes off the list until he or she have been destroyed; that includes Gabrielle Warlick.”

“Then it will have to include me also, because I’m not about to allow any of you to destroy her.” His voice held a touch of menace he couldn’t conceal. He heard CeCe’s shocked gasp, but ignored it.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“She’s not like the others of her kind. She doesn’t take human life, so I see no reason to end her existence simply because of what she is.”

“My God, boy, she’s cast a spell on you. Can’t you see that? She used one of the oldest tricks her kind has at their disposal—seduction.”

Preston turned back to face his grandfather. “No, she didn’t, and I mean what I said. You will call off Cameron.”

Will cocked his head. “Or what? Are you threatening me, son?”

“I’m simply stating the facts. If you persist in this endeavor, I will walk out that door and never set foot inside the Folly again.”

“You are willing to cast off your family for the sake of one of those—abominable—monsters? Desecrate the memory of Corbin Adams? You would do such a thing?”

Preston refused to be swayed by the ache that had begun in his heart. He hadn’t known he would go so far, but now that he had, he didn’t regret it. “That’s exactly what I’m saying.”

Will got to his feet, his entire body trembling with rage. “Then so be it.” His voice was harsh.

“No, you can’t—” CeCe protested, her thin, high voice quavering

## *ENEMY MINE*

with distress.

Will swung around to glare at her. "I'm head of this family. I can do whatever I think is necessary to preserve our mission." He shot his grandson a bleak look. "Even if that means one of our own goes over to the enemy. From the very beginning of our fight against evil, there has never been a male Adams who shirked his God-given duty. I should have suspected you would; you have a Goddamned bleeding-heart attitude like your mother. I always knew you'd turn out like her. I tried to warn your father before he married her that she couldn't accept what we did, but he wouldn't listen."

Preston stiffened at the contempt in his grandfather's voice. "Leave my mother out of it. She has nothing to do with this."

"Damned if I will," Will snorted. "If not for her influence, you could have been as good a hunter as your brother. If I hadn't stepped in when I did, she would have ruined Cameron, too, with her bleeding-heart talk. You were so young. I thought I had time to remove you from her influence before it was too late. Now I know I was wrong."

Preston stepped forward, his hands balled into fists at his sides.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“My mother was a good woman, Granddad. You broke her heart when you stuck Cameron in training. She cried herself to sleep every night after that. And when you did the same to me a few years later, it killed her.”

“She was weak—too weak to be an Adams. My son should never have married her.”

Preston reached over the wide desk and gripped his grandfather by his shirt collar.

CeCe grabbed his arm in a desperate grip. “No—he doesn’t know what he’s saying.”

“I know perfectly well what I’m saying,” Will said, giving her an angry glare. “I’m not senile. So go ahead, boy, hit me. Perhaps that will bring you to your senses.”

Preston forced back the red tide of anger. He wasn’t going to let his grandfather goad him into a fight, do something he’d regret later. “I think not, Granddad.” With that, he turned on his heel and walked out of the study.

He was halfway to the front door when he felt CeCe tug at his

## *ENEMY MINE*

sleeve. “Please don’t go like this, Preston,” she pleaded. Two fat teardrops ran down her pinched face.

He leaned down and hugged her. “I’m sorry, CeCe, you’re the last person I want to hurt, but I have to do this. Somebody has to put a stop to the killing.”

“Why does it have to be you?” she asked through tears.

“There is no one else to do it,” he said with a bleak smile.

“I can’t bear to lose you the way I lost your dear mother. Please reconsider, Preston. Surely, this creature is not worth losing your family over.”

He gently pulled away from her. “I’m not dead, CeCe. I’m just going away.”

“You might as well be dead,” CeCe said miserably. “He’ll send Cameron after you and Gabrielle. He’s trained your brother well. I’m afraid that if you get in his way ...”

“He’ll sacrifice me for the good of the cause,” he finished for her, putting his arm around her narrow shoulders. “CeCe, I know the risks, and I’m more than ready to take them. I’ll be ready for Cameron, or

## *ENEMY MINE*

any of the others he might send.”

“Is she really worth alienating your family?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“I don’t understand.” CeCe sadly shook her head.

Preston touched her cheek. “I don’t either, but I know what I have to do.”

CeCe shoulders slumped in resignation. She reached up and kissed his jaw. “May God keep you safe.” She watched with sad eyes as she stepped outside to see him drive away, his automobile’s wide tires kicking up a spray of gravel. “From your own brother ...” she added in a whisper.

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Dawn was just a few hours away when Preston walked into the bedroom. Gabrielle took one look at his face and knew the news was not good. “How did it go with your Grandfather?”

“Badly. It didn’t go the way I expected. But then again, I’m not exactly sure what I did expect from someone so hardheaded and opinionated.” He sat on the edge of the bed. “The man just can’t be

## *ENEMY MINE*

reasoned with when it comes to vampires.”

“I expected that. And you should have, too. You can’t change something in a matter of hours that has been going on for centuries, Preston.”

“But I thought maybe I could get him to listen. It was time someone questioned our profession.” He let out a tired sigh. “But he wouldn’t even try to understand.”

Gabrielle wanted to reach out and somehow erase the pain and exhaustion she saw in his face, but she resisted the urge. This was not the time to stir up emotions she didn’t understand or want to feel.

“What do we do now?” she asked quietly.

Preston leaned forward and rubbed the back of his neck. “Well, I don’t know about you, but I have to get some sleep. I feel like I haven’t slept for a week. Later, when the sun sets, we go back on the road.”

“We keep running.”

“That’s the idea, unless you can come up with something better.” He stood abruptly. “I have a hunch my brother won’t be far behind.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle could feel the blood drain from her face. “Do you think he already knows where we are?”

Preston shook his head. “I don’t think so—although on the drive back I had the feeling I was being tailed. I wouldn’t put it past my grandfather to have me followed so that Cameron can just pick us off one at a time at his leisure.”

Cold sickness clasped at her insides. No matter how far they ran, it would never be far enough. The hunters would run them into the ground, and she knew it. So did Preston, from the look on his face. “Your brother’s going to come after us, isn’t he?”

His eyes took on a bleakness that frightened her.

“I wish it wasn’t true, but he will come. And he won’t stop until you’re dead.”

“Perhaps we’d better go now.” She struggled to sit up, moaning as the terry cloth of her robe rubbed against the sores on her back.

He pushed her down with a gentle hand. “We’re not going anywhere. You need some time to heal, and I need some sleep. It’s going to take Cameron time to get back from his last assignment. We

## *ENEMY MINE*

can leave tonight and still have a head start.”

Gabrielle nervously bit her lip. “You can still get out of this, Preston. You don’t have to put your life on the line for me.”

“Hey, it’s my life.” He grinned. “I can’t think of any better use for it than to put it in on the line for a beautiful vampire. Anyway, what happened to your idea of keeping an eye on me? I am your enemy, after all. Remember?”

She frowned. “I still have doubts, Preston, especially about why you’re doing this. But ulterior motive or not, I don’t want you getting hurt because of me. Get off this crazy ride before it’s too late.”

Preston studied her for a long, drawn-out moment. “No, I signed on for the duration. We’re in this together, Gabrielle. I won’t be a party to wholesale killing any longer.” He walked to the door, then turned to look at her. “I’m going to bed. Get some sleep, kiddo. You’re going to need it.”

## *CHAPTER 7*

After Preston had left the room, Gabrielle lay on the bed watching the shadows play across the wall. Her thoughts circled and tangled as she tried to figure a way out of this mess. Even though she hadn't really believed Preston could convince his grandfather to back off, she still had secretly hoped he could pull it off.

But he had tried, and she had to admit she was more than surprised he had even made an attempt. All day she'd expected to be stormed by vampire hunters, with Preston leading the pack. Could it be possible that he was genuine in his concern for her? He gave every indication that he was sincere, and that he ... she tried to sort out her feelings about him. They were just as tangled as everything else in her life.

## *ENEMY MINE*

Vampires did not fall in love with humans ... it was an impossibility. Or was it? God's teeth! She was so confused she didn't know up from down, much less how she felt about a man she wasn't suppose to feel anything for.

Things couldn't possibly get any worse.

But then the shadows shifted, and she knew they could get much worse. *Oh God, they have already found me.* Her eyes widened in fear. She scrambled off the bed, crying out in pain as the scabs on her back tore away at her sudden movement.

"Take it easy, my love," a familiar voice said. He stepped into the pool of dim light filtering from the bathroom. He had the features of an angel, hence his name. His hair was as dark as her own; his eyes burned like green ice at the bottom of a glacier.

Time had done nothing to fade his looks. He was more than five hundred years old, but he didn't look a day over twenty-five.

Just one of the advantages of being a creature of the night, she thought with a wry smile. None of her kind ever mentioned the heartache of living for centuries, living off the blood of humans, while

## *ENEMY MINE*

your loved ones died and turned to dust. A high price to pay for immortality, she thought. But who cared what she thought.

She relaxed, slumping back onto the bed, wincing as the nubby material of the borrowed robe scratched at her reopened wounds. “You really shouldn’t sneak up on people, Angel. It’s a very unattractive trait in a vampire.”

He looked offended. “I beg your pardon. I do not sneak up on anybody. I just prefer to keep my presence unknown until I know if any enemies may be lurking.”

She hid a smile behind her hand. “I’m glad to see my warning kept you from becoming another notch on Cameron’s stake.”

One dark brow shot upward. “I suppose I have your champion to thank for that.”

Gabrielle sighed at the skepticism in his voice. Angel would never change. He never accepted anything at face value. But from what little he’d told her about his past, she couldn’t really blame him for being so distrustful of humans and their motives.

“How did you find me, Angel?” she asked, shifting to her side to

## *ENEMY MINE*

relieve the soreness in her back.

“You have been too long out of the fold if you must ask such a question,” he chided gently. “There is nowhere you can go where I can’t find you. You are my creation—my child. We are bonded, you and I. You are a part of me.”

Gabrielle rubbed the sides of her temple. “I haven’t forgotten, Angel. But there are times I wished you had let me die that night in the hut.”

Angel looked appalled. “God’s teeth, woman. How can you say such a thing? I couldn’t leave you to die in that filthy hovel. You had the voice of an angel, and you were so damn beautiful, even with the specter of death nearby to claim you. I had no other option but to snatch you from the jaws of death.”

“I’m sorry, Angel. I had no right to say that. You did indeed save me from a horrible death.” She looked up at him. “It’s just that right now I’m having a difficult time of it. What with the Adams’s contract out on me and also on you, and then having to leave my home ... I’m really a bit confused ...”

## *ENEMY MINE*

Angel sat next to her on the bed. He took her hand into his and raised her hand to his mouth, gently kissing it. "Your confusion wouldn't have anything to do with a certain hunter, would it?"

"I see the old network is working as well as ever," she remarked in a bitter tone.

"With the present crisis, you should be glad it does. Brandy was killed last night by one of your hunter's cousins." His eyes darkened with emotion. "If not for your warning, I, too, would be dead."

Momentarily forgetting her injuries, she jumped up and paced the floor in front of him. The blood pounded in her veins at the thought of poor Brandy dying. Brandy had been a light-hearted creature who couldn't even kill a fly, which had never set well with the others, but Gabrielle had liked her and enjoyed her company. Her life had been snuffed out simply because of what she was, not what she did. Brandy was another of the good ones.

Gabrielle stopped dead in her tracks and spun around to face him. "When is it going to end, Angel? Why don't they see we are not all the same? Must we all die to satisfy those savages? Will they not be happy

## *ENEMY MINE*

with anything less than complete annihilation of our kind?”

He shrugged his slender shoulders. “That is their agenda. They care not whether we do evil. Each generation of hunters seems more vicious than the last. But for the most part we do keep ahead of them. I’m just not sure we can continue to do so. They want only to destroy us, no matter what.”

Gabrielle went to the window, peeking out between the gaps of plank that covered the glass. She couldn’t help but remember Preston’s touch, his concern for her welfare. At first, she’d been convinced he was faking it, but now ...

“Except for one,” Gabrielle uttered softly.

Angel came up behind her, placing his hand on her shoulder. “Oh yes, your champion. Preston is why I am here.”

Gabrielle turned to face him, fighting the surge of apprehension that welled up inside her. “What do you mean?”

“The tribunal has called a meeting.” He lowered his eyes to the patterned carpet. “I’m to bring you to them.”

“What do they want with me?” she asked, tilting her head to the

side.

Angel let out a heavy sigh. "Cheroe is up in arms about the resurgence of attacks against us." Angel hesitated. "He wants to put a stop to it."

"Go on. What does that have to do with me?"

Again he hesitated as if searching for the right words. "The network has linked you with Preston Adams. The council is bringing charges of treason against you."

Gabrielle gasped. "Treason. You can't be serious."

Angel nodded, a look of misery on his face.

"God's teeth," she cried, unconsciously using the ancient expression Angel himself had used earlier. "I may be a lot of things, but I would never betray my people. Don't they know that?"

"How could they? For the last two hundred years you have kept to yourself, living a hermit-like existence. Except for myself, Serene and Artimus, and a select few others, no one else has had much contact with you."

"You know why—"

## ENEMY MINE

Angel nodded. “Yes, and so do they, Gabrielle. But they don’t understand it any more than I. The Blood War took place two hundred years ago. Damon is dead and nothing can bring him back, my love. It’s time to let the past go.”

“I can’t do that,” she muttered, thinking of Damon lying in a pool of blood. Pain ripped at the center of her being. *Oh Damon, how much I loved you. I would give almost anything to have you by my side right now.*

She looked at Angel, tears stinging the back of her eyelids. “For you and the others, the war happened in the past—for me, it’s still happening in my dreams.”

Angel shook his head. “Will you come with me?”

She nodded absently. “I’ll go.”

He started for the door.

“Angel?”

He turned back.

“I can’t fly anymore,” she whispered.

He smiled a smile that illuminated his fine features. “I’ll do the

## *ENEMY MINE*

flying for both of us, my love.”

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“Gabrielle Warlick, you have been accused of treason. How do you plead?” Cheroe intoned in his gravel voice. His eyes were solemn as he gazed down at her.

She bit her lip, feeling butterflies scraping her insides. She looked around the cavernous room filled with her peers. The meeting was being held in an abandoned theater, a strange place for her fate to be decided, she thought. A sense of sadness came over her as her gaze wandered over her surroundings. The peeling plaster and shredded red velvet curtains were the last remaining remnants of a building that once held a place in people’s hearts.

Once, this place had been alive, a spot where young boys brought their girls and mothers brought their children to see the Saturday matinee. But it had been put out of business by the appearance of VCRs and video stores. Progress had finally caught up with the theater and left it in the dust. Despair and desolation permeated from its very walls. Much like her own.

## *ENEMY MINE*

Now it lay silent—dead—no longer any use to the people who had once loved coming to see its weekly offerings of favorite movies. She felt a certain kinship with the old building, for didn't she face the same fate? Somehow, she had to prove her innocence. She just wasn't sure how to go about doing it.

The auditorium was packed downstairs, as was the gallery overhead, faces staring at her without compassion, already convicting her before she'd had a chance to defend herself. She trembled, despite her resolve not to show her uncertainty, her fear. She spotted three friendly faces—Angel, Serene and her dear old friend Artimus—and her despair lifted slightly. Most of the others she'd known and loved were now dead, killed by hunters. These three were all that were left who meant anything to her.

Gabrielle dredged up her courage from deep inside her and turned back to her judges. With her friends behind her, she could do anything, even face a courtroom full of her peers who believed she'd betrayed them with their enemy.

She proudly held her head, returning Cheroe's steady gaze with one

## *ENEMY MINE*

of her own. “Not guilty.”

A hushed murmuring rose in the air.

Cheroe banged his gavel until silence reigned once more. He frowned, his baldpate shining in the harsh florescent lights. “Then how do you explain your alliance with Preston Adams?”

“He made the first contact with me. He warned me that he had been sent to destroy me. Instead he helped me escape.”

“Impossible,” Cheroe exploded. “Never has an Adams done such a thing for any of us. It must be a trick.”

Gabrielle shook her head. “I beg to differ, sir. He has had many opportunities to slay me. Why has he not done so by now?”

“Perhaps he is waiting for the right moment,” Linus, the judge on Cheroe’s right, remarked.

“Or waiting for her to reveal the locations of our sanctuaries.” The judge on his left put in. Gabrielle didn’t know him. A recent newcomer from Europe, she suspected, upon hearing his heavily-accented English.

She fixed her gaze on the newcomer. “He has not asked for such

## *ENEMY MINE*

information, and rest assured: if he did, I would not reveal it.”

“How do we know this to be true?” Cheroe inquired. “Have you not shunned our ways, and lived in isolation for nigh on two centuries? Why should we believe you?”

“That is true, and it is your choice whether to believe me or not,” she agreed. “But because I choose to live my life alone does not mean I’d betray my brethren.” Her expression hardened. “For reasons I do not wish to discuss here, I renounced our way of life, vowing never to partake of human blood again. I stand by that decision, but it does not make me a traitor.”

Cheroe’s beady eyes narrowed. “What evidence can you produce to support your claim?”

Gabrielle drew herself up to her full height of five-foot-three. “Nothing but my word, sir.”

“That is not enough,” he declared with a bang of his gavel to punctuate his emphatic statement.

Angel, his eyes glittering with anger, stepped forward. “You also have my word.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle heard a gasp from the onlookers. It was rare for Angel to back anyone. He was one of the peacekeepers, someone the judges often used to go after vampires that had turned rogue. Although nobody would speak about it, it was common knowledge among her kind that, when a vampire went mad, he often killed without discrimination. His need for blood became enormous, bringing the increased wrath of the hunters upon all their heads.

It put all of them at risk; hence the idea of peacekeepers was born. Angel had tried to get her to become one, but she knew she didn't have what it took to do the job. Killing her own kind, even if they deserved it, was just as atrocious to her as killing humans. She wanted none of it.

Artimus and Serene, both wearing mutinous expressions, moved to join him. "Ours, too," they echoed.

Gabrielle turned away from the dais and sent her friends a warm smile. They, too, were peacekeepers, and to have their loyalty was very special indeed. Artimus, still wearing a monk-type garment of yesteryear, smiled back at her and gave her a thumbs-up signal.

## ENEMY MINE

Serene, her red-gold hair framing her pixie face in a most charming manner, winked at her.

Gabrielle's gaze fell on Angel, the last of her staunch supporters. He also gave her a thumbs-up. It was good to have loyal friends such as these, she thought, turning back to face her accusers.

She may have few friends, but the ones she had were the best anyone could hope for. It was a thought that kept her from panicking.

"I don't believe we should take anybody's word on this matter. Gabrielle Warlick should be executed without delay to protect us all."

Angel sharply whirled around. The fire of anger flickered in the depths of his green eyes. Gabrielle reached out to touch his arm, but Angel shook her off and stepped toward Thaddeus.

"We all know how you work, Thaddeus. Your reputation for killing rogues, and *then* asking questions, is something with which we are all familiar." Angel cocked his head to the side. "How many times have you been pulled in front of the council for your rather unorthodox behavior?"

Thaddeus scowled. "I am not the one on trial here, Angel. Your slut

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is, and I, for one, think we should eliminate the danger she presents to our society and be done with it.”

The murmuring of the crowd swelled, and a sick sinking sensation rocked Gabrielle’s stomach. She noted the majority was nodding their heads, agreeing with Thaddeus.

Artimus and Serene’s expressions reflected her heart-wrenching fear, and she knew if the onlookers turned ugly, her friends would also die, trying to protect her from their wrath.

Gabrielle watched numbly as a dark frown gathered like a thundercloud across Angel’s brow. “Who in Hades died and made you head of our tribunal, Thaddeus? You are a peacekeeper. You have no say in how this matter should be resolved.”

“Nor do you,” Thaddeus shot back. “I say we leave the bitch to die in the first light of dawn.”

A chill trickled down Gabrielle’s neck as several voices rose in agreement. Artimus and Serene moved closer to her, enfolding her into a protective circle. They warily eyed the crowd.

Angel stepped toward Thaddeus, his fists clenched by his sides.

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“Why you—”

Cheroe slammed down his gavel. “Enough—I will have no more of this infantile behavior between my peacekeepers. This is a decision for the tribunal to make, not you, Angel—nor you, Thaddeus.” He frowned at the two vampires. “I want order in my court or I’ll clear the room.”

Both men nodded reluctantly.

“Good.” Cheroe leaned over to confer in a whispered voice, first with the judge on his right and then the one on his left. He straightened, an unreadable expression on his features. “This tribunal is declaring a recess for one hour. We will reassemble at the stroke of midnight.” With that, he and the others filed off the stage.

Gabrielle relaxed visibly. It was over for now, but the worst was yet to come. Would they sentence her to death? As far as she knew only one vampire who had not gone rogue had ever been sentenced to die by the hand of their peers, and that was before her time.

Angel had mentioned it on the way over as they had rode the back of the night wind. A coil of coldness had wrapped itself around her as

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Angel told her the tale. He'd wanted only for her to realize the seriousness of the charges against her. To be prepared. But all she could think about was she could be the second one.

Gabrielle felt a hand on her shoulder, and turned to face Angel and the others.

"Hang in there, kid," Serene said, snapping her gum with a loud crackle.

Gabrielle grinned, despite herself, when she took in what her friend was wearing. Before, her mind had been fully on the trial, so she'd paid little attention.

Now, she studied her friend with amusement. Serene had fallen in love with the time of the gangster era. She was dressed in a tight, green satin dress that clung to her body in all the right places. With high spiked heels and dangling earrings to complete the outfit, she was the perfect picture of a gangster's moll. She clung to the trappings with a passion that surprised both people who didn't know her and some who did. But not Gabrielle.

"I'm trying," she finally answered. "But it's not easy. I just hope

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they believe me.”

Artimus patted her on the back with a nervous gesture.

“They just don’t understand, is all. They weren’t there when the Blood War occurred.” His head bobbed up and down. “If they knew what we had to go through to stay alive, they’d sing a different song, I assure you.”

“The Blood War?” Serene cast an inquiring glance at Gabrielle. “You never told me you were there!”

The smile left her face. “It’s not something I like to talk about or want to remember.”

“That doesn’t matter now,” Angel put in impatiently, giving the other two a warning look. “What does matter, however, is what we are going to do if the verdict goes against Gabrielle.”

Serene put her hands on her hips. “Listen, doll, I don’t know about the two of you, but I’m not about to stand by and let these old geezers issue a buddy of mine a pair of cement shoes.”

“God’s teeth, Serene,” Angel exploded, his sensuous features twisting with annoyance. “Can’t you speak like the rest of us? Cement

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shoes indeed. What if one of us has to carry out the sentence?”

Serene glared at him. “I won’t do it.”

Artimus looked shocked. “Neither will I.”

Gabrielle shook her head. “Please.” She let out a feeble laugh. “I don’t think I can listen to anymore. I’m frightened enough as it is.”

“Let’s not talk about it now,” Serene said, giving her friend a worried look.

Artimus put his arm around Gabrielle shoulders. “She’s right, fighting among ourselves won’t help our Gabrielle. Now, the most important issue is we have to stand united, or else we will fail to help our dear friend.”

Gabrielle nodded in agreement, but, in her heart, she wondered if anyone could save her if a “guilty” verdict was handed down. There were other peacekeepers that would have no compunction in carrying out any sentence the judges handed down ...

She felt a tightening in her spine, a growing sense of apprehension at the thought.

The hour seemed to drag by, and when the judges filed back in,

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Gabrielle was more than ready. The suspense of not knowing what awaited her was unbearable. She was tired, her back and arms hurt. She just wanted to get it over with so she could leave. A cold chill washed over her. That is, if she was allowed to leave.

Cheroe waited for the court to settle down before he called for order. He cleared his throat, peering at the paper in front of him.

“Gabrielle Warlick, we have been unable to come to an agreement about whether you are guilty of treason.” A surprised murmuring swelled from the onlookers.

He fiercely glared at them, banging his gavel for silence. When at last the room was quiet, he lay down the gavel and picked up the paper. “Therefore, we have decided to test your loyalty. If you pass our test, the charges will be dismissed. It is the judgment of this court that you carry out the sentence of execution against the vampire hunter known as Preston Adams.”

The room seemed to sway sickeningly. Gabrielle, reeling with shock, stepped back involuntarily. Kill Preston Adams? How could they ask her to take the life of the man who had risked everything to

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save her own? Or take any life, for that matter? She would not ... could not do as they wanted ... not now ... not ever.

“Do you agree to our stipulation?” Cheroe asked.

She tried to speak, tell them she was not going to commit murder for them, but she couldn’t get the words past the lump in her throat.

“She agrees,” Angel said, stepping forward to stand by her side. He caught up her hand, squeezing it hard, warning her not to say anything to damage her case.

Cheroe leaned forward with a frown. “Then why doesn’t she say so herself?”

“Gabrielle is so overcome with emotion that you would trust her with such an important mission, she is understandably speechless,” Angel said in his smooth manner.

Gabrielle opened her mouth to deny the nonsense of his words. But Angel seemed to sense her intention and increased the pressure on her hand until she thought the bones would break from his stranglehold. She winced and tried to pull away, but he wouldn’t let go.

Wisely, she decided to refrain from comment. But no matter what

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Angel said, she would not—could not—kill Preston Adams ... or could she?

\* \* \*

An hour later, Angel gently sat her down in front of the beach house. He shuddered at the sight of the white-crested breakers rolling in from the sea. “God’s teeth, woman. Couldn’t the man find a better hideaway?”

“He thought it would be more difficult to find us if we stayed here, by the ocean. The hunters know we don’t like being near the sea.”

“Do you really trust your hunter that much?”

She looked past him, her gaze wandering across the moonlit waters. “I don’t want to, but for some odd reason I do. In some ways, I feel like we have always known each other.” Her gaze left the sea and fixed on his face. She let out a tiny, forced laugh. “Strange, huh?”

“Very. My advice is to tread softly, my love. A hunter can be devious. Watch your back.”

“He’s a good man, Angel.”

He gently touched her hair and smiled a smile that didn’t quite

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reach his eyes. “I know, my sweet. He would have to be for you to trust him with your life. I don’t think I could trust any human that much—especially not an Adams. I just hope you’re not making a mistake, Gabrielle. It could cost you your life.”

Miserable and confused, she leaned into him. “Oh, Angel, what am I going to do?”

“You should do what the tribunal commanded you to do,” Angel said, his voice matter-of-fact.

Gabrielle closed her eyes against his cruel words. “I can’t.”

With a weary sigh, Angel crossed his arms around her. “I know that, too. Nevertheless, I don’t know of any other way to convince the others that you are still one of us in heart, if not by actions. I’m afraid for you, Gabrielle. Not only will you have the hunters after you, you will also have your own kind seeking to destroy you.”

“I have not killed a human since before the Blood War. I don’t want to kill one now ... not even to save my own life.”

Angel cupped her chin and tilted her head. He gazed deeply into her eyes. “Is it you don’t want to kill humans, or is it you don’t want to kill

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Preston Adams?”

“Does it matter?”

“I suppose not.” He released her chin with a soulful sigh. “I will do what I can to protect you from the others, but I can’t make any promises.” He leaned down to kiss her cheek. “The sun will be up soon. I must go if I wish to reach my new sanctuary before the dawn.” He paused for a moment, an uncertain expression flitting across his features. “There is one thing you might do to salvage the situation.”

Gabrielle could feel the hope rising in her breast. “What’s that?”

“Make him one of us.”

Her glimmer of hope splintered. She trembled visibly. “You know that’s impossible. I can’t do that to him.”

“Then leave him. Come with me. You know I will keep you safe.”

Gabrielle shook her head. “I can’t do that either. I gave him my word, and I won’t break it.”

“You owe him no allegiance, Gabrielle.”

She wrapped her arms around herself against the chill of the night air. “But I do. He saved our lives, Angel. I owe him something.”

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Angel nodded. “It was only a thought. Good-bye for now, sweet Gabrielle.” He gave her a smile and misted, disappearing before she could respond.

She felt heaviness in her spirit as she went into the dark beach house. She knew Angel didn’t understand, but he loved her enough to respect her decisions.

Gabrielle made ready for bed, and as she slid between the cool, cotton sheets, she thought about Preston. What would he say if he knew she’d been ordered to take his life? Would he still want her by his side?

## *CHAPTER 8*

“Oh God no ...” she moaned. She was back in the great hall with Artimus, surrounded by torn bodies ... ripples of crimson swirled around her feet. Her head jerked upward, her nape prickling with a sense of menace. The voices coming from the corridor were growing louder.

“May God have mercy on our souls,” Artimus whispered, crossing himself. He was a vampire who believed himself to be damned. Gabrielle, however, knew he’d never forgotten his training as a man of God. She hoped it kept him in good stead now and gave him comfort in these last moments of life.

The roughly clothed villagers burst into the room, bearing their

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brightly-lit torches in one hand, and in the other, stakes made of ash wood sharpened to a deadly point.

“There’s two more of them,” one of them shouted.

Before Gabrielle could move, they were on her like leeches. She struggled against the unyielding hands that held her prisoner, calling forth her supernatural strength, but there were too many of them.

A cold dark numbness settled into the pit of her stomach as the leader raised his wooden shaft. She closed her eyes to the sight of the hate and fear she saw in his coarse-featured face.

“What are you waiting for, Adams?” one of the men sneered. “Do it, or else get out of the way and let a real man do the deed.”

The crowd’s voice rose in agreement. The hatred they felt for Gabrielle and Artimus was almost palpable. Sickness rolled over her in a dark wave. To be hated so much ... it was unbearable.

Summoning up her courage, she resolved to die with dignity. The way she knew her beloved had died. She could do no less than he could.

Gabrielle opened her eyes, regarding her executioner with a steady

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gaze. He would not see her grovel for her life. *We will be together soon, my love.* She smiled at the thought.

Her would-be executioner uttered a muffled curse, then raised the stake high above her head.

“No ...” a voice roared from the stone archway.

Gabrielle whipped her head around. She caught her breath in awed wonderment.

Angel stood in the wide arched doorway, an avenging dark archangel bent on total destruction. Behind him gathered another dozen or more of their brethren, all prepared to do battle.

Angel’s black cloak swirled around him; his eyes burned with fury. In one hand he wielded a silver sword which he used expertly against her captors. He cut a path to her side, pushing Gabrielle behind him.

Damon came next and tossed the dumbfounded Artimus a sword.

The battle reached a high-fevered pitch, but her avenging angel never faltered. Human after human went down under the glistening blade of his sword.

Gabrielle moaned aloud as more carnage was added to the chamber.

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More humans piled into the room, shouting their vengeful war cries. *Oh, merciful God, would it never end? How many more would die before this insane war was over?*

Rough hands came at her from the side. She screamed in terror. Angel spun about with a ferocious expression, ripping the intruder away from her.

Blood splattered her face as Angel's weapon drove into the man's heart. The life-giving substance her kind needed to live, she thought dazedly. Now, the very sight of it filled her with horror. "No, no ... enough. Please, no more killing ... no more must die ..." she screamed.

Without warning, the hellish scene melted away.

Gabrielle felt warm, steel-muscled arms wrapping around her, holding her close, strong hands stroking her back, drawing her out of the nightmare and back to the present.

"Shh ... I'm here," a voice muttered, reassuring her.

Damon's voice, Gabrielle thought, a sense of overwhelming joy filled her to overflowing. It had been a dream ... nothing more. It was

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impossible, but he was here by her side.

Gabrielle felt his lips touch hers and her mouth opened, welcoming him. His tongue explored the softness of her mouth, sending spirals of ecstasy through her.

She opened her eyes, hungry for the sight of him.

Her eyes widened in shock. She pulled away with a gasp. “Preston ...” Gabrielle scrambled to the bottom of the bed. She eyed him warily. “What do you think you’re doing? How dare you try and take advantage of me while I’m sleeping?”

Preston held up his hands. “Hey, relax, Gabrielle. I only came in here because you were screaming in your sleep. I was trying to wake you up.”

She stared at him in disbelief. “By kissing me?”

He grinned that irresistible grin. Her heart lurched wildly. “You kissed me, and I sure as hell wasn’t going to push you away. Besides, my mother always told me never to wake somebody up when they’re sleepwalking.”

“I wasn’t sleepwalking.”

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Preston shrugged, his grin grew wider. "Same difference."

She shoved her hair out of her eyes, feeling disoriented and confused. "I—I must have been dreaming. I thought you were someone else."

"Damon?"

She gaped. "How do you know about him?"

"It would be hard not to, since you kept screaming his name in your sleep. Must have been one helluva dream."

She shifted uneasily on the bed. "Yes—uh—let's talk about something else, okay?"

"We don't have time." He glanced at his watch. "The sun's gone down and we need to leave. I don't want them catching us unaware. We have to keep moving."

Preston stood, remembering the heady sensation of her full lips against his. He pushed away the memory with great difficulty. He needed to keep in mind the differences between them. But it was damned hard when she appeared to be so human.

"I'll wait for you in the car," he muttered, leaving before he gave in

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to his desire to kiss her once more—hold Gabrielle close—make love to her. Christ, he needed time to get himself together.

After he left, Gabrielle rushed to throw on her clothes. She pushed back the memory of his warm lips upon hers ... the feel of his hands on her body. Gabrielle tried to tell herself it was only a kiss, and didn't mean anything, but a tiny part of her knew it wasn't true. It *had* meant something. The kiss had set off fireworks of explosions inside her. Whether she wanted to admit it or not, this human meant more to her than she cared to acknowledge.

She stumbled as the blood lust swept over her; a burning rose in the back of her throat as the hunger writhed inside of her like a caged animal. It swept all reasonable thoughts aside as it tried to take hold. She made her way to the cooler Preston had placed in the corner when they had first arrived.

Gabrielle tore into it with an urgency that disgusted her, but she couldn't ignore the gnawing hunger. If only it were possible to ignore it, she thought, drinking from the cool plastic container. The burning eased off, the biting need inside of her blunted to a dull edge ... for

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now.

Neither of them spoke when Gabrielle joined him in the car a few minutes later, and, with a squeal of car tires, Preston swung onto the moonlit highway.

“Where are we going?” she finally asked.

“For now, a shabby pawnshop on the outskirts of town. It’s right off the highway, and I know the owner. I think he’ll give us a decent price for your silver pretties.”

“And later?”

“Down the coast.” An unreadable expression flickered in his blue eyes. “I have to locate a safe sanctuary for us. One that my family can’t trace.”

Gabrielle touched his arm with a gentle hand. “Preston, you can’t hide me forever. They’ll find me soon enough, either this generation or the next, despite your efforts to the contrary.”

His jaw tightened into a hard knot. “It will give me more time to come up with a workable solution for this nightmare.”

Gabrielle tipped her head to the side. “And when the money runs

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out, what do we do? Obviously, we can't go back to my sanctuary for more valuables. And, no doubt, your family is already aware of my various financial holdings, so I can't contact my business manager."

"By then I should be able to get into my accounts. I don't have all the answers, Gabrielle," he snapped. "I wish I did. Right now, I can only think of getting through each day, and keeping you alive."

He pulled the car into an alley next to an ancient brick building that had seen better days.

"Wait in the car," he ordered in a brusque voice.

"I'm not about to sit out here and let you go into that disreputable joint without me."

He looked annoyed. "Okay, but let me do the talking."

"I wouldn't dream of interfering in your wheeling and dealing," she responded with an indulgent smile. "I know how you humans enjoy dickering with one another."

Gabrielle followed him inside the shop, her gaze sliding to the portable television sets, radios, VCRs, camcorders and computer systems stacked in no apparent order on long, gray metal tables. On

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the shelves that ran the length of the store, every small item imaginable stood at attention.

“Some place your friend has here,” she whispered.

“I didn’t say we were friends. I said I knew him, that’s all.” His voice sounded defensive.

She shrugged. “Doesn’t that amount to the same thing?”

He gave her a sharp look. “There’s a world of difference between the two.”

A short man with a bushy red beard came toward them, his hand outstretched in welcome. “Preston, it’s been a long time.”

Preston took the proffered hand with a polite smile on his lips. “Yes, it has. Did the police catch the other punk who broke in here last fall?”

The man shook his head. “I’m sorry to say it, but no. The one you caught wouldn’t talk either, so they sent him to the state pen. He’ll be there for the next ten years, I can tell you.”

Amazed, Gabrielle stared at Preston with rounded eyes. “You fouled a robbery attempt?”

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“It was nothing,” he said, a dull red creeping up his neck and spreading into his lean features.

The man stared, his gaze incredulous. “Nothing? Why, if you hadn’t happened along that night, I might not be around today to tell the story. Anytime you need a favor, pal, Eric Greene is at your service.”

Preston, apparently shaking off his embarrassment, grinned and put an arm around the top of Eric’s shoulders, leading him to the back of the store. “Now that you mentioned it, I do have one little request. I have a few items I think you might be interested in.” He glanced back at Gabrielle with a wink.

She couldn’t help but smile. She just hoped he was as good at wheeling and dealing as he let on.

Thirty minutes later, money and silver exchanged hands, and Preston escorted her out the door with a self-satisfied smile on his face.

“I gather you made a good deal in there,” she remarked casually.

“You could say that,” he said in a smug tone. “Suffice it to say that

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we can live fairly well on the dividends for a while. And just as soon as I possibly can, I'll be back to rebuy them for you."

"You don't have to do that, Preston. They're not that important to me."

He opened her car door. "I want to, Gabrielle. Come on, let's get out of here. I know a greasy spoon where they serve up the best rare burgers you've ever tasted."

She started to laugh at his obvious bad pun, then her laughter died in her throat. Ice trickled down the length of her backbone as her preternatural senses screeched a warning.

*They were in danger.*

Gabrielle stiffened, then turned to Preston with a sense of urgency. But before she could warn him, another voice boomed out of the night.

"Hold it right there, dear brother." The command came from the dark, shadowy depths of the alleyway.

Gabrielle straightened slowly, her nerve endings buzzing with apprehension. She needed no introduction to the stranger, for she knew he was none other than Cameron Adams—vampire hunter—the best

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the Adams family had to offer.

He stepped out of the darkness and into a pool of dirty light filtering from a side window of the pawnshop. Gabrielle noticed at once the similarities between the brothers. They both had blond hair the color of old gold coins, and compelling blue eyes that put her in mind of a small, crystal-blue lake in her mountains back home.

But that's where the resemblance ended. There was a cold harshness about Preston's brother that made her shudder in fear. He would give no quarter even to his own brother, she realized with sudden, horrifying clarity.

Preston whirled, his face white with shock. "Cameron ..."

Cameron Adams laughed a nasty sound. "Were you expecting someone else, perhaps?"

Preston looked almost defeated. Gabrielle's heart ached at the dullness that crept into his eyes. "No ... I suspected he would send you, instead of one of the others. How did you find us?"

Cameron laughed again, a menacing sound that grated along Gabrielle's nerve endings like a nail scraping across a chalkboard.

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“Never underestimate our grandfather’s abilities, brother. He put Jeremy on your tail before you had time to reach the highway.”

“Then why didn’t Jeremy take me out?”

An unholy light glittered in Cameron’s eyes. “I wanted that pleasure for myself. You’re my brother. It is my duty to take care of you in view of your defection from our ranks. But I’ll tell you what: if you will ease away from her slowly, I just might overlook your transgression. I’ll talk to Granddad, and I’m sure after a couple of months on probation, he’ll let you resume your duties.”

“No thanks, Cameron. I’m staying right here.”

Cameron’s gaze fell upon Gabrielle, his expression changing to one of lustful admiration. He smiled hungrily. “That’s what I thought you might say, and I certainly can see why you would change sides. She is indeed a beauty, but it’s no excuse for betraying us.”

Gabrielle’s skin crawled under his scrutiny and, for the first time in centuries, she wanted to kill a human being for the simple pleasure it would bring her to do so.

“So this is the infamous Gabrielle Warlick. My, my, brother mine. I

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applaud your taste in vampires. I can understand why you're so infatuated with her, but you should never have let her get under your skin. Perhaps after I dispatch you, she and I can have a little fun before I send her to hell after you."

A feeling of sick loathing rose in the back of her throat at the thought of this perverted monster touching her body. "I'd rather die," she spat, eyeing him with contempt.

His smile faded; his eyes became colder still. "And so you shall, my dear."

Suddenly, he swung a shiny metal instrument in front of him. Confused by its sudden appearance, she stumbled against Preston. It took her a moment to comprehend what she was seeing.

A cold chill swept over her when she realized he was holding a crossbow. Except it was unlike any she had ever seen, made of what appeared to be a lightweight aluminum.

But what really struck terror in her heart were the wooden-tipped arrows he pulled out from a backpack. If even one of those deadly arrows pierced her skin, she would die in her present weakened state.

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Involuntarily, her frantic eyes searched for a way out of the alley. As if anticipating her reactions, a black sedan pulled across the entrance leading into the narrow corridor.

Trapped; they were trapped like animals.

“Don’t do this, Cameron,” Preston said in a voice harsh with raw emotion. “For God’s sake, we’re brothers. Doesn’t that count for anything?”

Cameron positioned the crossbow before he shrugged with indifference. “It didn’t make any difference to you, brother, when you turned your back on your family for this whore of Satan.”

Cameron notched the arrow and, with a loud whooshing sound, it flew outward before Preston could say anything else.

Gabrielle wasn’t exactly sure what had happened. One second the arrow was coming straight at her with deadly precision, and the next, Preston was lying on top of her, crushing the very life from her body.

He uttered a curse under his breath, and then wrenched her from the ground, throwing her inside the car like a rag doll.

She quickly recovered her dazed wits, scrambling over the console

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and bucket seats so he could get in behind her.

*Thank God Preston had left the keys in the ignition*, she thought, turning the key and gunning the powerful engine to life.

She couldn't see any sign of Cameron in front of the car, so she surmised that he'd either retreated or Preston had somehow put him out of commission. But there remained one obstacle in their path. Jeremy and the sedan.

With a grim smile at Preston, she deliberately stroked the gear stick into reverse, simultaneously shoving the gas pedal to the floor. She cringed as the back end of the car crashed into the side of the sedan with a resounding grind of steel meeting steel. She heard the tinkle of glass shattering in the distance, but she didn't let up off the gas.

Groaning like a prehistoric beast in mortal agony, the other vehicle relinquished its position and she shot past it, gaining the upper hand.

She dimly heard shouts of anger, and was aware of other humans appearing on the sidewalk with expressions of stunned amazement.

She could only grin in triumph as the car cleared the wreckage. Tires smoking in protest, she whipped the car into drive, racing off

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into the crisp autumn night.

A sense of exhilaration surged through her veins as the wind from the open window danced through her hair.

“We did it, Preston. We beat him,” she declared in a voice threaded with excitement.

He didn’t answer.

“Preston?” she repeated, taking her eyes from the road to look at him. “Oh my God—you’re hurt,” she gasped, taking in the wide, spreading stain on the front of his shirt. But he couldn’t hear her ... he had lost consciousness. A shiny metal arrow buried halfway to its shaft protruded from his wound.

She reached out a shaky hand and detected a shallow pulse in his neck. Thank God, he was alive. She debated whether she should take him to the nearest hospital. But just as she made the decision to do so, he opened his eyes and spoke: “No hospital. Cameron will come after us. Don’t stop until we have to,” he murmured in a voice thick with pain. His eyes closed again.

She gave him a startled glance, wondering how he knew her

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thoughts. She impatiently shook her head. That didn't matter. What was important was getting him somewhere safe so she could tend to his injury.

"Hang in there, Preston," she muttered. "The battle may have ended, but the war has just begun."

\* \* \*

It was all Gabrielle could do to keep her mind on the road when her attention was focused on Preston. Preston wasn't doing well. In fact, she feared he might die as she watched his life's blood ebbing from his injury with each passing mile.

But she knew she had to get some distance between her and the hunters, or else she wouldn't be around to help Preston.

Frequently, as the mileage on the speedometer ticked by, she checked her rearview mirror for signs of anyone following them. But they were alone on the isolated highway.

After a couple of hours and a hundred miles down the coastline, she spotted a side road leading off the highway. In the sweep of her headlights she saw a large pink sign, proclaiming the Pelican Motel as

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the best little getaway on the entire eastern seaboard. The perfect place to hole up, she thought. At least for a couple of days, until Preston was able to travel.

Gabrielle drove for another five miles on badly cracked pavement before the motel loomed ahead of her. She grimaced as she pulled into the wide asphalt drive, underneath the garish pink sign depicting a giant pelican surrounded by blinking lights. Not a five-star hotel, but it would do for her purpose.

Money! Damn, she couldn't get a room without money. Frantically, she searched the car until she found it buried under Preston's seat.

She gave him a worried glance before she opened the door and slid out. She took a deep breath and fixed a smile on her lips before entering the tiny motel office.

An elderly man with bifocals, wearing a gray sweater patched on the elbows, came from the back when she rang the bell.

"What can I do you for, young lady?" he asked, peering at her over the rim of his bifocals.

She blinked, not sure if she understood what he meant.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“I beg your pardon.”

He shot her a grin, revealing two chipped front teeth. “Do you need a single or double room?”

“Oh ... uh, a double, please.”

He pushed over the register for her to sign and then handed her a key. He glanced out of the wide glass window, and frowned. “Been in an accident?”

She followed his gaze and, for the first time, saw the extent of the damage to Preston’s car. The back end was squashed like an accordion and the back window was shattered. She wondered how they had managed to get this far with the car in so bad a condition. Tomorrow night she would have to see to another means of transportation, but for tonight, Preston was her first concern.

“Yes, earlier this evening. I must go now. My ... my husband is not feeling well, and I’d like to get him to bed as soon as possible.”

“Wait a minute,” he said, holding out his hand, palm outward. “That will be thirty-five dollars, payable up front. We don’t give no credit at this here motel.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

She counted out the money and left before the old man could ask any more nosy questions. But Gabrielle could feel his faded eyes boring into her back.

Thankfully, the room was located on the other side of the office, so she was able to get Preston inside without prying eyes following her every move.

She lay him on the bed, using every ounce of preternatural strength she possessed. She would have to feed again soon. But not now ...

Gabrielle collapsed beside him, breathing in quick gasps as she waited for her strength to return. When at last she was able to pull herself upright, she hurried into the bathroom and gathered all the towels and wash cloths she could find. She filled the ice bin with warm water and then, satisfied she had everything she needed, hurried back to Preston's side.

"Okay, first things first," she muttered, eyeing the arrow protruding from his upper chest. It had been hell getting him inside without jarring the hellish weapon. Now she had to figure the best way to get it out of him without causing him to bleed to death.

## *ENEMY MINE*

There was really only one way—pull it out, and then deal with the damage.

She bit down on her lip as she gripped the arrow with both hands and then wrenched it outward with all the strength she could summon.

Threads of scarlet shot outward, drenching her in seconds. Unexpectedly, the blood lust lunged inside of her like a mindless beast. The sound of his slowing heartbeat held her spellbound.

She desperately wanted to taste of his essence, feel the warmth of his blood as it flowed through her, soothing away the ravaging ache of emptiness that she'd known for so long. She needed it so badly ... so very badly. Without thinking, she lifted her blood-covered fingers to her mouth. Just a taste—that's all she would have—only a tiny taste. What harm could it do?

"No ..." she screamed, her eyes widening in horror as reasoning returned and she realized what she was about to do. Sobbing brokenly, she pushed down the ungodly hunger and stripped him of his shirt. She focused all her attention on stopping the flow of blood, using every skill at her disposal.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“By everything that’s holy,” she swore, “you will not die by my hand.”

His body jerked almost convulsively at the sound of her voice, but he never opened his eyes.

Frowning, she noted the blue tinge around his lips. He’s losing too much blood, she thought, pressing even harder against his injury to stop the endless flow of red that gushed from his chest.

“Damn you, Preston ...” she whispered. “Live.”

She dimly noted that his medallion was missing, but no matter. Right now she was more concerned about whether he would live. After a while, she noted the flow had almost ceased. With a trembling breath of relief, she cleaned the injury, and after another five minutes saw that the bleeding had stopped entirely.

She took that as a good sign. She ripped up one of the clean towels to use for a bandage. She could only hope he was strong enough to fight off any infection that could occur from such a serious wound. He could still die from lack of blood, too.

But she had done everything she could do. She sat next to him on

## *ENEMY MINE*

the lumpy double bed. With a weary sigh, she leaned her head against the headboard.

Her gaze traveled over the tawdry pink room, taking in the pink wallpaper, pink draperies and pink carpet.

She giggled. The people who own this firetrap must love the hell out of the color pink. Or perhaps they just love the color of dawn's first light, she thought. Then she sat up abruptly, remembering that morning's first light was only a couple of hours away. She hurried to the car, and got her draperies along with the cooler Preston had procured for her. She drank the last of her supply of blood and washed up.

Half an hour later, shades and curtains drawn, she was more than ready to meet the coming morning.

Again she settled next to Preston, telling herself she was only doing it so she could keep track of his condition through the day. The warmth of his body next to hers gave her comfort, something she'd not known in quite some time.

Gabrielle's thoughts wandered back to the tribunal. She could

## *ENEMY MINE*

easily carry out their command right now. All she would have to do is leave him to die. She wouldn't be guilty of striking even one blow against him. Just letting nature take its course.

Gabrielle turned to face him, letting her gaze sweep over his features. Dear God, he was so much like her Damon. Every moment they spent together brought home that indisputable fact.

And tonight, he'd save her life again, risking his own to do so. How could she leave him to die after that? No matter what the council had ordered, she couldn't carry it through. How could she convince them they were wrong about him? There had to be a way ...

Why had he taken such a risk for her? Gabrielle wondered. She went back over the events that led to their escape from Cameron. She remembered Preston stooping down to the ground, and then she'd caught a glimpse of some kind of dark object flying past her head, connecting with Cameron's chest just as the arrow left the crossbow.

Everything kind of blurred after that. She could only surmise that Preston had thrown himself in front of her, taking the arrow meant to end her life.

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle tenderly traced his lips with her fingers, emotions she hadn't felt for two centuries warring inside of her. She owed him a debt beyond what mere words of gratitude could convey. And she would be damned if she rewarded his bravery with betrayal ...

\* \* \*

The sound of keys jangling in the door jerked her out of sleep. Her inside voice screamed danger.

She leapt off the bed, instantly awake, and stood behind the door ready to pounce on the intruder.

A pretty blonde teen with enormous blue eyes stepped into the room, a pile of towels over one arm. She let out a shocked gasp at the blood-streaked towels lying in a heap on the floor; the ring of keys fell out of her nerveless fingers. "Oh-my-God. Oh-my-God," she whispered, the last note ending on a moan.

Gabrielle caught her from behind as she stumbled back to the door. "Oh no you don't, sweetie."

The girl struggled, her eyes liquid with terror. "Please—please don't hurt me. I—I won't tell anybody, I swear to God."

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle pushed back the sympathy she felt for the girl's plight. She knew she couldn't let the girl go, not yet. But what in heaven's name was she supposed to do with her? If she let her go there would be cops swarming all over the place in a matter of minutes, and they would have too many questions for which she didn't have answers.

Suddenly the burning fire of blood lust leapt forward, wrapping her in a net of agony, giving her its answer to her dilemma. Dammit, not now. She tried to breathe evenly, forcing it back with sheer will.

The girl renewed her struggles. "Oh-my-God. Oh-my-God," she muttered over and over until Gabrielle thought she would scream.

There was one thing she could do, and she could only hope she had enough strength left to do it. She took a deep breath and summoned the *voice*. At first nothing happened, and she felt the first stirrings of panic as she tried to think of other options, short of killing the maid, but then it was there, a familiar ally.

"Calm down," she told the girl. Immediately the girl quieted, her face a curious blank as she waited patiently for Gabrielle's instructions. "You cleaned the rooms as usual and saw nothing out of

the ordinary.”

“I cleaned the rooms and saw nothing out of the ordinary,” the girl whispered in a monotone.

Gabrielle’s hands trembled from the effort of maintaining the link between the girl and herself, but she managed to bend down and pick up the keys the girl had dropped. “Here, take these and leave. On your way out, put the *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door. Do you understand?”

Something flickered in the maid’s eyes. “I—I—”

Gabrielle’s body shuddered as she increased the hypnotic hold. Dear God, she hadn’t used this much of her powers in centuries. She wasn’t sure how long she could continue. “Do you understand?” Her voice was harsh from the strain.

The girl nodded, the flicker in her eyes dying a slow death. “Yes, I understand. I saw nothing. I’ll remember nothing.”

After the girl left, Gabrielle collapsed on the bed, breathing heavily as the power receded. She wondered if perhaps Angel was right and she’d been a fool to let her powers go dormant, but then she

### *ENEMY MINE*

remembered what was necessary to retain them, and again knew she'd made the right decision for herself.

A moan from Preston rocked her thoughts. She drew herself up off the bed to look at him. His head tossed feverishly back and forth upon the pillow, his fair hair dark with perspiration, his face flushed with fever.

Her hands convulsively tightened on the bedclothes as she stared at him with horror. She knew he was dying, and there was nothing she could do to prevent it.

## *CHAPTER 9*

Darkness rushed in on him, and then he was back—back in the meadow where he'd seen Gabrielle and the man who looked remarkably like him. Except, this time Preston and he were one and the same.

Preston felt intoxicated with life, delighting in the glory of being alive. Deliriously happy to be with the woman he loved far more than life itself.

The waning sunlight warmed his face. The crushed grass tickled his nose, and he could hear a lazy bumblebee droning in the clover nearby.

His tongue explored the soft recesses of her mouth. His heart soared with the realization that Gabby-Skye had just made him the happiest

## *ENEMY MINE*

man in the kingdom with her promise to be his wife. Gabby-Skye, his very own special name for her. He'd loved her from the first time he met her, when she was ten years old and he was but a gangly boy. He had been riding through the village with his father collecting the rents when she bounced right up to him, completely unafraid, and asked him to teach her to read. His father had been appalled, but he was enchanted, and had been ever since. His thoughts returned to the present.

Gabby-Skye pulled back with a tiny smile, pushing at the errant strands of silken ebony hair that had escaped from her chignon. "I dare say we should take it a bit slower, my love, or else we will have no mysteries left to explore on our wedding night."

Damon rolled onto his back with a laugh, taking her with him, her long skirts bunching up between their bodies. "Gabby-Skye, I could love you forever and never explore all the mysteries of your wondrous form."

"Damon, I love you more with each passing day," she whispered fervently.

## *ENEMY MINE*

He groaned as the wet tip of her tongue slowly traced the outline of his lips, sending sparks of fire to his groin.

He felt himself growing hard, straining against the cloth of his breeches. She could drive him wild with desire without ever removing one stitch of her clothing. The way she gazed at him with her violet eyes made him feel hot and flushed. The very sight of her midnight curls drove him insane with wanting her.

He pulled her closer, looking deeply into the purple eyes that held his soul prisoner, drowning in their shadowy depths. “I love you, Gabrielle Christina Skye Warlick. I’ve adored you for as long as I can remember. Unto death will I love you, my precious.”

Tears of happiness caught in her luxuriant black lashes, the sun’s dying rays turning her tears into crystal drops. “Even unto death ...” she whispered.

Thunder growled overhead, and he looked upward with concern. The clear blue sky had given way to a dull gray, big black clouds marching like soldiers across its surface.

He felt the wrenching loss of her before he looked down to see her

## *ENEMY MINE*

gone. Somehow, he had known she would be ...

The air of the world split, darkness swelled and spread like a cloud inside him. Preston got to his feet, his hands curled into fists. He closed his eyes as the loss of her swept over him in waves of longing and despair.

When he at last opened them, he found himself inside one of the villager's cottages. The smell of decay, sickness and death rose in his nostrils, overwhelming him with the stench. His eyes widened in disbelief when his stunned gaze fell upon his Gabrielle. She tossed back and forth restlessly on a dirty cot, moaning his name over and over.

Terror surged through him, rising like bile into his throat at the sound of her fevered ramblings. He quickly moved to her side. Despite the filth, he lifted her into his arms. Damon would take her to the castle no matter how much his father objected to her presence. He would pay for her care himself, nurse her back to health so they could wed as he had promised. He would not allow her to die in such squalor as this.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“No, sire. You mustn’t take her away,” the wisewoman exclaimed. “She is dying of the plague.”

“You lie, old woman,” he snarled. “My father has paid you to tell me this tale. Everyone knows he is against our wedding.”

The hag’s eyes became sad. “No, sire. I speak only the truth. I would not speak a falsehood to hurt this child. I love her like my own.”

He held Gabby-Skye close, tears squeezing out from behind closed eyelids. “No, no, no ...”

Dizziness overtook him. The world spun out of control, reality bending, folding in upon itself. What was happening to him?

Damon stumbled back against something cold and hard. His arms felt empty and, without looking, he knew she’d been wrenched away from him yet again. Somehow, time had marched on without him being aware of it. A sense of urgency assailed him.

He had to find her, save her from the illness that threatened to take her away from him for eternity. He opened his eyes to the sight of numerous granite stones dotting the hillside. A sickening sense of dread coiled inside the pit of his stomach.

## *ENEMY MINE*

“Oh merciful God, spare me,” he begged before he turned and stared down at the stone he’d stumbled over only moments ago.

His knees gave way as he read the name inscribed on the gravestone. *Gabrielle Christina Skye Warlick*.

“No ...” he screamed, beating his fists against the cold face of rock standing sentinel over her final resting place. He looked upward, toward heaven and his God. “Damn you to hell. Damn you to hell forever. As of this moment, I renounce you as you have renounced me.” A boom of thunder clapped in the distance, lightning illuminated the sky with an almost spectral incandescence, seemingly protesting his blasphemy.

Damon surged to his feet, glaring at the heavens, daring God or his host of angels to strike him dead, wishing desperately someone would do so. Then, at last, he could join his beloved.

But nothing happened. The thunder died, the lightning dimmed, and he knew without any doubt there was no respite on earth from the hell he must now endure.

Without her, he was nothing. He didn’t exist.

## *ENEMY MINE*

Blackness consumed him, drawing him deeper into its shadowy embrace. Perhaps God had heard his prayers, he thought briefly, letting himself drift, welcoming the sweet sting of death's final kiss. Not even death could keep them apart ...

"Preston ... Preston, can you hear me?" The melodious voice of his love tugged at him, bringing him reluctantly out of the darkness into the light.

"Gabby-Skye? I must find her ... save her," he muttered. He struggled to return to the deep, black, enveloping darkness ... must keep searching.

"Preston ... I am here. Please open your eyes and see me. I'm safe. We both are."

Again her voice. Could it be a trick? Or was it really his Gabrielle?

I must see for myself, he thought, now fighting eagerly through the many layers of darkness to reach the warm glowing light.

He opened his eyelids a mere slit. His vision was hazy, edged with darkness. He saw her sitting next to him. God, how frightened she looks, he thought, wanting to reach out to her, caress the satiny

## *ENEMY MINE*

softness of her cheek, let her know he was still with her.

But when he tried to lift his hand, he found it impossible. His chest felt like someone had tied a hundred-pound weight around it. A lump of fear rose in his throat as he tried again to move his arm. Still no response.

“Gabby-Skye,” he rasped, panicking at his paralyzed state.

She leaned forward, her violet eyes wide and frantic. “I’m here,” she whispered, taking his hand.

He saw her grasp his hand, but he couldn’t feel it. His limbs were growing cold, so damn cold. He could feel himself drifting, floating back into the safety of the blackness ... away from his beloved.

“No, Preston. Damn you! Fight to live,” she uttered in a fierce whisper. “You can’t leave me now. I won’t let you.”

He watched through the haze as she bent her head, and ripped at her wrist with her teeth. Horrified, he wanted to shout at her to stop, but he couldn’t find the strength to speak, much less shout.

Rivulets of scarlet flowed from the self-inflicted wound. Blood-tinged tears slid down her cheeks as she offered him her wrist. Even

## *ENEMY MINE*

with his vision hampered, he could see the trembling in her arm as she held it to his lips.

“Drink, my love,” she whispered.

Two centuries clashed and warred, melding together until he couldn’t tell where one ended or the other began. Instantaneously, he flashed back to another time, another place.

A time of great sorrow, a time without his beloved by his side.

He lay on his bed in his chamber wanting to die, pleading with God to let him die. He was weak from hunger and thirst, yet remained steadfast in his vow to die. He could not live in a world without Gabrielle, without her steadfast love.

His father had tried to reason with him, but Damon had turned his back to him. His father sighed wearily before he went away, but nobody had bothered him since, leaving him to die in peace.

Then she was there, kneeling at his bedside, his very own beloved returned from the dead. He thought her a vision of loveliness despite her paleness. She was dressed in the whitest of gowns. The very garment she’d been buried in, he realized with shock. Merciful God, it

## *ENEMY MINE*

was her, he wasn't dreaming. She was with him ... a miracle brought on by grief, he reasoned.

"Why do you do this, my beloved?" she asked, her eyes revealing her torment.

"For you, my sweet," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I promised you unto death. We are two halves of one soul, and my half grieves to be with you. I cannot go on with this life without you. Soon, my darling, we will be together forever."

"Not if you die this way," she said, her voice wavering with indecision. "You will surrender your life for naught."

Indecision about what, he wondered. What did she mean he would give his life for naught? It wouldn't all be for naught if they were together. "Please, I don't understand," he rasped. "I want to be with you, Gabby-Skye."

Gabrielle seemed to come to a decision. "I want to be with you, too, but this is not the way. I know another, but I don't have time to explain. You must trust me." She leaned down to kiss his neck.

He felt hot needles of pain as her teeth pierced his flesh. "God in

## *ENEMY MINE*

heaven!” he breathed. All the legends of the undead thundered in his ears. But then calmness came over him. She had asked for his trust, and he would give it willingly, without hesitation. For if he must be one of the walking dead to be with his soul mate, then so be it ...

Present time intruded upon his ancient memories, merged, and then he opened his eyes. He was in some kind of cramped room, a far cry from the spacious quarters he’d once resided in centuries ago. No matter, he was dying; it made little difference where he drew his last breath. Gabrielle was kneeling by his bedside, tears in her eyes, pleading with him to drink of her blood.

Trusting her now, as he had trusted her centuries before, he lifted his head and drank deeply.

The blood flowed smoothly, liquid energy—no, a better word—liquid *ecstasy*, yes, flowing into every part of him. He could feel something happening in his chest, something he couldn’t explain. Nevertheless, the impossible was happening: his body was healing, growing stronger. He could see clearly again, and hear with crystal clarity.

## *ENEMY MINE*

For Damon, the feelings were no surprise; for Preston, they were overwhelming—incredibly so. More than anything he wanted to make love to Gabrielle—his Gabby-Skye.

Suddenly, she jerked her wrist away from him, gasped for breath, and flung herself across the room. He closed his eyes, grief and sorrow rising in his throat, unable to watch her disappear again.

Gabrielle lay on the fuchsia pink carpet, dizzy from loss of blood. The decision to let him drink from her was a painful one, a last resort; a decision she would never have made under normal circumstances. Except that these were hardly normal circumstances. Preston had been dying by inches before her very eyes. She'd had no choice but to save him using the only means at her disposal—her own blood.

Just enough to save him—not change him into an accursed creature like herself. Not since Damon had she used her powers to change anyone ... and she never would as long as she walked the earth.

Preston pried open his eyes, then immediately closed them again. He felt his stomach roll sickeningly as he reopened his eyes again, this time more slowly. He stared around the god-awful pink room, and

## *ENEMY MINE*

wondered if he'd awaken in a pink antacid commercial or some such nonsense.

Images flooded into his head, yesteryear and modern day entwining, expanding, crowding his thoughts with images, sounds and smells of a time he couldn't possibly have any knowledge of, yet somehow did. It was almost like being born again. His head felt as if it would burst from the inside out. And then suddenly everything came rushing back at him with a dizzying speed, and he remembered.

He sat up abruptly, his hand automatically feeling for his wound. His brother had shot him with an arrow, but he felt no wound—no pain.

His bewildered gaze found hers. "What the hell did you do to me?"

Gabrielle turned her head to stare at him with her dark violet gaze. "Don't worry. What I did was only to keep you from dying, it won't change you into a vampire."

She moved to sit up, breathing heavily as she did so. When the dizziness abated a bit, she stood, swaying only slightly. "I must go out for a while, Preston. You will be all right now. I will return soon."

## *ENEMY MINE*

Preston could see the charcoal smudges under her eyes and the exhaustion in her face. It was as if, by giving him her blood, she had drained her life energy to an all time dangerous low. “Gabrielle, you’re more than welcome to take what you need from me. I ... I owe you my life.”

Preston saw the pain leap into her eyes, although she tried to hide it. “Thank you, but no thanks. I don’t intend to break my vow now.”

“Does this vow of yours have anything to do with this Damon you dream about?”

“Yes, but I don’t have time to go into the whole story.” She gave him a grim smile. “Remind me to tell you about it when we’re not so busy running for our lives.”

She started for the door, then turned back when he called her name.

“Where will you hunt?”

“There’s a marsh behind this motel. I believe I can scare up enough animal life to sustain me for some time.”

“Gabby-Skye, hurry back. I don’t think we should linger too long in one place. My brother will be on our trail before we know it.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

She froze, something twisted painfully inside her. How did he know Damon's special name for her? Now that she thought about it, she remembered he'd used it several times in his delirium. How could he know?

A look of uncertainty shadowed her features. "You called me Gabby-Skye. No one has ever called me that except Damon."

He shrugged as if he didn't understand what the big deal was, cursing himself silently for letting the nickname slip out. "Sorry, I didn't mean to step on anyone else's territory. You said it a couple of times in your sleep last night."

She nodded abruptly, a shutter coming down over her expression before she slipped out the door.

Preston shoved one hand through his hair. Damn, he'd almost blown it. He wondered if he should have told her about his growing belief that he was Damon. Jesus Christ, it sounded crazy. Yet it was the only logical answer he could come up with to explain his knowledge of the nickname. And what about the dream? It was too real to be a dream ... it was not a dream, he was sure of it, but possibly

## *ENEMY MINE*

past events. Reincarnation? He didn't know much about it, but he was beginning to believe in it. If someone had tried to convince him it was a reality, he would have laughed in that someone's face, but now he knew it was the only answer for what he'd experienced.

He should have told Gabrielle about his strange vision, his dream. Hell, he didn't know what to call it.

Then again, if he had blurted it out, she probably would have told him he was nuts for even thinking such a farfetched notion.

And at this point in the game he would have no choice but to agree with her assumption. What real proof did he have that he was in another time and place while he was out cold? She'd want to chalk it up to a delusion, and he wasn't ready for someone to pierce his bubble, not yet at any rate.

## *CHAPTER 10*

Gabrielle returned an hour before dawn. She had given it a lot of thought and had at last decided that, if Preston were up to it, they would leave the motel tonight.

Her head was down as she mulled over the places they might possibly hide until one of them could come up with a way to get the Adams clan off their backs.

A warning tingle in the base of her neck alerted her to the danger. Something wasn't right. Her head jerked upward. Instinctively, she glanced toward the window-lined office, her stomach suddenly clenching in terror. Cameron had found them.

He was in the office talking to the old man who had checked them

## *ENEMY MINE*

in last night. Gabrielle saw him show the little man a couple of snapshots, pointing to Preston's car. She didn't wait around to see anymore.

She hurried to the room, shutting the door quietly behind her. "Preston, we've got trouble."

Preston jerked upright. "What is it?" he asked, his voice harsh and demanding.

His hair was wet from the shower, and the clean manly smell of him overwhelmed her senses. She shook her head, angry with herself for being so weak. She had no time for that now; too much was at stake.

She uttered one word. "Cameron."

The name hung in the air between them, dark, malignant. A curse instead of a name, she thought, waiting for his reaction.

The color drained from his face. He muttered an obscenity, swinging his legs off the bed. "Let's get the hell out of here."

"We'll never make it to the car, Preston. Our only hope is escaping into the swamp. It goes on for miles. We can hide there until he's

## *ENEMY MINE*

gone.”

His jaw line tightened. “You don’t know my brother. He won’t leave this area until he’s exhausted every resource to smoke us out. He knows we will eventually return for the car.”

“Then we just won’t return to pick up the car. Anyway, it’s in too bad a shape to do us much good,” she announced, opening the door a crack to peer out. “The coast is clear. Come on. Let’s get out of here while we still can.”

Preston heard his brother’s voice shouting his name as he neared the swamp. He grabbed Gabrielle’s hand and took off at a dead run, never looking back to see if his brother followed. The overly sweet smell of rotting vegetation rose up to meet him, and he tried not to think about what kind of wildlife could be lurking nearby.

They ran past twisted, moss-shrouded oaks that seemed to reach out to them. Although he knew it was ridiculous, Preston steered clear of their low-sweeping branches. Cypress trees heralded their approach, rising like the malevolent spikes of some medieval torture device. He shuddered, feeling as if, in this nightmarish landscape, anything was

## *ENEMY MINE*

possible.

Thirty minutes later, panting for breath, he pulled to a stop. Spread out before them was a chain of tiny islands. They seemed to float upon a sea of spiky grass. The earth beneath their feet was no longer stable. He knew if they continued on the route they were going, either of them could easily be trapped in a quagmire of quicksand, or lose their footing trying to navigate through the shallow brackish water. No, it was too risky to try and wade across. Better to go around, he thought.

Raw panic clawed at his gut as the first rays of feeble sunshine broke through the thick gray lace coverings of the trees overhead. Damn, he'd forgotten about the curtains in all the commotion. Gabrielle could die because of his forgetfulness.

Preston wildly glanced around, hoping to find something he could use to combat the sunlight, but he saw nothing that would help. He tried to think through the fear clouding his mind.

What could Gabrielle do to protect herself from the bright of day?

He cursed aloud for getting her into this predicament. If not for him, she could have been hundreds of miles away, somewhere safe, for

## ENEMY MINE

a while at least. He pulled Gabrielle against him, wanting to protect her from the deadly rays, yet helpless to do so. “What can we do?” he asked, his voice rough with unspoken emotion.

Gabrielle let herself lean against him, taking comfort from his nearness. “If I am to survive, I must go to ground.”

“Then do it and do it quick. I don’t want to lose you again, my love.” Gabrielle could hear the near-panic in his tone and marveled at how much he cared. It was hard for her to believe he was so concerned for a cursed creature. But against all logic, he was.

*I don’t want to lose you again, my love.* The statement beat a tattoo in her head; shocked recognition flowed through her veins. Time stood still for a split second. She was in the past, hearing Damon’s voice repeat those same heart-wrenching words—just before the Blood War began.

Before she knew what was happening, she was back in the present with Preston—in his arms, his lips seeking hers, his mouth invading hers with a scorching heat that set her aflame.

His scent filled her nostrils, making her dizzy with desire. Part of

## *ENEMY MINE*

her mind screamed at her to put a halt to this. He wasn't Damon, nor would he ever be Damon.

But another part of her, perhaps the part where her soul once resided, demanded more of his searing kisses, his caresses. That part of her recognized him as Damon, and with a heart-startling realization, she knew he was—*Damon*.

Before she could sort out in her mind what her heart and body already knew, he roughly pushed her away. "Go now, Gabby-Skye. No one will harm you while you sleep. You have my word." Again, he used the endearment he couldn't possibly know, but yet somehow he did.

Gabrielle opened her mouth, wanting to let him know what she had just discovered, share with him the joy of at last finding each other after two centuries, but the sun was rising fast.

"Wait for me," she whispered before she sank into the marshy ground.

He nodded, his face grim and determined. He would die before he let Cameron within ten feet of her resting-place.

## *ENEMY MINE*

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Dusk had just put in its appearance when she awoke and rose from her shallow grave. God's teeth, how she hated to go to ground. It was almost as bad as killing the animals she needed to sustain her life. If she weren't such a coward, she would take her own life and be done with it.

But something held her back, her religious background she supposed, even though it was ironic that any traces of her former faith lingered after all these years. She could not add the sin of taking her own life to the monumental list of sins she had already accumulated.

As miserable an existence as it was, it was still life, she thought, brushing dirt out of her hair. Gabrielle stiffened in dread as the first stirrings of blood hunger roused within her, hating it with everything inside of her. She pushed it away with super-human effort, determined to fight it, but it took hold with an intensity that doubled her over in a red haze of agony. She stumbled away, and then leaned against a twisted cypress tree to catch her breath.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a blur of movement. Nearby, a

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fat rabbit nibbled at a tuft of weeds. Gathering her remaining strength, she shot forward, and in a blink of an eye, the rabbit was in hand. It blinked stupidly at her, and she felt a twinge of regret at what she must do to survive.

“I’m sorry, little one. Death will be quick and painless,” she whispered. With one powerful wrench, she broke its neck. Tears ran down her cheeks as she fed quickly.

Her hunger appeased for the moment, she returned to where she’d slept. Her face softened as she spotted Preston sprawled out a few feet away. He was sleeping soundly, despite the hardships of having neither a pillow for his head, or a blanket to ward off the chill.

Gabrielle could still feel the taste of his mouth upon hers, the touch of his hands on her body.

He *was* Damon.

She knew that now, but how could she tell him? And if she did, would Preston believe her? She tried to fight the overwhelming need to be with him, to touch him. Only God knew how much she’d missed him ... the hopelessness she’d felt at his loss so long ago.

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But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't prevent herself from dropping to her knees, and with a trembling finger, trace his full lips. Her other half, her soul mate, given back to her by a fate she had once thought cruel and fickle. Dare she hope he would feel the same for her? That he would remember what they had meant to each other?

He opened his eyes and a quiver ran through her body. Smiling sleepily, he pulled her down beside of him.

"Gabby-Skye," he whispered, before his mouth claimed hers in a sizzling kiss.

For a heartbreaking moment, she remembered he was human, and she was not ... but then his hands found her breast, and all rational thought deserted her.

Human or not human, he was her Damon.

Her arms snaked around him, and she held him tightly, feeling the sweet wildness pervade her. She reverently returned his kiss, her fingers winding into his hair at his nape, stroking, caressing. With a sudden burst of sweet surrender, she gave way to the hunger he aroused in her.

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Never had she expected to feel this way again—so loved—so cherished. Never had she thought she would find him again, her own sweet Damon. It was a miracle, a second chance for them.

She was caught in a maelstrom of emotions and sensations, and she prayed that if there really was a God he would let this single heart-stopping moment last for an eternity.

To know love again made her want to cry tears of joy. To feel it bursting forth like a golden ray of the brightest and hottest sunlight was as precious to her as gold.

\* \* \*

Preston worshiped her with his hands and lips, knowing deep within his heart that loving her was right, predestined by a higher power.

He didn't care anymore what he'd been taught to think, or how to feel about her kind. The two of them had shared a lifetime before—loved each other with a passion that defied time and space. In his heart he knew this with a certainty that defied logic and reason.

It was true that he didn't know all there was to know about the past

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they had shared. There were many blank spots in his memory, but he knew enough to realize Gabrielle was his and his alone—forever. How many lifetimes had they shared, one, a dozen, a hundred? It didn't matter, because it still wasn't enough. No matter how many lifetimes they had shared, he would always want another one and then another, forever. His need for her was like a living, breathing presence.

He shuddered with pleasure as his hands sought out the secret places of her tantalizing curves.

How could he ever have thought that making love to her would be repulsive? He no longer gave a damn what she was, or who she was. She stirred his passions like no mortal woman had ever done, or ever would.

Preston pulled back just enough to gaze at her face, framing it gently with both hands, memorizing every plane, every curve. No matter what happened, he would always have this memory of her. He would always remember the way she looked at this very moment. Even if he died right this minute, he would not allow himself to forget, and he would search the world over to find her again. From this time

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on, he vowed to take a hand in his own fate, his own destiny. Never would he be apart from Gabrielle again.

He sucked in his breath at the intensity of passion he saw in her wondrous purple eyes. The full sensuous beauty of her lips tugged him forward, and Preston hungrily covered her mouth with his own, losing himself in her once more ...

Gabrielle was his, and he'd fight vampire or vampire hunter to keep her by his side ... for a thousand lifetimes, if need be.

\* \* \*

With each caress, every tender kiss, Gabrielle could feel the delicious warmth sliding through her veins in much the same way that she had felt centuries ago, when she'd taken human blood: such ecstasy—such sweet torment.

Gabrielle moaned in protest as he moved away from her, but within the space of a heartbeat he was back, loving her again in the same, so familiar way he had loved her two hundred years ago. Her clothes seemed to melt away, and she felt the rush of cool night air kiss her bare skin.

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There was a breathlessness in her, a spiraling need that wanted him to hold her, kiss her endlessly. She needed to feel him inside of her. So much time lost—so much to make up for—years and years of loving and living.

“Gabby-Skye.” Her name was almost a groan on his lips. Red-hot desire stabbed through her body as his head dipped, and his mouth captured one rosy-tipped breast.

Gabrielle whispered his name as her hands moved restlessly over his broad back, stroking the hard-muscled flesh while his hands roamed wantonly downward, until at last he slid his fingers into the apex of her thighs. He found and captured the small, delicate bud between two fingers, urging it to fullness. She cried out his name as he plucked gently at her throbbing sex.

At last, finally, when she thought she would die from the intense pleasure flooding her senses, he swore softly, pressing her down into the green moss, burying himself in her tight heat. She felt the heat of him everywhere, searing her flesh ... branding her for all time as his once again.

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Time coalesced, mingling together past and present, and they were once again in the sun-drenched meadow of their impetuous youth, making love with an abandon that took her breath away, while in the here and now voices of crickets and tree frogs serenaded them with their mating song.

“My beloved,” she gasped as his life spilled into her, filling her, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well.

Two different halves melded into a whole, belonging together for all time. Human—vampire, it made no difference. Gabrielle knew the fates had decided long ago that they were meant to be ... unto eternity, just as Damon had promised her two hundred years ago.

\* \* \*

Afterward, she lay in his arms, feeling complete for the first time in eons, feeling almost human. Preston opened his eyes, gazing at her with such love she felt a sweet seizing of her heart.

“You know,” she said simply.

“Yes,” Preston replied, holding her close as if he feared she would disappear into the night.

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“How?”

He cradled her closer still, gazing up at the stars that peeped through the Spanish moss. “I think I’ve known from the first moment I laid eyes on you that we belonged together. But it was the dreams that really convinced me.” He shuddered. “I died a thousand times over when you died that night in the hut. The agony of it drove me mad with grief. There was nothing I wanted more than to die, to be with you once more ... unto death. Do you remember my promise?”

Gabrielle nodded, her dark violet gaze filled with anguish. “I remember,” she whispered, her voice breaking.

He stood, pulling her to her feet along with him.

“Gabby-Skye, we have to get moving.” He smiled at her with such warmth it made her blood sing with joy. “When we’re safe, we will have the rest of our lives to regain the time we lost, to love again.”

For Gabrielle, the world seemed to hold perfectly still for a heartbeat as coldness invaded the very center of her being. For just one brief, dazzling moment in time she’d forgotten the difference between them.

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How could they ever achieve happiness when she was a daughter of the night, and the man she loved was not? Human—vampire; the chasm that separated them threatened any chance of happiness they might have had.

As they dressed, she decided she would not tell him what she now knew as truth. She would wait, savor every moment she had with him. When the threat was over, she would leave him. He deserved the chance to have a normal life with children and a loving human wife.

A life without her.

## *CHAPTER 11*

Angel wondered why he'd been called to the sanctuary of Cheroe. Surely they didn't have another assignment for them already. It had been only a few weeks since the last one. Besides he didn't want to leave Gabrielle in her time of need.

Angel waited impatiently as Cheroe strolled in a few minutes later and settled his bulky frame behind his massive desk. "I'm glad you came, Angel. Your new assignment has been handed down."

Angel gave him a steady look. "We were just on assignment, Cheroe. Give this one to somebody else."

"The assignment is Gabrielle."

Angel lost his composure for a moment and gaped in shock at the

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high council member. “You called me here to tell me *Gabrielle* is my assignment?”

Cheroe nodded. “I know this is hard for you, Angel, but as a peacekeeper you have an obligation to our community.”

“I also have an obligation to Gabrielle.” Angel’s mouth pressed into a hard line. “Good Lord, man, you can’t expect me to carry out an order of execution against one of my own fledglings. It’s unheard of, and you know.”

Cheroe got up from his chair and padded to the fireplace. He threw another log on the fire before he spoke. “Your job as peacekeeper takes precedent over any other bond you may have with Gabrielle Warlick. If she does not carry out our order to eliminate Preston Adams, then you are ordered to do it for her.”

Angel watched shadows cast from the fire’s flickering light play across Cheroe’s features, giving him a sinister look. Normally, Cheroe looked like a nice elderly man who could do nothing more wrong than cheat at his regular checker games with his buddies. But tonight—tonight was different. He looked the epitome of a vampire, Angel

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thought. All he needed to complete the picture was a cloak, and a hat to cover his bald head.

“Angel, I apologize. This is a sorry business indeed. But the council has a responsibility to everyone. There are some of us who doubt Gabrielle’s ability to carry out the sentence we imposed upon her. So, it has been decided, that if Gabrielle Warlick does not carry out her assignment within the next forty-eight hours, she is to be brought back before her peers, and the sentence of death by sunlight will be carried out.” Cheroe features took on an even darker cast. “And if you can’t take her prisoner, you are to treat her the same as you would any other vampire who has gone rogue.”

Angel stiffened. “Gabrielle is *not* a rogue. I will have nothing to do with plotting her death.”

Cheroe’s face became hard. His eyes turned into black bits of stone. “You will do whatever you have to, or we will send another who will.”

“No,” Angel whispered. All the agony he felt was forced into that one syllable. “You can’t ask this horrendous deed of me.”

“I can and I do.”

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Angel clenched his hands into fists and turned away. He choked back anger and frustration as he fought for some semblance of control.

Over the years, Angel had carried out many of Cheroe's and the other council members' orders to seek out and destroy vampires that had gone berserk, but never, in all the time he'd been doing so, had they ordered him to destroy a vampire who'd done nothing wrong. And although he didn't trust the human to whom she'd entrusted her life, he was convinced Gabrielle had done nothing wrong.

Nothing to deserve a sentence of death.

Even if she had, he couldn't kill her. She was his heart, a part of his very inner being. They were connected by blood and time, and something less defined—"love," was what humans called it.

Angel didn't know for sure, because he'd never experienced it while he was still alive, and after his transformation, well, the chance had been lost forever. Now he doubted that creatures of the night could experience such an intense feeling, but what he felt for Gabrielle came as close as his kind could get to that intangible emotion ...

He turned back to the elder, his eyes bleak with the despair he felt

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deep inside his soulless body. “I will not carry out your order, nor will either of my companions.”

Cheroe let out a heavy sigh. “Then I will assign another to do the task.”

“Do as you will,” Angel said, his voice harsh with emotion. “But I must warn you—my friends and I will protect Gabrielle with our lives, if need be.”

Cheroe’s mouth pressed into a tight line. “That is your last word on the subject?”

Angel shook his head and gave Cheroe a grim smile. “This is—I quit. Find yourself another executioner.”

\* \* \*

Preston sensed something was wrong almost immediately after they made love. He decided, however, not to say anything about it. It was entirely possible Gabrielle was only worried about Cameron catching them, and he certainly didn’t want to add to her depression by questioning her.

He studied her for a moment before he spoke. “I think it would be

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best if we go around the treacherous ground, staying close to high ground. If we're lucky, we'll walk out of this place long before dawn." With a tender gesture, he reached over to brush dark hair out of her eyes. "Keep your fingers crossed, and hope we come out somewhere near civilization."

"Then what will we do?" she asked. He heard the despair and hopelessness in her voice, and he'd have given his soul to erase it. "Cameron can't be too far behind us."

"If I know my brother, he's not in any hurry to capture us," he said, wishing he knew what to say to comfort her. "He's one of those people who enjoy the hunt almost as much as they do the kill. If not for my grandfather's orders, I don't think he'd have cornered us so quickly at the pawn shop." He frowned. "Now that we've bested him at his own game, he'll want to play us along, make us suffer for humiliating him the way we did."

"For God's sake, you're his brother!" Gabrielle cried. "Doesn't that count for anything to that lunatic?"

A brief spasm of pain tightened his face. "It did once ... before

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Grandfather took him away from my mother. But not anymore.” With that, he pivoted, and started hiking through the long grasses surrounding the grassy marsh.

Gabrielle followed at a slower pace, thinking about what Preston had said. It was obvious that it was painful for him to talk about his mother. She couldn’t help but wonder—why? What could have happened to his mother to cause Preston such pain when he spoke of her and his grandfather in the same breath?

She wanted to ask him about her, but she knew now wasn’t the right time. When he was ready, he would confide in her, not before. She had more than enough patience to wait. After all, she’d had plenty of practice.

Lost in thought, she didn’t realize Preston had stopped until she bumped into him. His body was tense, his eyes wary as his gaze searched the area around them.

“What is it?” she asked, confused by his wariness. She felt no premonition of danger. She knew her preternatural senses were not up to par, yet surely she hadn’t completely lost them.

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Anxiety stabbed at her when Preston dropped to the ground, dragging her along with him. He put a finger to his lips, indicating for her to be quiet. She was too frightened not to obey, although a hundred questions clambered at her lips.

“Do you need a lift?” an amused voice asked from the darkness.

Gabrielle smiled and relaxed, letting out her breath in a noisy rush. But before she could tell Preston it was all right, he jerked upright and spun around, his face pale with strain, a killing fury in his eyes, and kicked outward toward Angel’s head with one of his powerful legs.

“No, Preston,” Gabrielle gasped, her fingers curling over her mouth.

Angel’s reflexes were quicker than lightning. He caught Preston’s foot in mid air, flipping him gently.

Preston landed on the other side of Gabrielle with a thud loud enough to wake the dead.

Gabrielle scrambled on her hands and knees to his side. “Dammit, Angel. If you’ve hurt him, I’m going to rip out your heart and lungs and feed them to the birds.”

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Angel laughed. “My, my, you sound positively bloodthirsty, my dear. I assume I have our friend Mr. Adams to thank for this unflattering hostility you’re exhibiting.”

“Leave her alone, doll-face,” Serene scolded, drifting into sight. “She has enough problems without you acting like a total boob.”

A pained expression played across Angel’s perfect features. “Would you please kindly refrain from calling me ‘doll-face’? I find it very uncouth.”

Artimus trudged from behind a massive mimosa tree, his monk’s robe trailing in the mud. “Now, now, children. We are not here to fight. We must remember we are here for our dear Gabrielle.”

Gabrielle ignored them while she helped Preston to his feet. “Are you all right? He didn’t mean to hurt you—did you, Angel?” She glared at Angel, who shrugged helplessly.

Preston didn’t bother answering. He was too busy eyeing the trio with an incredulous stare. “Who are these weirdoes?”

“Vampires,” Gabrielle said bluntly.

“I resent being called a weirdo, Gabrielle, by this—this human,”

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Angel declared, his face twisting in indignation.

“Be quiet, Angel,” Gabrielle snapped. “What do you expect him to think with you sneaking up on us like that? You could have called out a warning.”

Angel sniffed. “Well, if you were a proper vampire you’d have sensed my presence. It’s not my fault your boyfriend attacked me.” He grinned an impish grin. “Remember, he tried to strike the first blow.”

“I don’t want to be a proper vampire, and you bloody very well know it,” Gabrielle retorted.

“Just what I need right now. Three more vampires to make my life even more *interesting*, to say the least,” Preston commented in a sarcastic voice.

Gabrielle decided it was high time for her to intervene when she saw the dark look that crossed Angel’s face. Or Angel would end up making mincemeat out of her lover, despite her objections.

“Why are you here, anyway?” Gabrielle asked before Angel could respond.

Angel’s expression suddenly became serious. “The tribunal wants a

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report on your progress.”

“Progress on what?” Preston asked, giving her a puzzled frown.

Angel shrugged, spreading his hands outward. “On your death sentence, of course.”

Gabrielle shot him a baleful glare. “One of these days, Angel.”

Angel laughed in delight. “Ah, *ma cherie*. You’re so beautiful when you are angry. I do believe I will try to make you angry more often. Just to see those lovely amethyst eyes flashing at me so wickedly is well worth the effort.”

“What the hell is he talking about, Gabby-Skye?”

Gabrielle shifted uneasily at the added edge in Preston’s voice. He deserved an honest answer, but she wasn’t sure how he would react to the truth.

Angel stepped backward, his eyes wide with astonishment. Artimus gasped. At first, Gabrielle wondered why they were reacting so strangely, then she realized Preston had called her Gabby-Skye. Both men knew only one man had ever called her by the endearment.

“I’ll explain it later, guys,” she said in an impatient voice before she

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turned to Preston.

He grasped both her arms, his eyes narrowing in suspicion. “You will tell me now, Gabrielle. There will be no secrets between us. Were you ordered to kill me?”

“Of course she was, you ninny,” Serene put in. “If she doesn’t, she will be branded as a traitor and executed in your place.”

“Keep quiet, Serene,” Angel growled. “He doesn’t need to know our affairs.”

Gabrielle noticed a strange unreadable look in Angel’s eyes, but she didn’t have time to ponder the implication—not with Preston watching her so intensely.

“My God,” Preston rasped. “Is that true?”

She nodded, unable to speak past the lump in her throat.

“Why didn’t you kill me back at the motel when you had the chance? Hell, for that matter all you had to do was let me die in the room without lifting a finger to help ... yet you didn’t.”

“I couldn’t,” Gabrielle whispered. “You’d just saved my life.”

Preston grinned. “Guess neither one of us is very good at carrying

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out orders.”

“Guess not,” she said, smiling up at him lovingly.

Angel snorted in disgust. “I don’t have time for this cooing and billing nonsense. If we don’t depart soon, your dear brother is going to find you.”

Artimus cleared his throat, noisily drawing everyone’s attention. “Well, I suggest that, for the time being, we find a sanctuary where they will be safe, until we can think of a way out of this terrible dilemma.”

“I have to agree,” Preston said, “Artimus, is it?”

The old man nodded, wearing a pleased smile. It didn’t take much to make Artimus happy, Gabrielle mused. She’d always loved that about him. A kind word or something as simple as someone remembering his name was enough for him.

“But how do you suggest we get there?” Preston asked, pulling her back to the problem at hand. “We left my car at the motel. I would bet my last dollar Cameron has one of my cousins watching it, just in case we decide to return.”

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“You’d win, too,” Angel said. “Not only does he have men watching your automobile, he also has men patrolling the borders of this insidious swampland, awaiting eagerly for you to wander unknowingly into their greedy little hands.”

Preston lifted one fair brow in surprise. “What does greed have to do with it?”

Angel let out a mocking laugh. “I overheard two of your kinsman talking about the reward your grandfather has posted on you and my sweet Gabrielle’s head. Ten thousand dollars apiece, to be exact,” he added with a rueful smile. “Aren’t relatives absolutely grand? Never had any myself, thank God.”

Preston whistled through his teeth. “I never dreamed Granddad would go to such extremes. Cameron must be furious.”

“Why?” Gabrielle asked.

Preston shot her a crooked grin. “Because it shows the others that Granddad doesn’t trust my brother to do the job he sent him to do.”

“It also means we have less chance of getting out of this mess alive,” Gabrielle said, feeling a shiver of apprehension work its way

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down her back.

Serene snapped her gum with a loud pop. "If you ask me, I say we fly out of this pest hole before it's too late."

"Whoa ... wait a minute," Preston said, backing up a step with one hand upraised in protest. "I'm not about to go flying off into the night with the likes of you without a safety net. I don't mind living on the edge, but that's too far out even for me."

Angel laughed. "Not afraid one of us might drop you, are you?"

The jeering note in his laughter jarred Gabrielle's nerve endings. She gritted her teeth, however, and said nothing. These two would end up bickering all night if she did. She wondered if either of them realized they were picking up where they had left off two centuries ago.

Preston's lips pressed into a thin line. "Not at all. I see no reason to risk my life unnecessarily. Besides, have any of you given any thought to what our destination might be?"

"Debra," Gabrielle said without thinking. As soon as she said her foster child's name, she knew it was the right decision.

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Serene clapped her hands in delight. "Perfect hideaway for you two."

"And just where is this perfect hideaway?" Preston asked dryly.

"New Orleans," Angel announced. "Come, its time we go before one of your relatives stumbles over us."

Preston stubbornly shook his head. "If I can't get there under my own power, then I'm not going. I'd just as soon take my chances with my relatives. It's safer, in my opinion."

A dawning comprehension lit Artimus's wrinkled face. "You're not afraid of us, are you? No, no, of course not. How stupid of us not to see it. You have a fear of flying itself, don't you?"

Angel rolled his eyes in disbelief. "Surely you jest. Nobody nowadays is afraid of flying. People do it every day. Of course, they do it in airplanes, but it's all the same."

A dull red stain washed upward from Preston's neck into his face. "Artimus is right. I hate flying. My mother died in a plane crash when I was a kid. It was Granddad's private plane. Ever since, I get sick every time I try to board one." He tried to laugh. "It doesn't seem to

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matter whether it's a small plane or a jet, I get deathly ill all the same."

Gabrielle's heart went out to him. God, how she adored him. Not many men had the courage to reveal their innermost fears, much less to strangers. She knew better than anyone how hard it was for him to admit a weakness. In the past, he'd had the same difficulty, but it hadn't made her think any less of him.

In fact, it had made her love him even more, although it had made her crazy when she had no idea what was bothering him. Perhaps in this lifetime he'd learned something about communicating.

Of course, everyone had his or her own dark secret fears, including her ... especially her. Perhaps she should take a lesson from him, she thought ruefully.

Silently, she moved toward him, reaching upward and touching his hand with her own, interlacing her fingers with his. "You asked me once to trust you with my life." Gabrielle paused, gazing intensely into his eyes, letting him see the depth of her love for him. "Now, I'm asking you to trust me."

"You know I do," Preston growled. "I'd trust you no matter what

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happened.” He pulled her against the length of him and his head came down, his lips fleetingly touching hers before he released her. A promise for the future, she thought, blinking back tears. A promise that he could never keep—only he didn’t know that yet.

Anguish tore at her. She loved him with everything inside of her that made her Gabrielle Warlick, had desperately loved him for over two centuries, and she would love him until the end of time.

But it wasn’t enough to bridge the differences between them. And it never would be.

Who knew how many times before her transformation they had loved, or how many lifetimes they had shared? How many more they might have shared if circumstances had been different? They shared a bond of undying devotion, unbroken by the passage of countless years.

Somehow, in a split moment of time, she sensed all this and more. She couldn’t begin to express with words what she was feeling in the deepest, most secret part of her, for there were none, in any language known to man, to describe how she truly felt about him.

“Well, are you coming or not?” Serene asked, her lips curving into

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an amused smile. “I don’t have all night, you know.”

Preston nervously licked his lips. “Do I have to ride with you?”

Serene clapped her hands to her waist, her eyes narrowing. “And what is wrong with me? I can fly you just as well as any of these clowns—probably better, if the truth be told. Or we could mist, but that’s a bit difficult for me with a piggyback rider.”

Preston took a step backward, his heart pounding in his ears. “Uh-huh. I can’t do this.”

Gabrielle stepped forward. “Preston, you have to trust Serene. She is not going to mist.” She tossed Serene a hard look. “Serene is great at flying, and she’s not going to let you fall, if she knows what’s good for her.”

Preston knew he could trust Gabrielle; after all, she loved him. But as for the others—well, he wasn’t keen on the idea of extending that trust to them.

For all he knew they could get him up in the sky, miles high, and just conveniently (accidentally, of course) drop him. And then there would be one less Adams to bother with. No, he didn’t think so.

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Angel let out a laugh. "He thinks we plan to drop him in flight."

"Stop reading my thoughts," Preston said with a furious frown. "I'm just being cautious. Serene's so tiny and, frankly, well, she doesn't look strong enough to carry my weight."

"I could take you," Artimus offered, "but alas, my powers are not what they used to be." He sadly shook his head. "I follow Gabrielle's lead, for the most part." A dark red flush crept into his round cheeks. "But I have to confess I do love to fly, so I take a little human blood here and there to keep myself from getting too rusty."

"God's teeth," Angel exploded, "the Adams clan will be on us before we know it if we stand here debating all night." He gave Preston a disgusted glare. "You can fly with me, and Gabrielle can go with Serene. Happy now?"

Now Preston was even more alarmed. He would have to be deaf and dumb not to feel the antagonism that literally crackled between Angel and him. If anyone wanted rid of him, it was most certainly Angel. No way was he going on a night flight with that particular vampire. No way in hell.

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He shook his head. "I'll go with Serene." He said the words reluctantly, but he couldn't help it. This was his nightmare come to life, and he was doing his best to cope without screaming hysterically like some frightened girl.

He saw Angel smile and knew the vampire had been shifting through his thoughts again. He felt a surge of heat rush into his face. Instinctively, his body stiffened. "If you don't stay out of my head, so help me God I'm going to—"

Angel gave him a grim look. "You're going to *what*, human? You think you can hurt me? Come on, you're welcome to try."

Gabrielle stepped between the them. "Enough. We don't have time for this. Let's go before we are all captured." She turned to Preston, and placed her tiny hands on his chest. "Please trust Serene. She won't drop you, I promise."

Preston gave her a miserable look. "How do you know for certain?"

She kissed him gently, and then pulled back to look at him with a grim smile playing across her full lips. "Because if she does, I'll tear her heart out myself."

## *ENEMY MINE*

Serene threw up her hands in disgust. “God almighty, you people beat anything I ever saw. I ain’t gonna drop the big galoot. Now, can we get on with this before the sun comes up? I do have other matters to attend to tonight.”

Angel tucked Gabrielle into his arms, lifted his face to the night sky, and then quicker than the mortal eye could see, took to the skies. Artimus followed suit, but a bit slower, and this time, Preston was able to see a hazy blur.

Without giving Preston time to protest, Serene grabbed him with an amazing strength that alarmed him, tucked him into her arms, and streaked into the starlit black canopy overhead.

His head reeled, and his stomach rolled alarmingly as the chilled night air rushed at him with a speed that terrified him. He ventured a look downward, swallowing hard at the sight of the doll-sized landscape streaming by in a kaleidoscope of images.

The instant he looked down he knew it was a mistake. The panic he tried so hard to hold at bay broke loose. “Let me go. I can’t do this.”

“If I let you go, Gabrielle is going to be plenty pissed,” came back

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her amused reply. “Now please stop struggling, handsome, or I am going to drop you into the biggest pile of horse manure I can find.”

He struggled to regain self-control. He closed his eyes and began taking deep breaths. He tried to think of something else—anything at all would do. But nothing came to mind except the time he went on the roller coaster with Cameron when they were kids, before Granddad had gotten his hooks into his brother.

At first it had been fun, and then Preston had begun to feel sick as the wind slapped into his face, stealing his breath away, stinging his eyes, and making his stomach pitch and roll, until at last he’d been deathly sick right then and there. Cameron had been angry and disgusted.

He’d called Preston “wimp,” “sissy,” and everything else he could think of, but Preston had said nothing in his own defense. He’d been deeply ashamed, and he’d also been determined not to show his brother the hurt he felt at the name-calling.

It still hurt to think about it so many years later. Funny, how childhood memories could do that.

## *ENEMY MINE*

His stomach sloshed uncomfortably as he recalled the painful memory. Way to go, Preston, he told himself. Thinking about a dumb ride that had frightened the hell out of him as a kid was definitely not the right thing to think about at a time like this. Especially not when he was flying miles above the earth, without the benefit of a parachute or, for that matter, an airplane, with a vampire who thought she was a siren from the late thirties and found his fear amusing.

He dared to open his eyes for a brief second; the stars overhead crashing in his direction as she turned south made him flinch. Instantly, he squeezed his eyes shut, praying silently that she knew what the hell she was doing.

“How much longer?” he finally managed to choke out past the mountain-sized lump in his throat.

“Open your eyes, Preston,” she said quietly.

Hesitantly, he did as she bade, shock and relief washing over him in a tidal wave as he felt the good solid earth beneath his feet. He staggered as he readjusted to being on land, still not quite sure if he really was, or if he was just dreaming it. God, he hoped like hell he

## *ENEMY MINE*

wasn't dreaming it.

"Are you all right, Preston?"

Gabrielle's voice broke into his dazed thoughts, and when he saw her approach, he knew he was in real time and he'd survived the wild tumultuous flight. A damn miracle was what it was. Never again, he swore silently, his head spinning.

"He's fine, Gabrielle," Serene offered with a snap of her ever-present chewing gum. "Just a little shook up, is all. We ran into a bit of turbulence on the way here."

Gabrielle shot him a worried look. "He doesn't look too good."

Preston put on a brave, though shaky smile. "I'm a-okay," he managed to get out before he pitched forward onto his face.

"Oh my God, is he dead?" Serene asked.

Gabrielle fell to her knees by his side, seeking frantically for a pulse. When she found it beating strong and steady, a sigh of relief escaped her. "Thank God, he's alive."

Angel snorted. "God's teeth, woman, of course he's alive. The man just fainted, that's all. I daresay his first trip by air was more than he

## *ENEMY MINE*

could handle.”

Gabrielle turned to glare at him. “Do be quiet, Angel. He did very well, considering his phobia, and you bloody well know it. Now get over here and make yourself useful.”

Angel’s features took on a bewildered look. “How so, my love?”

“God’s teeth, must I spell it out? Help me carry him inside the house.”

Angel gently pushed her away and picked up the big man as effortlessly as if he’d picked a piece of clothing off the floor. “I daresay this goes far beyond duty, Gabrielle Warlick. I can’t believe you have me, Angel Duvall, once a great lord, toting a blasted human like he was a baby.”

She made to follow him, but he turned back in mid-step with a wicked grin on his sensuous mouth. “You owe me one, my love, and I always collect unpaid debts.”

Gabrielle sniffed and gave him a little push in the direction of Debra’s house, but she couldn’t help smiling. For all his posturing and complaining, Angel Duvall was the one person in all the world she

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could count on in a crunch—he always came to her rescue, just as he had in those dark days during the Blood War.

Angel was one of those rare vampires who cared about others, although he fiercely denied it. But Gabrielle knew the truth, as did Serene and Artimus. Angel was one of a kind—a friend to the bitter end. She gave him another little prod in the back to hasten his progress, then grinned as she listened to him grumble all the way into the house.

## *CHAPTER 12*

Gabrielle gazed with a tired smile at the sleeping Preston. She smoothed back a lock of corn-gold hair from his forehead with a tender gesture.

Earlier, his face pale, his jaw tensed, he'd been unable to sleep as she had suggested. Finally, Serene had used her powers to put him to sleep so he could get the rest he sorely needed.

Gabrielle's heart swelled with love and admiration at how he faced his enormous fear and found the courage to come along with them. It still amazed her, and she had to admit it touched her heart that he'd been willing to trust Gabrielle and her friends not to allow any harm to befall him while he was so vulnerable.

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She kissed his forehead before getting up from the bed and leaving the room. The door closed behind her with a soft click.

So much had happened in such a short space of time; she was determined that he would rest for now. Later, he would need his strength for the long battle ahead. She had little doubt that, in the end, it would come to that.

The Adams clan had declared war against vampires, and even against one of their own. Gabrielle didn't know what the future held for the Adamses or the vampires. She wished all sides could live peacefully, with no bloodshed. She just couldn't precisely figure out how to bring it about. Gabrielle doubted seriously that anybody could. Worried, she tugged at her bottom lip with her teeth.

Frowning in consternation, she wandered into the kitchen where the others waited.

"Still sleeping, I presume," Angel commented with a dry smile.

She nodded, sitting at the faded Formica tabletop. "He should sleep a few more hours before the effect wears off."

Debra, her pink scalp showing through the remnants of snow-white

## *ENEMY MINE*

hair, grasped her hand. "The sun will rise soon. If you like, I can keep an eye on him while you rest."

Gabrielle smiled, gently squeezing the elderly woman's frail hand. "Thank you, sweetie. I don't know what we would have done if you hadn't opened your home to us."

"Don't be a goose," Debra said. "It was the least I could do. With everything you've done for me, I couldn't begin to repay you if I lived a dozen lifetimes."

"How long have you known Gabrielle?" Serene asked.

"That's right. You weren't here then," Debra said. She smiled, a faraway look coming into her faded brown eyes. "Since I was six. She found me wandering the streets of New York during the depression after my parents died. If not for Gabrielle's timely intervention, I would have died before I reached my seventh birthday."

Angel grinned his most devilish smile. "If I remember correctly, Debra, you were quite terrified of us at first." He glanced at Serene. "She was so afraid after she found out what we were, she wore a woolen scarf around her neck at night when she slept."

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Gabrielle laughed in delight. “I remember, in the hours she was awake she made sure she wore a crucifix. She fashioned it from some rusty old tin she found lying about.” She cast Debra a fond glance. “It took me months to convince her she was safe with us. But since then she has been a good and loyal friend.”

Only one of many, she thought sadly, remembering the scores of orphans she’d raised in her life. But with each one’s death, a piece of her had died as well, until finally when Debra grew up, she fled into the mountains, unable to bear to watch another one die.

Angel stood, stretching widely. “This trip down memory lane is fascinating, but I do think we should be going.”

Gabrielle stood also, tentatively touching his arm. “Not yet, Angel. I want to know why you behaved so badly with Preston tonight. It was so unlike you to be so ... so thoughtless.” She was too tired to come up with a better word to describe his behavior.

Angel looked annoyed. “I don’t really know. That particular human just seems to rub me the wrong way.”

“As did Damon,” she murmured, thinking about the fierce

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competition between the two men from the minute they'd met, two centuries ago.

Angel's features seemed to harden, shadows finding the contours of his finely sculpted face. "Are you trying to tell me that upstart is Damon Kendleton?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying," she said, giving him a steady look.

"God's teeth, woman, have you gone completely mad? Damon died in the Blood War. You know that as well as I do."

"But what if he came back?" she asked, her voice hardly more than a whisper.

"Utter nonsense. Preston Adams is no more Damon Kendleton than I am," Angel snapped, running his hand through his dark curls. "Gabrielle, I know you don't want to carry out the sentence against the man. But that's no excuse for fabricating this ludicrous fantasy. Reincarnation is just a myth humans like to fantasize about."

Gabrielle lifted one shapely brow. "Don't the humans also believe we are myths? Yet we know *we* exist."

## *ENEMY MINE*

Angel hit the table with the flat of his hand. “You have to accept that Damon is dead—gone forever, Gabrielle. And no matter how much you want it to be true, he’s not going to come back.”

“But he has. How else can you explain how he knew the way I died, and the nickname he called me? How could he have known that was Damon’s special name for me?”

Angel scowled fiercely. “I haven’t the faintest idea. Perhaps he got it from his blasted data files. I just don’t want to see you hurt, *ma cherie*, and if you persist in this foolishness that’s precisely what’s going to occur. I, for one, can’t stand by and watch it happen all over again.” He misted and was gone before she could open her mouth.

Stunned by his passionate outburst, Gabrielle’s confused gaze sought out Artimus. “I don’t understand why he is behaving so strangely.”

Artimus shook his head. “Child, after all this time, don’t you know that Angel loves you? It pains him to see you hurt.”

“I love him, too, but that still doesn’t explain why he’s being so stubborn. He’s been around a lot longer than I have. Why, he told me

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he's seen a lot of strange things he couldn't account for. I can't understand why he just can't accept the fact that Preston is Damon."

"Are you so sure, dear?" the old man asked.

"Yes," she said in a quiet voice.

Artimus' bleary eyes were sad, yet compassionate. "I suspect Angel senses that. I'm sure he must feel threatened by your obvious affection for this human."

She tilted her head to the side. "Why should he? It doesn't affect my relationship with him. He will always be my friend."

"Ah, but that's just it," Artimus said, wagging his finger at her. "Angel wants to be more than your friend, my dear. I don't think he's even realized it himself. But I know he has for a long time, only you've always shut him out."

Gabrielle stared at him in disbelief. "That can't be true. He's never said anything all these years."

"Yes, it is true, Gabrielle," Debra interjected. "I've known about Angel's feelings for you since I was a child."

Gabrielle shook her head. "How could I have known? How could I

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have been so blind and not seen the way he felt about me?”

Debra touched her hand. “Sometimes we only see what we want to see.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Gabrielle said. “I always thought Angel never had a thought beyond where the next party was being held. Angel has always enjoyed life to the fullest, never thinking about tomorrow. Of course, I’ve always known part of his carefree attitude was an act, and that when it came to his own kind he took his responsibilities very seriously. But I’d never dreamed ...”

Artimus smiled. “I suspect he wouldn’t want you to know. He remembers how much you loved Damon. He accepted that. I just don’t expect he thought Damon would return in the guise of a human—an Adams, no less. He’s frightened for you, as I am.”

\* \* \*

Later, after the old man and a strangely silent Serene took their leave, Gabrielle gazed with unseeing eyes through the black iron grate of the double windows in the old fashioned parlor. The pink rose of dawn was minutes away, yet she couldn’t stop thinking about what

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Artimus had told her.

Heaviness settled upon her heart. She would give anything to keep from hurting Angel, but she couldn't help the way she felt. For her, Angel had always been brother, friend and father all rolled into one. Never could she feel the same way about him that she felt about Damon, and now ... Preston.

"I'm so sorry, my friend," she whispered into the night, bloodstained tears upon her smooth pale cheeks. "We were never meant to be."

\* \* \*

"How in Sam Hill did you let them get away this time?" Will Adams slammed his fist onto the desk. He stared at Cameron as if he suddenly realized he didn't know him. Nor did he trust him to do the job he'd sent him to do. Of course, by posting that damned reward, he'd made that clear to everybody.

Cameron shrugged, keeping his own anger checked so as not to further antagonize the older man. "I can't explain it. There's no way they could have gotten past my men."

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“Idiot. All she had to do was fly out of there. They weren’t watching the sky, were they?”

“Not if my information is correct. Gabrielle Warlick has few powers left. She is one of the weakest among her peers. My sources tell me she is unable to fly. She and Preston would have had to walk out of that swamp.” Cameron shook his head. “No, it was the men. The men you gave me were incompetent.”

Cameron tried to keep resentment out of his voice, but he knew he’d failed to do so when his grandfather studied him with a piercing stare, pinning him in place. He could hear his blood roaring in his ears.

Stay calm, he told himself. Don’t go off half-cocked or the old man will make you regret it.

Since he’d been old enough to hunt alone, his grandfather had never had to hire mercenaries to assist him like he did for some of his cousins. Now, he had done so. All because of his little brother. Cameron blamed Preston for his fall from grace.

His little brother had caused him nothing but trouble from the day he was born.

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“Did you ever stop to think they might have had help? Accomplices? Goddamn vampires who have a full range of powers?” Will snorted in disgust. “No. You wouldn’t, cause you’re too damn confident. Arrogance and overconfidence are bad traits in a hunter.” Will gave him a hard look. “You’re heading for a fall, boy, and you and me both know it. I am head of this family. I’m the one who decides when you are to have assistance or not. In this particular instance you need all the help you can get. Despite Preston’s ineptness, he’s damned smart. He will do everything in his power to protect that blood-sucker.”

Cameron smiled an ice-cold smile. “And I will do everything in my power to see that he fails.”

“Don’t kill him unless you have to,” his grandfather warned. “After all, despite his defection from our ranks, he is still an Adams.”

Not in my book, Cameron thought as he left the study. If his little brother had no more sense than to get himself involved with the enemy, he deserved whatever came his way.

Of course, it was possible that cute little vampire could have turned

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his head the way she had Preston's, but he'd still have stuck it to her, once he'd had some fun with her. When Cameron caught up to them again, he'd show his little brother exactly what a hunter was suppose to do with a pretty little number like Gabrielle Warlick.

"I want to speak to you," CeCe said before he could open the front door.

He wore a grim expression when he turned to face her. "I know what you're going to say, CeCe. Save your breath, I don't want to hear any sentimental nonsense about my mother, or about when my brother and I were kids. I have a job to do. That's all it is: another job."

CeCe laughed bitterly, her eyes haunted. "Is that what they call fratricide nowadays? I must be getting senile in my old age."

A feeling of disquiet crept up his spine. "You don't know what you're talking about, old woman. Brother or not, Preston betrayed us all. Don't you understand that he is now the enemy—not me?"

"All I understand"—she waved her hands impatiently—"no, all I *care* to understand is Preston is your brother no matter what the circumstances. It is against man and God for you to set out to murder

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your own brother in cold blood. You can't do this horrible deed, Cameron. Your brother's blood will stain your hands for the rest of your days. I do not wish to see you carry such a burden. What would your dear, sweet mother say about her eldest son wanting to kill his only brother?"

"I don't care what she'd think, CeCe. I'm a hunter and I'm doing my job. It's not my fault Preston chose to go over to the other side. It was his choice, not mine."

Tears glistened in her eyes. "Please—please, stop this now while you still can, before it's too late to turn back. Don't defile the memory of your mother this way."

For a spilt second, he was torn with indecision. He longed—no, he wanted to do as she asked. It wasn't true what he'd said about his mother. He'd loved her dearly, but she'd never understood his profession—his calling. Perhaps he could leave, forget about his grandfather, and all the rest. He had more than enough money to leave the country, do something else ...

He shook his head to dislodge the traitorous thoughts. No, he could

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not run away. A vampire had killed his father, and he'd be damned if he'd let even one remain alive while he was still living. He would not back away from this assignment. He had a job to do, and by God, he intended to do it, brother or no brother.

"I can't do that, CeCe," he said, his features twisting painfully. "It's already too late. I will not turn my back upon my family the way Preston has done." He turned back to the door, his hand on the knob.

The tormented grief in her fractured voice stayed his hand. "Is that your last word? You refuse to put an end to this madness? You're going to murder your brother?"

He didn't turn to face her—he dared not, for he feared he would falter if he saw the tears in her eyes.

The tears he heard in her voice.

It was almost more than he could do, not to do as she asked, because unfortunately, the one person he had a soft spot for was CeCe, but he knew he must.

"I'm sorry CeCe," he said, his voice harsh. Without giving her a chance to respond, he walked out the door.

## *ENEMY MINE*

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Artimus blew out the candles and made ready for bed. Dawn was slowly creeping across the nighttime sky, making him feel every one of the years he'd lived since his transformation. He was getting too old for all this cloak-and-dagger nonsense, and he'd known it for a long time, even before this trouble with Gabrielle.

Oh dear, dear, Gabrielle. He sadly shook his head as he made his way upstairs in the tiny cottage he kept in the backwoods of East Tennessee. His sanctuary was only a hundred miles or so away from Gabrielle's own sanctuary, because he'd felt she might have need of his services someday.

Oh, Artimus knew he was too old to be playing a knight in shining armor, but he loved her like his own child, and he wanted no harm to befall her. Despite her nature, she was the most innocent of them all. If only the others understood that, but none did, save for Angel.

Serene tried to understand, but in reality Gabrielle's steadfast refusal to intake human blood baffled her as much as it did the others.

He thought of Angel and the pain he'd glimpsed in his green eyes.

### *ENEMY MINE*

The poor vampire really had no idea what he was up against with Preston Adams, just as he had not known with Damon.

Angel had never understood the depth of Gabrielle's emotions for her one true love, and for years had thought that one day she would turn to him. But now, that would never happen. And to add to his misery, the council had ordered Angel to execute her if she didn't carry out her assignment. Poor, poor man, it was a shame, really. If Angel wasn't careful, he could find himself with a contract upon his own head. That wouldn't do, not at all.

Uncomfortable with the route his thoughts had taken, Artimus turned his mind back to Gabrielle and her bold assumption about Preston Adams' previous identity. Artimus didn't want to believe it any more than Angel did. But something inside Artimus told him that Gabrielle was right about the vampire hunter coming back as her Damon. As impossible as it seemed, Gabrielle and Preston's destinies were intertwined. He could only hope that history did not repeat itself. Gabrielle could not endure more heartache; she'd had more than enough for a dozen lifetimes.

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His gaze fixed on the wooden crucifix above his bed, and he sank to his knees beside his rumpled cot and clasped his hands together. He bowed his head and said a silent prayer for all of them. Although he'd been forced from God's presence centuries ago, he could not give up the love he had for the Almighty. He'd been only a simple man of simple pleasures before his transformation three centuries ago. A man who had devoted his life to serving God.

But a rogue vampire, with a perverted sense of humor, had changed all of that one stormy night when he'd attacked Artimus. He had been on his way back to the monastery after seeing to the sick in a nearby village and never thought he might be in danger. A false sense of security, he supposed, now that he looked back and could see the folly of his ways.

At first, he'd almost gone mad with the knowledge of what he'd become, wanting only to die, until Angel had found him. It was Angel who'd taught him how to live with himself and his religion. Now, centuries later, he'd finally achieved a sense of peace and had come to terms with himself and with his God.

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The sound of movement behind him brought up his head. A jolt of terror rocked him. He was no longer alone. His senses screamed a warning.

But it was too late to help him now.

“Well, well, what do we have here?” A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

He shuddered in revulsion as he looked up into the cold, deadly face of his intruder.

\* \* \*

It was happening again. “Oh dear God, please don’t make me live through it again,” Gabrielle moaned, tossing restlessly in her sleep.

*The castle was under siege. Terror clutched at her insides. She ran through the smoke and fire, the stench of blood in her nostrils. She could hear their dogs howling in the distance beyond the castle’s walls. She had to get to Damon before it was too late.*

*Why hadn’t they listened to her? Hadn’t she warned them this might happen? She’d known the villagers would finally revolt against their inhuman masters—tired of the killings—always more killings,*

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*taking their able-bodied men, women and children.*

*But the others had laughed at her concerns, declaring that the villagers were steadfast, loyal, not to mention deathly afraid of them ...*

*It had happened, though, just as she had predicted. Mortal against immortal—blood—death—mayhem, everything she had expected, and then some.*

*She spotted Artimus, blood streaked across his wrinkled brow, his monk's robe torn at the shoulder, hurrying down the corridor. "Get out, child, before it is too late. We have lost the battle. Flee now, before they destroy you as well."*

*She gripped his arm in a tight hold. "Damon? What of Damon?"*

*Artimus shook his bushy head, his eyes sad. "Alas, I fear he is dead. He was one of the first to be taken."*

*"Damon ... no," she cried, denying his words. Her head reeled; her chest hurt; breathing was becoming difficult. "Not Damon. You must be mistaken." Her voice quavered. "Tell me you're mistaken ... it can't be my Damon."*

## **ENEMY MINE**

*“I fear ‘tis true, my beloved.” He wrapped a frail arm around her shoulders. “Come with me, child, before it is too late and our enemies are upon us.”*

*“Nooo ...” she screamed, her voice bouncing off the stone walls, echoing through the long corridor. “It’s our insatiable desire for human blood that has brought us to this place. That is the abomination that has caused this tragedy, not the villagers.” She locked her gaze onto him. “We should have known—been aware of the dangers. Now ... it is too late.”*

*“Please, my child, come with me. You are not yourself. You are mad with grief. You know not what you’re saying.”*

*She pushed away from him. “Not until I see Damon for myself,” she whispered, taking off down the corridor in the direction he’d just left before he had time to stop her.*

*She ran as if her feet had sported wings, her mind voice calling Damon over and over.*

*“Please answer me, my love.” A tiny sound of despair lodged in her throat. No answer ... no loving reassurance.*

## **ENEMY MINE**

*She halted in mid-stride when she reached the great hall, stunned by the grisly appearance of this once-magnificent, dignified chamber. She flinched at the sight of bodies, human and vampire, locked in mortal combat, even in death.*

*Blood. Blood was everywhere, making intricate designs on the stone floors and walls. Her wide-eyed gaze flew to the richly embroidered tapestries that adorned the walls, now splashed with gore, ruined beyond repair.*

*Her breath stopped. Her heart thudded painfully as her gaze fell upon her love. He lay sprawled upon the raised dais as though merely sleeping, the dying firelight reflecting off the burnished gold of his silky hair. She flew to his side, her stomach twisting into a small, cold knot. He was so still, pale beyond his normal paleness.*

*“No ... please, no ...” she moaned, collapsing in a crumpled heap at his side. She touched the wooden stake buried in his chest, willing him to live ... needing him to live for her.*

*Despair overwhelmed her, the agony grew, expanding until it had nowhere else to go ... it stabbed through her like spears of fire ...*

## ENEMY MINE

*“Gabrielle, you must come,” Artimus shouted, pulling her to her feet. She could hear the fearful desperation in his voice; then she caught the sound of loud voices coming toward them.*

*Oh merciful God, he was right. Panic spiraled through her. Her eyes darted across the room, searching for an escape route. The villagers had learned their lessons well. Every opening was sealed, which meant she and Artimus could not mist or fly, could not escape the fate in store for them. They were trapped—nowhere to hide, nowhere to run. The humans were getting closer. Numb with grief and despair, she sank to her knees and cradled Damon’s golden head in her lap. “Soon, my love. We will be together again soon,” she whispered, smoothing back a golden lock from his forehead.*

*Shock rippled through her when she looked down and, instead of Damon, she found herself holding Preston.*

*“Preston?”*

\* \* \*

*She jerked upright, breathing shallow breaths as she fought back the fear and grief that swamped her. She glanced frantically about the*

### *ENEMY MINE*

subterranean room Debra had readied for her, searching the shadows as if she expected one of the mortals from the past to jump out and finish the job begun two centuries before.

Her breathing slowed as she calmed down and realized she was alone. Her thoughts drifted back to her dream, and she remembered her shock at Damon turning into Preston.

Did the dream have significance? She'd been having the same nightmares for eons; now suddenly it had changed. Was it a warning that Preston was in danger? The thought of losing her one and only love to death once again ripped a hole in her heart.

No, she wouldn't let the past repeat itself. Somehow, she would change his fate. She would not fail him again ...

## *CHAPTER 13*

“Did you sleep well?” Debra asked Preston when he came into the kitchen late the following morning.

The bleached wood cabinets and shiny copper pots, hanging over the massive wood counter island in the center, gave the kitchen a sunny bright feel. He liked that and, for the first time in days, Preston felt optimistic about the future.

His family seemed very far away, and that’s the way he liked it ... except he missed CeCe. He could only guess how his cousin was faring in the midst of madness. He hoped she was not suffering unduly because of him. He also missed Bailey, another cousin. She was a spunky little thing, always pestering Granddad about becoming a

## *ENEMY MINE*

hunter.

Finally, their grandfather had had enough, and sent her on a tour of Europe. The entire family had seemed to breathe a sigh of collective relief at Bailey's departure. Granddad believed that females had no business trying to be hunters. Preston knew Will hoped the tour would get it out of Bailey's system, but he had his doubts it would work. Bailey was just as stubborn as their grandfather. It bothered him to know he'd not been able to say good-bye to her.

"Preston, are you all right?" Debra asked, eyeing him with motherly concern.

"Yes. Please forgive me. My attention wandered for a moment." He smiled. "You must be Debra."

She nodded. "Have a seat and make yourself at home." She went to the stove and withdrew a pan of freshly baked blueberry muffins. Preston swallowed hard at the tantalizing aroma that drifted his way.

Preston hungrily eyed the muffins as Debra brought them to the table, pouncing on the delicacies when she set them down.

She laughed. "I guess I can safely assume by your eagerness it has

## *ENEMY MINE*

been a while since you've eaten."

Preston nodded, too busy enjoying the heavenly taste of the muffins to reply.

"I'll get you some coffee to wash them down," she said, going to the stove.

When she came back to the table and set down a brown mug, steam rose from the surface, tantalizing him with its scent of freshly brewed coffee. He picked it up, taking a long sip before he spoke. "Gabrielle?"

Debra seemed to know what he meant. She took a sip of coffee from her mug and smiled. "She's fine. She's in the basement. I had a room prepared for her years ago when I bought this old house. I never thought she would really come, but I held out hope through the years, and now she's here." She shoved another muffin under his nose. "Here, have another. I just love to see people enjoying my cooking."

"What about the others?" he asked before he bit into another delicious muffin.

"Left before dawn. But I'm sure they will return this evening."

"God, I hope not," he said, finishing off his second muffin. "I've

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had about all I can handle from those kooks. I never knew vampires could be so ... eccentric.”

Debra smiled. “I take it you don’t care much for their company.”

He shrugged before reaching for another muffin. “Not especially. I’m afraid I’m not used to consorting with vampires. It sort of goes against the grain, if you know what I mean.”

“It does take some getting use to,” she said, getting up and refreshing his coffee. She sat back down with a sigh. “But once you get to know them, you’ll realize they’re not half bad. Of course, I can’t speak for the entire society of vampires. But those three you met last night, and Gabrielle, are the best in the bunch, in my opinion. I have met a few over the years who made my blood run cold, I can tell you.”

Preston glanced at the golden coin she wore on a chain around her neck. The Roman coin glinted in the morning sunlight. Unconsciously, he reached for his own, only to find it gone.

He felt a pang of regret as he realized he must have lost it somewhere over the last two days. The problem was, he didn’t have any idea where or when. He felt a twinge of apprehension, feeling

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oddly naked without it. He'd worn it since he was ten years old—an initiation gift from his grandfather, given to him when he joined the hunters' training program.

The story went that Corbin Adams had had the coins specially blessed centuries ago for protection against the evil of vampires. Only one hundred of them were still around today, and Preston had thought they were all in the possession of his family. Debra having one of the precious relics proved him wrong. He remembered another family legend about an amulet of unusual beauty that had belonged to Corbin's dead wife, which he'd reputedly had blessed by the pope.

The amulet had great powers against the creatures of the night and was said to be able to destroy them. But somehow, through the ages, it had been lost. He couldn't help but be thankful it had been, or his family would have completely wiped out Gabrielle and her kind long ago, and he would have never found her again.

He gestured toward Debra. "Your medallion. Where did you get it?"

Debra smiled fondly as she gently fingered it. "Gabrielle gave it to

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me on my eighth birthday. She told me it would protect me from her kind if any of the rogues came around.”

Preston raised an eyebrow. “Rogues?”

“That’s what she and the others call vampires who feed upon human blood the same way they did in the years before blood banks and transfusions. It infuriates her to no end that there are those who still prey upon mankind.”

His gaze held hers for a moment before he spoke. “Debra, do you know why Gabrielle has such an aversion to human blood?”

The old woman eyed him warily. “Don’t you know?”

“Would I be asking you if I did?”

Confusion clouded her faded eyes. “I don’t understand. Gabrielle said you were Damon. If that’s true, you should know the answer.”

“I do remember some of it in bits and pieces. Mostly parts I’ve dreamed. But there are still things that are hazy. It’s frustrating as hell, believe me.”

Debra studied him with a thoughtful frown. “Preston, I think it best not to push this kind of thing. You’ll remember, or Gabrielle will tell

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you when she's ready. It's not my place to betray her confidence. Gabrielle has been the mother to me I never had. I won't talk about her out of school." She laughed self-consciously, touching the white strands of her chin-length hair. "I know how that sounds with me an old hag, and she as beautiful as the day I met her, but it's true. She sent me to school, helped me study in the evenings. She was even godmother to my children, but from a distance." The corners of her mouth tugged down into a frown. "After I married, she seemed to change. I started seeing her less and less, until finally we were only exchanging letters and phone calls. To this day, I'm not sure why she distanced herself from me."

Preston gently sat his cup down. "You love her very much, don't you?"

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for her if she asked me. She saved my life."

He caught up her gnarled hand in his. "Don't worry, Debra, you can trust me. I love her, too. I would never do anything to hurt her."

He could see the relief in her face; he knew she had needed to hear

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those words from him.

He pulled back and picked up his coffee mug, taking a sip. He cradled it in his hands, enjoying the warmth emanating from its surface. “Now that we have that out of the way and we both know where we stand, is there anything I can do for you to show my appreciation for taking us in?”

“Well, there is something, but I don’t know—”

“Spit it out, woman. You need me to scrub the toilets, take out the trash, wax the floors.” He grinned and snapped his fingers. “Just name the dirtiest deed, and it’s done.”

She laughed and shook her head. “Nothing so dramatic, I’m afraid. I just thought you might go to the market for me. I want to fix a salad for lunch, and I’m out of lettuce and tomatoes. Do you mind?”

He smiled, running a hand through his rumpled hair. “Not at all. As a matter of fact, it will be nice to do something so mundane as going to the grocery. It’s better than running for your life any day.”

After he finished the last of the muffins, he went back to his room, and showered and shaved. When he came out of the bathroom, he was

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pleasantly surprised to find a pair of jeans and a red plaid shirt lying across the coverlet on his bed.

Surprisingly enough, they were almost a perfect fit, except for the jeans. They were a couple of inches too long. He rolled them up, tucked in his shirt and went to find Debra.

He found her in the parlor, dusting the ornate furniture. The stuffy room was crowded to overflowing with furniture dating back to the turn of the century.

“Thanks for the clothes. Where did you find them?”

Her gaze moved over him approvingly. “They belong to my grandson. He’s does some of the repairs around here to save me money. Todd keeps several changes of clothes here, so he can change before he leaves to go home. I thought you two looked about the same size, so I borrowed some.”

“I hope he doesn’t mind,” Preston said with a rueful smile.

Debra made a sweeping gesture with her hand. “He won’t, I can assure you.” With a fretful frown, she glanced around the room. “Now where did I put my grocery list?”

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She found it a few minutes later under the horsehair sofa. He turned down her offer of car keys, telling her he'd much rather walk since the store was only a few blocks away.

Preston left the Spanish-style brick house with a brisk walk, reveling in the warmth of the autumn sunshine. He breathed deeply, enjoying the scent of burning leaves drifting in the chilled air.

Forty-five minutes later, he was coming out of the video store located next to the grocery, a bag of food in one arm and a tape of *Casablanca* in the other. He hoped Gabrielle liked Humphrey Bogart as much as he did. He figured that, after the last few days, they both could use a bit of relaxation, if only for a couple of hours.

Even Cameron couldn't stay on the job twenty-four hours a day. It would take time for his brother to track them down again. Time he was determined to put to good use courting his Gabby-Skye, picking up right where they'd left off centuries ago.

A kid on a skateboard, wearing a striped shirt and ragged blue jeans, whipped past him, jostling his arm. The video slipped from his grasp, hitting the sidewalk with a loud slap. Preston, uttering a curse

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under his breath, bent to pick up the brown case, giving the receding back of the kid a sideways glare.

A frown marred his forehead when he noticed a man wearing a brown bomber's jacket lounging against the video storefront window, watching him.

Strange, he thought, too strange. He'd noticed the same man in the grocery store, and then again in Sam's Video Shop.

At the time he hadn't given it much thought, but now, with the man's pale blue eyes staring directly at him, Preston wondered if he could be following him.

A cold knot formed in his gut when he remembered the hired guns his grandfather sometimes used on hunts. Men who never thought twice about killing. Men who never balked at any despicable deed they were told to do, if the price was right.

When he was twelve, he'd accidentally run into one of these men outside his grandfather's study. The soulless look in the man's eyes had sent a shiver of fear down his back and it had haunted him for years afterward. He'd seen that same look in his brother's eyes; a look

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he'd hoped never came into his own.

He straightened slowly, his fingers tightening around the video box until his knuckles whitened under the strain.

A lump formed in Preston's throat as his thoughts leapt to Gabrielle sleeping peacefully two blocks away. He couldn't lead this guy back to the house. He had to think of a way to shake him without making him aware that he'd caught on to him.

But how?

Think, man, he sternly told himself. Preston forced himself to meander down the sidewalk like a man sent to do his family shopping, now lingering in the warmth of the sun. A man enjoying his escape from family life for just a little while longer.

Out of the corner of his eye, Preston saw the man move away from the window, coming behind him at a snail's pace, but still keeping him in sight.

Preston's heart beat faster as he sped up, his thoughts becoming frantic as he debated how to handle this particular crisis without bringing undue attention to himself. If he challenged the guy,

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somebody would no doubt call the police. He walked faster, his breath coming in short spurts. When he reached the corner of the block of buildings, he turned into the alleyway.

Anger surged within him. He'd be damned if he'd let this mindless piece of slime get the drop on him. He threw down the bag of groceries and the video, slamming his body against the concrete wall next to a giant green dumpster, holding his breath, waiting for the guy to come after him.

The stranger appeared around the corner seconds later, peering through the gloom in the alleyway. He took a few steps forward, speculatively eyeing the dumpster, blinking rapidly in the dim light.

The fury inside Preston coalesced, seeming to focus in one bright, burning spot, like a sun inside him. The fury lent him strength to do what he must.

He leapt forward, jumping the man from behind, catching him off-guard. The man uttered an oath during the brief struggle, before Preston gained the upper hand with a powerful round kick to the stomach. The man let out a whoosh of air, bending almost double in

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agony.

Preston roughly jerked him upright, flinging him against the wall. He held him prisoner, his arm against the man's throat, cutting off his air supply.

"Who the hell are you?" he bit off savagely.

The man's face turned beet-red as he struggled to speak. Preston slightly let up on the pressure.

"Nobody, man. Nobody."

"Okay, *Nobody*, who sent you?"

"Don't ... don't know what you talking about," the man said in a high, strangled voice. "Let me go, man. You're ... killing me."

Preston tightened the pressure. The stranger's face turned an even brighter red. "I want to know who sent you."

Again, he slightly loosened his grip so the man could speak.

"You're crazy, man."

"Why were you following me?" Preston persisted, bringing his knee upward into the man's groin. The man moaned; Preston ignored it. "That's only a sample of what I can do to make you talk. I was

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trained by the best in mortal combat and in interrogation. Would you like to see more of my inestimable skills?”

“All right, let ... let me go and I’ll tell you.”

“No chance,” Preston said curtly.

“I was going after your wallet, man. I swear, that’s all.”

By now the man was sweating badly. Preston could smell the acrid stench of his fear.

Preston studied him for a moment before he released him. He decided the guy was telling the truth. “Let me give you a piece of advice. Pick your victim more carefully next time. Now get out of here before I change my mind.”

The would-be pickpocket paled. He spun around with a cry of fear, disappearing around the corner of the opposite building.

Preston shook his head, bending to pick up the items that had fallen out of his bag. His hands were shaking at how close he’d come to killing that punk. He had never suspected he could feel such fury and hatred boiling inside him for another human. He’d never thought himself capable of such intense negative emotions.

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All his life he had fought against becoming like Cameron. Even when his grandfather ordered him to eliminate Gabrielle, he'd known deep down he couldn't do it, though he couldn't admit it even to himself at the time.

He'd tried to convince himself otherwise, hoping he could when the time came. But he wasn't like Cameron; a killing drone programmed to eradicate anything or anyone who didn't fit into his idea of suitability. Or was he?

The thought made his blood run cold.

## *CHAPTER 14*

After Gabrielle had returned from hunting in a nearby stand of woods, she followed the sounds of voices to the parlor where she found Debra and Preston talking and laughing. She felt a warm glow in the bottom of her stomach at the sight of them getting along so well. It meant a lot to her that Debra approved of him ... accepted him.

Preston spotted her first. He stood up immediately, coming to her, taking her into his arms with a welcoming smile. "We were beginning to wonder if you were going to come up. The sun's been down for close to an hour. I was about to come looking for you."

"If you both will excuse me, I must retire for the night," Debra said, getting to her feet. "At my age, I need all the beauty sleep I can get."

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After she bid them both a goodnight and went upstairs, Preston led Gabrielle to the couch.

“I rented us a video for this evening,” he said, going to the VCR and popping it in.

He sat down next to her, drawing her close. “I thought ... well, what I mean to say is there’s no reason why we shouldn’t enjoy an evening in like other folks.”

“Human, you mean?” she asked, thinking of how human they sounded right now. The world of darkness seemed to be so very far away. She only wished she could keep it at bay forever.

Preston’s face reddened. “Don’t misunderstand me. I just thought a relaxed ... boring evening together would be nice. Hell, in the last few days, we have both had enough adventure to last a lifetime. We could use some down time.”

Unthinking, she curved her slender fingers against his face, pulling him closer. “Hmm, sounds interesting. I guess I should at least give it a try.”

He grinned just before his mouth swooped down on hers, kissing

## *ENEMY MINE*

her with an intensity that made her ache in the deepest part of her being.

He raised his head to gaze deeply into her eyes, his own darkening with emotion. "I would venture to say that this boring evening could have some distinctly exciting possibilities." His voice was husky with desire.

Again his lips molded to hers, a soft caress that she answered with boldness, touching her tongue to his. A dull throbbing need in her stomach radiated outward, lodging hot and hard between her thighs.

Dimly, Gabrielle was aware of the opening theme on the movie playing in the background, but she ignored it. Desire for him made her feel sleepy yet wide-awake all at the same time. It astonished her that he could arouse such deep emotions within her so quickly.

They were like day and night, but somehow, some way, they blended together like milk and chocolate.

His love pushed away her blood hunger, making it seem unimportant. If only he could take it away forever, she thought as he began to unfasten the pearl buttons on the pale white linen blouse

## *ENEMY MINE*

Debra had laid out for her earlier.

The buttons fell away, and the fabric gaped. His tongue dragged lazily along her lower lip as his hands found her lacy bra. He easily unsnapped it, his head dipping downward to catch a rosy-tipped nipple in his mouth.

The dull throbs in her sharpened, taking on a painful, needy edge. She could almost forget what she was in his arms. She could almost pretend they were just two people in love, expressing that love the way people had been doing since the beginning of time.

Almost.

Who could it hurt to take advantage of this brief—oh so painfully brief—interlude with him? His future wife and kids? No, she wouldn't think about that. She would take nothing from them by loving him now. That was all she asked for and all she wanted—a tiny fraction of a moment out of his life. Memories to keep her warm on long, cold nights ... without him.

Gabrielle wished things could be different. She wished they could be together and live a normal life with children and birthdays. She

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wanted it all: love, family, even the heartache that came with being human. Gabrielle wanted everything that had been so cruelly snatched away so many painful years ago. She felt a bleak emptiness in her chest at the thought of losing him yet again.

Could she do it? Could she let him go to build a life without her? The thought filled Gabrielle with a sensation of desolation, plunging her into the darkest and blackest of pits. She wondered—how would she ever find the strength, or the courage, to walk away from him when the time came?

Preston's fingers felt hot against her skin as he slid her black slacks down her legs. Her mind whirled and skidded as he kissed a searing path from her breast to her stomach. She couldn't control her cry of delight as his lips moved magically over her body. He kissed his way back to her mouth and eased her against the sofa.

Their bodies came together in a clash of heat and passion, coming together perfectly in a way that made her sharply catch her breath, and Gabrielle blocked out everything but this moment, this night.

“Unto death ... Gabby-Skye. I will love you unto death, for an

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eternity,” he whispered in a voice hoarse with passion.

“Unto death, my own beloved,” Gabrielle murmured in return, her voice trailing off as Preston swept her into a swirling vortex of mindless pleasure created by caressing fingertips, hot seeking mouths, and closely entwined limbs.

Sealing their vow of love again, as they had done two hundred years ago. A time when they both walked under the light of a fiery golden orb high in the sky.

A time when they were both children of the sun.

After several lingering kisses, they came down to earth and got dressed—in case Debra came down and caught them making out like a couple of teenagers, Gabrielle told him, laughing as she said it.

“Would you be embarrassed if she did?” he asked, cuddling her close while they both pretended to watch the movie.

“I have to admit that I would be,” she said, playfully kissing the tip of his nose. “Debra is like my daughter. The closest I’ll ever get to being a mother. Like any other mother, I don’t relish the idea of my child catching me in a compromising position.”

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He threw back his head and laughed. “Well, don’t worry. I’d never do anything to compromise you in front of your adopted daughter, I promise.” He grinned, eyeing her with a lustful gaze. “Except maybe this.” He nibbled her earlobe. “Or this.” He nuzzled her neck, sending thrills of pleasure throughout her body. “Or maybe even this,” he rasped, pushing away the opened blouse she’d not gotten around to buttoning, and kissing the tops of her breasts, peeking delectably out of her skimpy bra.

He kissed his way to her mouth, capturing it with his own in a soul-searing kiss. “I don’t know how I got along without you all those years, or how I would get along without you in my future,” he whispered when at last he raised his head.

Her throat closed up tight, and when she spoke it came out in a croak. “You’d muddle through somehow, I suspect.”

Her emotions in turmoil, she watched him lift her hand, kissing each finger one by one. “Never. And now that we have found each other, I’ll never let you go. You belong to me, Gabby-Skye, just as I belong to you. I’m not sure how or why, but I know the last time we

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were together our love ended tragically. I won't let that happen again."

Her breath caught oddly in her chest. "What do you mean?"

His gaze was dark and intense. "I'll move heaven and earth to keep you with me, and nothing is going to stop us from being together. I swear it. Nothing, my darling."

"Isn't this a touching scene?"

Gabrielle jerked away from Preston, jumping to her feet in alarm. "Who are you?" she shouted, searching the shadows formed by the lamp on her left. "What do you want?"

Preston stood, his features showing annoyance. "Dammit, Angel, go away. We want to be alone, if you don't mind."

Gabrielle grabbed his arm, her violet eyes dark with fear. "It's not Angel."

A need to protect Gabrielle surged through Preston at hearing the undisguised terror in her voice. His body stiffened. Not Angel? Then who was it, and why was Gabrielle so afraid?

"Whoever you are, show yourself, unless you're afraid to let me see you," Preston growled, shoving Gabrielle behind him.

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A figure stepped out of the shadows. He was dressed all in black, his fangs bared, his eyes shooting sparks of fury. “You impudent pup. How dare you insinuate that I’m afraid of a mere human.”

“Thaddeus,” Gabrielle breathed. She clutched the back of Preston’s shoulder in a death grip.

“Do not speak my name, you traitorous wench. I was convinced before that you deserved execution.” He shot her a look of hatred and disgust. His thin lips twisted into a sneer. “But now I’m even more sure you deserve it, after seeing you consort with the likes of this ... this *human*.”

Alarmed, Gabrielle felt the muscles in Preston’s shoulders straining as he sprang forward. “Why you—”

“No, Preston,” she screamed as he tore out of her grasp. She tried to reach him, pull him back before he could attack, but she was too late. Her hands closed into fists as, helplessly, she watched Thaddeus catch him in mid-air and throw him against the wall as though he was nothing but a bug to be squashed beneath the vampire’s sleek, black shoe.

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Preston lay silent, motionless upon the carpet; blood streamed in a thin line from the corner of his mouth. The mouth that only a moment ago had caressed hers so tenderly—so lovingly.

Something inside her began to burn, burning away the fear, the horror of the blood wars ... the horror of what he'd done to Preston. A fire of anger, blazing hot and bright, fueling her need for revenge, engulfed her.

With a cry of outrage, Gabrielle hurled herself at him. Her fingers curled into talons, going for his eyes.

There was a shimmer of motion as he whipped the back of his hand across her face, his knuckles striking the side of her head. The blow knocked her against the sofa, the impact tipping it over.

“So weak, so puny,” he mused with a sinister smile. “You are a disgrace to the society of vampires, Gabrielle. You deserved nothing more than to die like the humans you try so hard to emulate. But the council has declared that you die like a vampire in front of all to see.” He moved toward her, his hand held out. “So you will come with me quietly, without anymore nonsense, to face your punishment. Do you

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understand?”

Gabrielle felt a wave of vertigo and realized she was losing consciousness. She fought it back with what pitiful few powers she had left. “I will go with you willingly.”

Preston moaned, and she turned to look at him for a long moment. Stay down, darling, she willed him silently, praying that Thaddeus hadn’t noticed he was still among the living.

She let out a tremulous breath, staggering to her feet. “I’m ready to go.”

Thaddeus cast a smile of such evil intent her lungs stopped working, and she had to literally force herself to breathe again.

He knows Preston is still alive, her mind screamed. Do something. Her body trembled, but somehow she kept her voice steady and even when she spoke. “You know the council doesn’t like to be kept waiting, Thaddeus.”

He moved as sinuously as a cat to where Preston lay. “I think they would approve of me taking time to get rid of this troublemaker before we take our leave.”

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“They might. But I don’t.”

The last dying flicker of hope in Gabrielle’s heart blazed into life at the quietly spoken words. She whirled around to see Angel lounging against the window ledge. His green eyes glittered with an unholy fire that belied his nonchalant stance.

Thaddeus lifted a warning finger. “You dare interfere with a direct order from the tribunal?”

“Yes, I dare, and if you know what’s good for you, you will leave this house at once.”

“You are as strong as the rest of us. Why do you take the side of such a weakling as this?” With a disgusted expression on his face, he pointed a finger at Gabrielle. “She pales in comparison with a real vampire. She is nothing.”

Gabrielle edged instinctively toward Angel at hearing the menace in Thaddeus’ voice.

Angel leaned away from the window, his body tensing, his perfect features hardening. Gabrielle saw a muscle throbbing in his cheek. “If you say another insulting word about her, I will have to kill you. Now,

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get out. Or I just might kill you anyway, for my own amusement.”

Thaddeus stepped forward, and for just a moment Gabrielle thought he was going to try and take Angel. But then he stepped back into the shadows. “You haven’t heard the last of this,” he said before he misted.

“Preston,” Gabrielle said, running to his side. She went to her knees, cradling his head in her lap. “Preston, talk to me.”

He moaned and then opened his eyes. “Christ, I feel like I’ve been hit by a truck.”

She took a deep breath, weak with relief. She raised her head, her gaze fixing on Angel. “Thank you. If not for you—” Her voice broke.

Slowly, Angel turned and raised his head. His eyes were bleak, sightless. Gabrielle looked away, unable to bear the anguish she saw in Angel’s face. She turned her attention back to Preston, now trying to struggle to his feet.

Angel lifted the couch with one hand and sat it upright. Preston nodded his thanks and sank down on it, holding his head in his hands.

“Can I get you something for your head?” Gabrielle asked.

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“Perhaps some aspirin would help,” she added, eyeing him with concern.

“No. Give me a moment. I’ll be fine as soon as I catch my breath.”

“You’d better be. Because we have a major problem,” Angel said, avoiding Gabrielle’s eyes.

It made her want to cry out against the unfairness of life, to see her dearest and best friend uncomfortable in her presence. But she said nothing. What could she say to make it right between them ever again?

“What gives?” Preston asked, raising his head upright, flinching slightly as a shaft of pain buried itself between his eyes.

“Cameron Adams has Artimus.”

“What?” Gabrielle gasped. “That can’t be!”

“I’m afraid it’s true,” Angel said. “This evening before I came here I went to Artimus’ sanctuary to collect him. He was gone, but I found this.” Angel thrust a ragged sheet of paper into Preston’s hands.

Gabrielle joined him on the couch, leaning over to read it:

*If you want to see your friend alive, then bring me the vampire called Gabrielle Warlick and her human companion before dawn. Or*

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*he will die in their stead.*

It was signed *Cameron Adams*.

Preston swore softly. "We have to go to the Folly. I see no other alternative."

Angel fixed him with a hard gaze. "Do you really believe that, if you and Gabrielle turn yourselves over to your brother, he will let Artimus go? Don't be a fool."

"That's not exactly what I had in mind," Preston said dryly. "I think we all know it would be useless to give ourselves up. Cameron has no intention of letting Artimus go, regardless of what we do. Although he would have us believe he would do so." Preston shook his head. "No, we have to come up with some kind of plan. Something totally unexpected to catch him unaware."

"Hey, guys and dolls. Sorry I'm late," Serene said, coming into the room in a slinky, red satin gown that clung to her like a second skin. Actually rather becoming, Gabrielle thought. Only Serene would have the nerve to wear something like that in mixed company.

Gabrielle sat upright, shocked by the frivolity of her thoughts. Judas

## *ENEMY MINE*

Priest, she was losing it. Artimus' life was hanging in the balance and she was thinking about clothes, for God's sake. For days, her emotions had been on a roller coaster going up and down so sharply that, most of the time, she wasn't sure how she should feel, or what she should do.

She looked to Preston for assurance, and almost as if he sensed her turmoil, he closed his hand over hers.

"Where have you been?" Angel demanded, his lips tight with anger.

Serene blinked and stepped back. "Whoa. Perhaps I should go back out and try it again," she murmured in a bewildered voice.

Angel grabbed her arm. "We've got trouble, and we're going to need your help."

Preston handed Serene the note.

When she finished reading it, her eyes grew round with fear. "Poor Artimus. What are we going to do?"

## *CHAPTER 15*

“Do you really think this will work?” Gabrielle whispered.

Preston wore a grim expression. “I hope so. It’s the only possible way to get Artimus back in one piece. Let’s just hope Serene and Angel do their parts well enough so we can get inside without being seen.”

The sound of the sea crashing against the rocks roared in her ears, adding to her apprehension. It had been Preston’s idea to face the enemy in their own camp, so to speak. She hadn’t liked it then, and she didn’t like it any better now. It was just too damn risky.

The very idea of having to go into the enemy’s fortress made her feel sick. If they failed, not only would Artimus die, she and Preston

## *ENEMY MINE*

would die also. Perhaps even Serene and Angel would be captured and killed.

All in all, they each had a great deal at stake. But not one of them had backed away when Preston revealed his plan. None of them were willing to leave Artimus in Cameron's clutches; it mattered to none of them that they knew it was a trap.

She glanced at Preston. He was still a little pale from the wild ride with Serene through the night air, but he never voiced one complaint. She noticed that, when his feet touched ground again, he'd staggered slightly, but again he had said nothing.

To Gabrielle's relief, he seemed to recover fairly quickly, and was more than ready to do battle against his family.

Now, hidden behind a pile of boulders about twenty feet from the house Preston called the Folly, they waited.

The full moon caught the house in its silvery glow, highlighting the gothic mansion in a way that made her think of Grade-B horror pictures. Why anyone would want to live in such a desolate area was beyond her, but then she'd never completely understood how the

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hunters thought anyway.

From where she sat she could see lights in several of the upstairs windows. Blackness dominated the windows of a central square tower thrusting over the tall chimneys.

Preston suspected that Cameron was keeping Artimus there. She could only hope he was right.

They would get only one chance at this rescue, and then it would be too late. The hunters would be alerted to their presence.

Please, let us pull this off, she prayed silently, reverting back to her childhood habit of praying before she had stopped believing in a higher power.

“Okay, there go the lights,” Preston said, tugging at her hand. “They’ve begun. It’s our turn to play.” He turned to look at her. “You ready?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be.”

They made their way, hunkering close to the ground across the wide expanse of yard, heading for the back of the house. Gabrielle couldn’t keep back a smile as shouts and screams, sounds of people

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running and doors slamming, filtered outside.

Preston pulled her down next to him outside the basement window. He smiled faintly. "It sounds like World War Four just broke out."

She nodded. "Angel and Serene are very good at keeping things off kilter. Between the two of them, they have some amazing tricks up their sleeves. I would dare venture they can keep your family in an uproar for quite some time."

"God, I hope so," Preston said, his expression uncertain. "We need all the time they can get us to pull this rescue mission off." He stared at the locked, dirty basement window and then glanced at Gabrielle. "Do you think you can do it?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. It's been a while since I misted, but I can try."

"Serene said if you just concentrate you can do it."

She frowned. "When did you become an expert on the failing powers of vampires?"

"Since I met you and your trio of off-the-wall buddies." He grinned. "Now, come on, honey. Close your eyes and concentrate. See yourself

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dissolving, becoming a vapor, a thin layer of mist,” he coached in a soothing manner.

Gabrielle closed her eyes, focusing on his words. Drawing on her reserve of preternatural power to mist. She had to get inside and open the window for Preston. Come on, she told herself. *You can do this. For Artimus.*

She could feel the coldness inside her, expanding outward and then enfolding her into a smothering embrace. Her body felt as if it was being pulled into one hundred directions at once and then, a brief moment of disorientation—and she was inside the basement looking out of the window at a beaming Preston.

She felt weak and dizzy, but other than that she was fine. She crawled up on a barrel underneath the ledge of the window and unlocked it. It came open with a squeaking sound that made her catch her breath.

“That was absolutely beautiful, Gabby-Skye,” Preston said as he came over the windowsill.

She jumped from the top of the barrel so he could use it to step

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down. Her nose wrinkled at the dank, musty smell emanating from the earthen floor. Her preternatural vision allowed her to see the dark cavern. Years of junk littered the floor and wooden shelves lining the concrete walls.

Preston uttered a curse as he stumbled into something. “Jesus Christ, I can’t see anything.”

“Did you remember the flashlight?” she asked, searching for the fuse box.

She heard a click, and then a round glow of yellow light pooled directly in front of her. “I don’t see the power box. Do you know where it is?”

Preston stepped over an upturned crate and headed toward the east wall. “It’s been years since I’ve been down here. But if I remember correctly, it’s on this wall.” He swept the beam of the flashlight across the spider-webbed wall. “Here it is,” he said, pointing at the gray box in the corner. Preston grinned at her as he pulled the main switch, and then pocketed the fuses. “Let’s see how well my brother does in the dark.”

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Upstairs, more confused shouting and screams as darkness replaced the lighting made his grin split wider. “You know, I might just get to like this kind of work.”

Gabrielle shuddered. “Please don’t joke, Preston. Let’s just find Artimus and get out of here.”

Preston’s grin faded. “Sorry, sweetheart. You’re right. I think our best bet would be to find CeCe.”

“CeCe?”

“My cousin. Don’t worry, we can trust her. Nothing goes on in this house without her knowing about it. She can confirm if my assumption about where Artimus is being held is correct.”

Gabrielle grabbed his arm as he started up the wooden steps. “But what if she alerts them to our presence? Then it will be over for us all.”

He took her hand, pulling her along. “CeCe’s been the closest thing I’ve had to a mother since mine died. She’d never betray me.”

She tightly gripped his hand and drew him back. “How do you know for sure? She is an Adams.”

“Because I know CeCe. Stop worrying, okay?”

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Gabrielle shot him a dubious glance, but remained silent. This wasn't the time to doubt his word about one of his relatives. Or was it? If Cameron was any example to go by, she had a feeling that the rest of his relatives couldn't be much better. She shook her head. She really hoped she was wrong.

Their success depended on it.

Suddenly he came to an abrupt stop, flicking off the light, and pulling her into a side hallway. They both dared not breathe as the sound of running feet came by their hiding place, too close for comfort, in her opinion.

"Come on," he whispered, taking her hand. He waited until they gained the steps of the back staircase before he flicked on the flashlight again. He moved forward cautiously. His body tensed in anticipation. But nobody was around to stop them. The hallways were strangely silent. Obviously, Angel and Serene were keeping them busy in the other wing.

"This is her room," Preston said, opening it with a quick thrust, and ushering Gabrielle inside without ceremony.

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“Who’s there?” a thin voice asked.

Gabrielle could hear the fear in the woman’s voice. She hastened to reassure her. “Please, we’re not going to hurt you. We want only to talk to you.”

“Don’t scream. It’s me, CeCe,” Preston hastened to add. “We need your help.”

The flashlight beam caught a glimpse of wildly flapping arms and legs akimbo as the woman scrambled awkwardly out of bed. She wore a pristine white nightgown with a high neckline, her graying hair going in all directions. She gazed incredulously at her cousin. “My heavens, Preston. Have you lost all the sense the good Lord gave you? I cannot believe you walked right into Cameron’s trap. What are you doing here? Is this Gabrielle? How could you bring her here—risk her life?”

Preston looked amused. “If you’d give me a chance to get a word in edgewise, I’d tell you what I’m doing here.”

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Gabrielle smiled. The tiny woman looked as if she was about to grab Preston and swing him over her knee.

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“We need your help, CeCe. Cameron has a friend of ours, and we want him back.”

“Oh dear, I just knew that strange little man meant trouble.” CeCe wrung her hands, her eyes round with worry. “Cameron has him in the tower. I tried to get up there earlier, but the guard wouldn’t let me pass.”

Preston exchanged glances with Gabrielle before he turned back to his cousin. “How many guards?”

CeCe shook her head. “One on the outside of the room. Inside, I don’t know.” She cocked her head. “Are you the one responsible for all the ruckus going on here tonight?”

Preston nodded.

“I thought so,” she said, giving him a stern stare. Then she smiled. “Keep it up.”

Preston hugged her, and then he and Gabrielle slipped out of the room. In the hall, she watched as a dark frown gathered like a thundercloud across his brow. “We’re going to have to take out that guard. Got any ideas?”

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“Maybe,” she said, giving him a secretive smile.

\* \* \*

Gabrielle worked hard to make her eyes wide with terror so the guard would think she was really frightened. Taking a deep breath to steady her shaky nerves, she walked around the corner.

The guard was sitting in a straight-backed chair in the dim glow of a kerosene lantern. He saw her and stood. She took an involuntary step backward when she saw the size of the man she was supposed to distract. He was over seven feet tall at the very least, she thought, dismayed and intimidated by his immense size. Okay, don't back down now, she told herself. *So he's a giant. He's still just like other men, so do your stuff, girl.*

“Sir, could you help me? I think I must have taken a wrong turn in the dark.” She laughed much like she'd heard young girls laugh when they were being silly and flirty. But to her ears it sounded awful and flat.

His dark brow arched in momentary surprise. “Who the hell are you?”

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She tittered again, trying not to wince at the tinny sound. A siren was something she'd never aspired to be in her long life. And she knew for certain after tonight, she'd never attempt it again. She was smart enough to leave that to the experts—Serene, for instance.

“I don’t mean to disturb you. But I’m a guest of CeCe’s and I must have lost my way somewhere.” She shrugged helplessly. “Could you perhaps show me to my room?”

The giant frowned and looked uneasy. “I’m not supposed to leave my post.”

“But it will only take a moment,” Gabrielle pleaded. “If you could just point me in the direction of the guest wing—” She smiled, trying to look helpless yet seductive at the same time.

*God, this was never going to work. Surely he wasn’t dumb enough to fall for such an act.*

He sighed, glancing at the door behind him before he turned back to her. “Okay, lady, I’ll show you the way. But I don’t want to catch you back up here. This floor is off limits. Got it?”

“Oh, thank you,” she gushed, clapping her hands like an excited

child.

She followed him until they rounded the corner, and then quickly stepped aside. Preston swiftly moved in behind him and, with a sharp twist of his hand, brought the edge of the flashlight across the back of the guard's head.

For one horrifying moment, Gabrielle didn't think he would go down. She sucked in a shuddery breath, her knees weakening as the guard tottered a few steps, and then went down with a soft thud on the patterned carpet.

Relief flooded her senses as she stared at him. "Should we tie him up?"

"Let's just get Artimus and get out of here. The noise downstairs is dying down. Angel and Serene must have exhausted their sleight of hand. If we're going to do this, we have to move."

Gabrielle's ears, sharper than his, caught the sound of a crashing noise far below. "Don't bet on it." She smiled. "There's still some life in them yet."

Preston nodded, a satisfied smile curved his lips. "Give 'em hell,

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Angel,” he murmured, picking up the kerosene lamp.

Gabrielle pressed close to him as he opened the door. The room lay in total darkness, the lamp making shadows dance upon the peeling wallpaper. “I don’t see him,” she whispered. “Do you think your cousin could have been mistaken?”

Preston held the lamp higher. A bundle of rags on the bed moaned. Oh God, not a bundle of rags, she thought, feeling the bile rise in her throat.

*Artimus.*

She hurried to his side. “Artimus, can you hear me? What have they done to you?”

He moaned again and opened his eyes, squinting into the brightness of the lantern’s glow. “Gabrielle?”

“Yes, it’s me.” She choked back her tears and tried to smile. “We’re here to rescue you. Are you well enough to sit up?”

He grimaced, lines of pain deepening around his mouth. “Can’t until ... you ... re ... lease me,” he faltered.

Preston frowned down at him. “What does he mean? I see no

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restraints holding him.”

Gabrielle’s head began to pound. Clammy perspiration broke out on her palms.

Please, no ... let me be wrong, she thought, whipping off the ragged blanket covering her friend.

She let out a gasp, feeling sick at the sight of the crusted, open wounds on his naked body. Thin strips of ash wood entwined in rawhide bound his hands and feet, making it impossible for him to move.

“How could they do this to you?” she whispered. It was only too obvious what Cameron had done. She couldn’t believe anyone could be so cold-hearted, so callous. Instead of just killing him, quickly and mercifully, Cameron had deliberately exposed Artimus to the sun at regular intervals for brief periods of time. Oh, not enough to kill him, she thought bitterly, but enough to keep him in untold agony.

She ripped angrily at the bindings before she turned to Preston, tears blinding her. “Your brother is more of a monster than my kind could ever be. Look at what he’s done. Artimus has never hurt anyone;

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he didn't deserve this sort of barbaric treatment."

Preston's jaw tightened. "We'll take care of my brother later. Let's just get Artimus to safety before we get caught."

A premonition of danger tickled Gabrielle's backbone. She whirled about, her stomach plunging sickeningly at the sight of Cameron standing in the doorway. "You."

He sauntered forward, an evil smile playing over his lips. "Who did you expect, Father Christmas? You didn't really think you could walk in here right under my nose and waltz out with the old guy, did you?"

Preston stepped forward, his features turning to granite, his eyes hard and cold. "That's exactly what we intend to do. And if you try and stop us," he paused, his eyes raking up and down his brother's form, "then I will have no choice but to kill you."

Cameron laughed an ugly sound. "You think so? That's funny. You don't have what it takes to kill me, little brother."

"But *I* do. And it would give me the greatest of pleasures," said another voice.

Cameron spun about, his eyes wide with surprise.

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Angel stood in the doorway, an evil smile upon his lips. “Thought you two might need some help up here.” He blew a puff of air upon his fingertips, and then buffed them on his white buttoned-up shirt. The expression on his face showed extreme boredom.

An act with which Gabrielle was very familiar. She’d seen him affect it at least a thousand times before. It was his favorite ploy to use when facing an adversary.

“Serene’s keeping the others busy. So I thought I’d drop in and take a look. See how you were doing,” he finished in a droll voice.

Preston’s eyes blazed with sudden heat as he stepped forward threateningly. “I don’t need your help, Angel.” He gestured toward the bed where Artimus lay. “If you want to do something useful, take Artimus out of here.” His voice was harsh and demanding.

Waves of freezing cold premonition seized Gabrielle, but she was unable to prevent this tragedy from playing itself out. She motioned for Angel, who was at her side in an instant. He seemed to also understand that whatever happened between the two brothers was inevitable.

## *ENEMY MINE*

He gathered Artimus into his arms and misted, returning scant seconds later. “Debra is caring for him. It’s your turn now, my sweet.”

She shook her head, unable to tear her frightened gaze away from the men who stood facing each other like two gunfighters in the Wild West of yesteryear.

She swallowed a sob of hysterical laughter. There had to be something she could do to stop this madness. Her mind flitted rapidly, trying to come up with a solution.

Nothing. Gabrielle was helpless. “No. I won’t leave Preston here.”

Preston flicked his gaze upon her. “Go with him. I have to do this alone. I need to know you’re somewhere safe.”

“Yes, do go, my dear Gabrielle,” Cameron said, giving her a smile that made her stomach twist painfully. “Because once I’ve dispatched my wayward brother, my intention is to come after you. I’ll do the job he was too weak to do. So run away, little girl. Tomorrow, we play.”

Preston’s features twisted in rage, and before either Gabrielle or Angel could stop him, he was upon his brother.

\* \* \*

## *ENEMY MINE*

Preston felt a white-hot rage that he'd never felt before balloon inside him, pushing away the restraints of society. Preston forgot Cameron was his brother. He forgot his aversion to becoming like his brother. He forgot everything but the need for revenge. He needed to hurt Cameron so badly he'd never go after Gabrielle, Artimus, or any other vampire.

His fist connected with Cameron's jaw, sending his brother sprawling against the doorjamb.

Cameron got up slowly, blood flowing from both his nostrils and his mouth. Preston threw himself at his older brother, his fists pummeling, viciously striking Cameron in the stomach, raining more blows to his head.

Preston wanted to kill him. He wanted it so badly he could taste it. And he fought to make it so. He was only dimly aware of the counterblows Cameron landed upon his own face and body. They were of no concern. Killing his brother was his only priority. He'd make sure Cameron never had a chance to hurt his Gabby-Skye again.

The two men hit the floor with a resounding crash. Preston heard

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Gabrielle cry out in fear, drawing his attention away from his brother for a moment. A moment too long; Cameron landed a brutal blow to Preston's midsection.

Fire clawed at Preston's insides. He saw black spots in front of his eyes as he tried to suck in air. He rolled off Cameron, struggling to get oxygen into his starving lungs.

Cameron came in for the kill, his eyes burning with a fiery light that Preston knew foretold his coming death.

Cameron grabbed the front of his shirt, jerking him upward until their faces were mere inches apart. "See, little brother, you're not as good as me, and you never will be. You're nothing but a screw-up and that's all you will ever be. This family should have gotten rid of you long ago."

Preston grinned, his mouth split and bleeding, and then, without warning, drove his knee upward, brutally thrusting it into Cameron's groin. His brother cried in agony, abruptly releasing him, doubling over. His face went white. He fell to his knees, and then crumpled forward, unconscious.

## *ENEMY MINE*

Preston wiped his bleeding mouth with the back of his hand. Determinedly, he went toward his brother, cutting off all emotion except his need to see his brother dead.

He felt Angel's hands of steel dragging him back, and then Gabrielle was clinging to him, her eyes dark with fear, pleading for him to stop.

She placed a fingertip on his rigid jaw, bringing him back from that point of no return. "No, Preston, he's your brother."

A feeling of sick shame washed through him as his head cleared and the last vestige of rage drifted away.

"Oh God. I'm not any better than he is," he muttered, pulling out of Angel's iron grasp, and walking away from both of them. He was only barely aware that Serene had popped in, too. Her face was almost as pale as Gabrielle's.

"We need to get out of here," Angel urged, his gaze flying to the door. "The others will be here in moments."

Just then, the power flickered on, bringing the room into sharp focus.

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Preston's gaze found his brother on the dirty floor. From the rise and fall of his chest, he knew Cameron was still alive. Angel was right. If they didn't escape now, they would be trapped.

Preston looked up and nodded wearily, closing his eyes as Serene wrapped her arms around him. He battled to keep back the oncoming blackness, but it was too much for him. In the end he welcomed it, needing it desperately, so he could forget that he'd wanted to kill his own blood—his brother.

\* \* \*

Cameron stumbled to his feet, his groin still throbbing from the blow Preston had sneaked in. He recovered sufficiently enough to take in the empty room. Damn, they were gone.

"I want to know what the blazes is going on here!" his grandfather roared, coming into the tower room. "I'm gone less than twenty-four hours, and you've turned this place into a three-ringed circus, complete with clowns."

Cameron flinched, knowing his grandfather was referring to him as the head clown. "I set a trap for my brother and his friend." He

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shrugged. "It didn't work. But eventually I will catch up with them, and when I do ..." He let his words trail off, wanting his grandfather to draw his own conclusions.

Will shook his head. "Son, you're off the case. As a matter of fact, we cease operation as of this moment. At least until we can find another safe house."

"No."

Will stared at him in disbelief. "What do you mean, *no*? You made a stupid mistake in luring your prey into your own den. That is one of the first rules of our society, and you damn well know it. Now we all must suffer the inconvenience of your bad judgment." The old man sighed, gazing about the room with sad eyes. "Our family has lived here for over one hundred years, and you threw it away in one short night. I don't know when we'll be able to resume business. I thought I'd trained you better."

Cameron drew himself upright, though it pained him to do so. "I have never failed an assignment and I don't intend to now. It's not over, not by any means."

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Will snorted in disgust. “You just don’t get it, do you, boy? You let your personal feelings get in the way of your mission. That’s why you failed.” The older man scowled at his grandson. “That and your blasted cockiness. This assignment has gone way beyond being just a job for you. Hellfire, it’s become a blasted obsession! You risked all our lives tonight, because your thinking is all screwed up. You’d better get your head back on straight if you want to remain a hunter.”

Cameron coldly eyed his grandfather. “I thought that’s what you wanted. You said to eliminate the vampire, even if I had to take out Preston to do so.”

Will lowered his gaze to the floor. “I will admit that some of this is my fault.” He lifted his head, staring at his grandson with an expression Cameron could not read. “But I did not realize then that this matter would drive you to the extreme of exposing our entire family to such danger. Do you realize what you’ve done?”

“My job,” Cameron maintained stiffly. “The way I was trained to do. The way *you* trained me to do.”

“No, son. You dismissed most of my men. You sent family

### *ENEMY MINE*

members on wild goose chases so you could handle this matter alone, without interference. You did everything wrong.” He shook his grizzled head. “Preston’s vampires destroyed our data base of information that we’d collected on their activities, along with most of our hard copy. Years of work—gone. Hellfire, boy, your foolish pride has set back our movement. It will take months, possibly years to regroup and reorganize enough to do the work God intended us to do.” He gave his grandson a long, hard stare. “Preston and his so-called friends will have to wait.”

Cameron said nothing, letting the man ramble. But inside he did a slow burn. Never had he failed an assignment, and by God, he was not about to let his inept, bumbling brother break a perfect record. Preston had made a fool of him tonight.

Never again.

He would have his revenge. Preston Adams, along with his vampire girlfriend, would pay in blood for their sins against the family ... and against him.

## *CHAPTER 16*

When they arrived at Debra's, Gabrielle watched silently as Preston made his way upstairs. Her heart ached at the despondency in his face, the way his broad shoulders sagged.

"You'd better go to him. Help him deal with this," Angel said quietly. "It's not easy for a good man to face his dark side. Most don't even know they have one until it comes into play."

She cast him an anxious glance. "But what about Artimus? I must see—"

Angel smiled. "Serene and I will see to our old friend. Don't worry. He'll recover. It will take more than Cameron to put our monk out of action."

## *ENEMY MINE*

Gabrielle nodded and made her way upstairs, her heart heavy. She hesitated outside Preston's room, not sure what she could say or do to help him get through this painful discovery. But who else could know what he was going through? Hadn't she fought her own killing lust for centuries? And what about the time before the Blood War? She'd killed freely and without remorse until near ... the end. Gabrielle, the healer, becoming a killer. It made her feel so ashamed to think upon that time in her life.

The door opened with a soft click and she went inside. The room lay in shadows, the moonlight filtering in. Preston sat in a rocker, staring out the opened window. She wanted to smooth the lines of pain etched deeply around the corners of his mouth. Take away the untold suffering in his eyes with her love.

She lay her hand upon his shoulder. "How are you doing?"

He didn't glance at her. Instead, he continued to stare outward, his eyes distant, almost as if they were fixed upon something only he could see. He took her hand, giving it a gentle squeeze. "Did I tell you about the mugger I met yesterday?" He hesitated. "Or was that today?"

## *ENEMY MINE*

It seems so long ago ...”

“No, you didn’t. We haven’t had much time to really talk, have we?” she asked, pushing out of his eyes a piece of golden hair that had fallen in his face. “Tell me what happened. Did he rob you?”

“I didn’t give him a chance. But I was so damn proud that I was able to keep my presence of mind and send him on his way. I wasn’t like my brother and the others, that’s what I told myself.” A laugh came out almost as a sob.

The sound ripped at Gabrielle’s insides. She put her arms around his neck. “Don’t do this to yourself. You are nothing like your brother. If you were, you’d have left that mugger dead. But you didn’t.”

“But I *did* want to kill my brother.” His face hardened. “I wanted it so much I could actually visualize myself choking the life from his body. Nothing mattered to me except killing him.”

Gabrielle cupped his chin and made him look at her. “But you didn’t. Don’t you see? Although you wanted to, you didn’t go through with it. That’s the difference between you and your brother. He enjoys killing. A human or vampire life means nothing to him. You are not

like that.”

“How do you know?” he asked, his voice hoarse with pain.

“Because you could have killed me, but you didn’t. That says a lot.”

“That’s what I like to think. But how do I know for sure it wasn’t just because a part of me already knew who you were?”

She snorted disbelief. “You’re not the Eradicator Incarnate. You are not programmed to kill. You are a human being who has feelings and thoughts of your own. No one can make you do anything you don’t want to.”

His smile was sad. “That’s what my mom said to me over and over after Granddad got his hooks into Cameron. I don’t know who she was trying to convince more—herself or me. I can still remember the fights she and Dad would get into over his training.

“But Dad never gave in. He’d been trained to be a hunter and that’s what he was. He just accepted as fact that his sons would follow in his footsteps.” He paused, looking deeply into her eyes. She could see how much effort it was costing him to reveal himself to her.

“Your mother must have been a very special lady.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

“I thought so. After Granddad demanded that I go into training, she just seemed to fade away. Nothing seemed to matter to her anymore. She was running away from the family when she was killed in that plane crash.”

“And your father?”

Preston swallowed hard. “He died twenty years ago on a hunt that went wrong somehow.”

Gabrielle drew away in surprise. “That’s when the attacks against us intensified.”

He nodded grimly. “That’s when Granddad seemed to take this hunting business to the extreme. And he installed that same obsession in Cameron. It was as if Cameron blamed your species for everything that had gone badly in his life. I mean, he was considered a good hunter candidate before Dad’s death, even as a kid he had that killer instinct, but afterwards he ate and slept hunting. It became his sole interest in life.”

She settled into his lap. He drew her close, kissing her neck as she leaned against him. “It’s over now, darling. Angel and Serene

## *ENEMY MINE*

managed to destroy their files and computers. It will take them time to recuperate—if ever.”

“I don’t know if that will be enough to stop my brother.”

“It will be. Angel also told me that he intends to meet with the tribunal and tell them what happened. He predicts that they will be satisfied with what he and Serene did. Enough, hopefully, to lift the death sentence off both of our heads.”

Preston shook his head in disbelief. “I’m not sure if I remember what it’s like not to be on the run. It seems like we’ve been running forever.”

“No more running,” she said, cuddling against him, running her hand through his pale hair. She wanted to memorize every aspect of him. Something to take out and cherish a hundred years from now.

“Perhaps we ought to talk about our future, like where we go from here?” he breathed against her ear. The brush of his lips was so sensual, so erotic, that a tremor of deep aching awareness rocked her body. His mouth moved to her neck, placing butterfly kisses until he reached her lips.

### *ENEMY MINE*

“God, how I love you. My life would be empty without you,” he breathed. He deepened the kiss, exploring the softness of her mouth, driving her wild with wanting him. His mouth was sweet, his breath as cool as mint, becoming more demanding, insisting upon a response from her.

By this time tomorrow she would be gone. Gabrielle would never be able to see him again, touch him, love him the way she so desperately wanted to love him. Shattering images of countless nights alone sliced through her thoughts.

A dozen lifetimes spent without the man to whom she'd given her heart and soul so many centuries ago. It was too much to bear, too much to endure, but endure it she would for his sake.

There was no other way.

But no one could deny her a glimpse of happiness, of completeness—no one in heaven or hell.

Her body shuddered as he stood, her arms wrapping tightly around his neck, surrendering herself to his hungry kisses. Just one more night, she silently prayed, one more night of loving him, and I'll give

him up.

Preston eased her onto the bed. She matched him kiss for kiss, caress for caress, loving the sureness, the mastery of his touch upon her throbbing body. Their clothes magically disappeared and then there was nothing keeping their heated skin apart.

With worshipping hands he caressed the delicate swell of her breasts. An aching built inside her as his hands moved downward, stroking her belly and the tops of her thighs, his fingers finding the fragile center of her being. She gasped aloud, her heart pounding in her ears, sensations of unbelievable delight spilling through her in waves of exquisite, unrelenting heat.

With a low, groan, he pulled her beneath him. Their eyes locked and held, and then he was inside her, filling her with a scalding heat that made her lose all control. Gasping and moaning, Gabrielle writhed beneath him, matching him thrust for thrust. Loving him, wanting him so badly she hurt. Her fingertips roamed his back, digging into his shoulders as a swirl of dizzying need swept her away.

Preston covered her mouth with his own, his tongue plunging,

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tasting, curving around hers, a tremor shuddering through his body at her eager response. He moved inside her with sweet surging strokes, his hard length driving deeper and deeper with each thrust. She was his—forever his. Now that he'd found his Gabby-Skye, he would never let her go again. She was a part of him, his soul, his life, reunited for an eternity of endless nights.

Preston moaned her name as he took them both to the top of the pinnacle, a plateau of ecstasy, where they danced among the stars.

It only took a few moments for her to return to earth, and to the shattering reality of leaving him, though she fought hard against it with every fiber of her being.

“You have to marry me, you know,” he whispered. His arms tightened around her. “We were cheated out of a wedding last time, but this time I want to do it right.”

Gabrielle moved away from him. “We can’t.”

He sat upright, studying her intently. “Why? Don’t you love me?”

She shook her head. “Don’t you understand? We are worlds apart. I am what I am.” She blinked back tears, fighting hard not to cry, not to

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break down in front of him. “And you are what you are. Nothing on this earth can change that indisputable fact.”

Was she right? he wondered. Just because they were from two different worlds didn’t mean they couldn’t be happy. But deep down inside he knew she was right. No—he wouldn’t accept that—couldn’t accept it.

The very idea of living without her was intolerable.

There was a way, though, they could be together—for eternity.

Was he willing to sacrifice the feel of the sun on his face, the pleasure of a beautiful summer day? And what about children? Could he give up that prospect—never be a father, play catch with his son, or have tea with his little girl?

He looked at Gabrielle, his chest tight with raw emotion, noting the love shining forth from her eyes, and knew he could give up anything the human world had to offer for the chance to be with her forever.

Because, without her, Preston had no life.

“You can change that,” he said simply, pulling her back to him. “You can change me like you did before. We can live together, loving

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each other for an eternity like we vowed in that spring-touched field so many lifetimes ago.”

“I can’t,” she whispered. She felt as if her heart was made of glass, and it was shattering into a million tiny pieces as she said the words.

“I assume this is because of your vow not to take human blood. But this is different, Gabrielle. It’s what I want. I would willingly give up my human status to be with you. I’ll do anything, be anything. I can’t lose you, my love—not again.”

“I’m sorry, my beloved, but I can’t do as you ask.”

“But—”

“Shh—” she whispered, gathering the wispy trace of her powers around her. She caught his gaze, staring into the depths of his blue eyes, persuading him to close his eyelids, to sleep. “In the morning, everything will be made clear. Rest, my darling, rest.”

She could see him fighting against it, trying to fight her spell of enchantment, but at last, his eyelids fluttered closed, and he was asleep.

A scream of despair welled up from the dark recesses of her being,

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but she quelled it. She couldn't back down now. It was the only way he would ever have a normal life.

"Someday, darling. You will thank me for this," she whispered in a tear-strained voice. She scrambled off the bed, jerked on her clothes, brushing away the tears that blinded her, so she could lean down to kiss him one last time.

A single tear fell onto his cheek, a tear stained with red. A symbol of her vampirism, of why they could never be together. She pulled back, drinking him with her eyes.

Reluctantly, she walked away, no last kiss, no good-bye, no final words. Because she knew if she faltered, or turned back, she'd not be able to go through with it—never again would she be able to leave him ...

\* \* \*

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Serene regarded her doubtfully. Gabrielle had found her downstairs in the parlor watching with blank eyes the video Preston had rented. "You're damn lucky to have someone love you the way Preston does. I can't believe you're

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going to throw it away.”

“I thought you, of all people, would understand my decision. He is human and I am not. The circumstances speak for themselves.”

Serene eyed her as if she were a lunatic who needed to be put away. “I still don’t see the problem here, doll. You love him and he loves you. If you can’t abide him being human, turn him into one of us.” She noisily snapped her gum. “Simple, see?”

“I wish it were, Serene.” Gabrielle knew she sounded bitter but couldn’t help it. “I made that mistake once before. I wanted to be with Damon so much I looked for any excuse, and found it.” She felt the sting of tears in her eyes. “I will not be the instrument of his death once again. If I hadn’t transformed him, he wouldn’t have been in that castle in the midst of the Blood War.”

Serene stared at her. “So you’re just going to walk away from him and never look back?”

“What else can I do?” she cried. “I will not be swayed into changing him. I want him to have a nice, normal life in suburban America with two-point-five kids, and a wife who will love him—a

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human wife. One he will grow old with and be buried beside forever.” Her chin lifted. “I will do nothing to deprive him of what he’s entitled to.”

Serene leveled a sad gaze at Gabrielle. “You love him so much?”

Gabrielle closed her eyes against the tide of pain crashing in on her. “Yes.”

“And Angel? Where does he fit into the picture, Gabrielle?”

Another sin to add to her burden. She didn’t know what to say, or how to say it, except straight out. “Serene, I don’t love Angel.” She shook her head, trying to clarify her thoughts. “I mean, I love him, but not the way I loved Damon, or the way I love Preston now.” She sighed wearily, rubbing her forehead to ease the ache between her brows. She looked at Serene with a hint of a smile on her lips. “There will never be anything romantic between us. But as for you and him—well, who knows?”

Serene’s amber eyes widened, she involuntarily stepped back. “Is it that obvious?”

“To me it is. It’s hard to hide your feelings about a man from

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another woman who is in love herself.”

A frown pleated the petite redhead’s forehead. “A fat lot of good it will do me. Angel doesn’t even know I’m alive, except when he’s angry with me.”

“Far be it for me to give anyone advice about love, but I think if you try being yourself instead of a vampire moll of the thirties ...” She smiled. “Well, who knows what could happen.”

The smile that broke across Serene’s face was like a ray of sunshine on the darkest night. “Thanks, Gabrielle. You may be nutty-toons, but I’m damn proud to be called your friend.”

“Then I would like to ask a favor of you.”

“Just name it.”

“Take me back to my mountains,” Gabrielle said in a quiet voice.

“You’ve gotta be kidding, right?”

Gabrielle could see the uncertainty in her face. “I must go back. There are things there I must do before I go away.”

“Where will you go?”

Gabrielle walked to the window to peer outside at the street. A cold

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drizzle blew, and with the help of streetlights, had turned the pavement into a shiny black mirror. A mirror reflecting the darkness she felt eating away at her. “I don’t know yet. But somewhere very far from here.”

She turned back to face Serene, forcing a shaky smile to her lips. “I’m not a saint. I want Preston to be happy, but I certainly don’t want to be around to see him with another. If I’m here in the States ... I ... I’m afraid I won’t be able to stay away from him.”

“I’ll take you back to your beloved mountains, Gabrielle,” Serene said at last, giving her a resigned look. “I just hope you know what you’re doing.”

“I’m doing what I must do,” she said, drawing a rasping breath, pushing back the raw, un-blunted agony stabbing at her heart. She wondered why it had to be so damn hard to do the things you knew to be right. She let out a self-mocking laugh. Who was she to question the powers that be?

\* \* \*

Gabrielle feasted her eyes upon her mountain. Even in the dark of

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night, she could see the beauty of the forest surrounding her house. In all the years she'd traveled around the globe, nothing came close to the beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains she now called home. They had protected her for over fifty years.

She'd found the closest thing to peace that she'd ever known, and the mountains had seemed to embrace her, hold her close, and ... accept her for what she was.

To leave them would break her heart, but leave them she must. It was the only thing she could do.

She'd said her good-byes to Debra and Artimus. And though Angel was present during her leave-taking, he had said nothing. She blinked hard, feeling that all too familiar sting of tears. She squeezed her eyes shut, fighting for control. It hurt so much to know that, by the time she returned, if she ever did, Debra would no doubt be dead. She could still hear Debra's last words.

*"I probably won't ever see you again. Not in this world. But I want you to know how much I love you."*

An irresistible urge came over her to shout out to God. Scream her

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anger at him for allowing her “child” to grow old and leave her behind. Scream about the unfairness of her life. Wasn’t it enough that she had to lose the love of her life? Must she also lose another child? So many children—so many deaths. She was sick of watching people she loved wither away and die.

“Perhaps it is a way of atoning for my sins,” she said aloud, her voice mingled with the whispering of the pines.

“Gabrielle, are you okay? What sins are you talking about?” Serene asked. She gave Gabrielle an odd look.

Gabrielle started, having forgotten for a moment that Serene lingered nearby. Enough self-pity. It was time to move on.

She tried to laugh, but it came out forced and awkward. “Don’t mind me. As you said before, I’m quite nutty-toons. Us nut cases are prone to occasionally talk to ourselves.”

Her gaze returned to her woodland. Her sharp hearing picked up the sound of an owl hooting. Her night vision allowed her to see the beauty of the fall colors. The leaves, crimson, russet, bright yellow, all of them displaying their coat of finery just for her.

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If she listened closely, she could hear the wind whispering her name over and over. Gabrielle ... or was it actually saying *Gabby-Skye*? No ... stop it, she told herself. It's useless to keep tormenting yourself this way.

"Gabrielle, I don't like the idea of leaving you alone," Serene ventured, her voice unsure, a far cry from her usual exuberant self.

"I'll be fine."

Serene still looked doubtful. "Maybe I should stay with you tonight."

"Don't be silly. Dawn is only an hour away. If you want to reach your own sanctuary you need to get going."

"I don't like this at all. For all you know, Cameron could be hiding around here somewhere, just waiting for you to put in an appearance."

Gabrielle shook her head. "I don't think he is. One of us would feel it, I'm sure. But if it makes you feel any better, I won't sleep in the house. I'll go to ground in my woods. Does that satisfy you?"

"I guess so," Serene replied in a tone of voice that belied her words.

"Stop it, Serene."

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Serene's dark eyes widened. "What?"

"Stop seeing danger lurking behind every tree and in every corner. I said I'd be fine. Now go home. It's getting late."

Her friend's face brightened. "What if I come by tonight? I could help you pack, close down this old heap of stones."

"No, thank you," Gabrielle said abruptly. "I'm sorry," she added softly when she saw the crestfallen expression on Serene's elfin face. "I didn't meant to be rude. I just have to do this by myself." She turned toward the mountain, opening her arms wide. "These mountains have served me well, protected me for many years from my enemies. They have allowed me to live an almost normal life."

She paused, turning back to her young friend. "I need to be alone to say my final farewells."

Serene nodded. "I understand, but if you need me—"

Gabrielle smiled. "I know. You'll be there."

Serene grinned her irrepressible grin. "That's what friends are for." With that parting shot, she popped out of sight.

Gabrielle walked into the wooded glade. She'd been gone less than

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a week. It seemed as if it had been forever. So much had she gained ... and lost ... in such a relatively short period of time.

Images of Preston saving her life, making love to her, telling her he wanted to marry her, so tenderly, so earnestly, crowded to the front of her mind, each memory vying for her attention.

No ... not tonight. She wouldn't think about him. She couldn't. It hurt too much to ... remember. It hurt too much to love ...

## *CHAPTER 17*

*The smoke from the torches burned his eyes. But he kept on fighting, his broadsword slashing a path through the horde of dirty peasants. Filthy beasts! How dare they have the gall to defy us—their masters, he thought, a red tide of anger surging through him, giving him the strength to keep fighting.*

*Gabby-Skye, where are you? his mind voiced desperately. He had to fight his way clear of the great chamber and find Gabrielle. What if she'd already run into one of these whoresons? No, he wouldn't think that way. She was fine, he would have felt it if she wasn't, wouldn't he?*

*His stomach lurched suddenly. He fought harder. He must get to his*

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*love—now.*

*A glint of gold caught his eye. He stepped back, away from the man he was fighting. The man was dark with a black beard, a patch covering his left eye. He was a stranger—not from the village at all. Stunned, he took another step backward, coming up against the dais in the center of the cavernous chamber.*

*The stranger grinned triumphantly, whipping out a piece of metal. Damon could see it was some kind of coin—a gold coin, to be precise.*

*“Die, monster!” the stranger shouted, thrusting home his sword.*

*A shard of agony ripped through Damon’s side. He glanced down to see blood seeping from his jerkin. Confused, he lifted his sword to cut the man down, but something stayed his hand. Why couldn’t he strike this man? he wondered in horror as the man again plunged the sword into his body.*

*Damon sank to his knees, crumpling onto the dais. A freezing coldness swept through him; he knew he was dying. Gabby-Skye. His mind voice reached for her.*

*The stranger leaned over him with an evil grin. “Ha, you must be a*

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*fledging, monster. Or else you would have known better than to challenge someone wearing a medallion.”*

*Damon felt himself fading, his vision blurring, growing dimmer. What did a simple medallion have to do with his dying? he wondered, darkness rushing in on him, carrying him away ... away from Gabby-Skye. No. No ... He tried to shout, but he couldn't speak, couldn't see in the blackness that enfolded him. But he was still painfully aware, his thoughts and emotions in a swirling maelstrom of confusion. Scenes of his life swept before his eyes; he saw himself in battle. He could still feel the remnant of indignant anger he'd felt as he wielded his weapon of death. The power of being a demi-god to the people.*

*The image changed with lightning swiftness, and he saw himself with Gabrielle in their bedchamber. She sat on the bed, pulling him down beside her. He wanted so much to smooth out the worry lines that ceased her brow but he dared not, for she was angry and so very frightened.*

*“Why are you doing this to yourself?” he asked, giving her a frown. “Your messages of prophetic doom are terrifying the others. If you*

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*don't desist at once they will no doubt ask us to leave. Is that what you want?"*

*"Nay," she said, shaking her head, her dark hair rustling in a most enchanting manner.*

*He stifled his urge to make love to her. The matter was too serious to ignore. She'd gone too far tonight with her dark visions of doom.*

*"I cannot deny what I feel to be the truth. We must stop the senseless slaughter of humans before it is too late."*

*"How can you proclaim it senseless killing when you know we need their life blood to continue our existence?"*

*"Do we?" She laughed bitterly, her lavender eyes dark with emotion. "Or is that what the others would have us believe? You and I are only newly born creatures of the darkness. We know next to nothing about what we can or can not do, or what we need or do not need. We have only the words of the others to guide us."*

*"You think they seek to lead us astray?"*

*Gabrielle hesitated momentarily before she answered. "Yea, I do. What else can explain why they are so reluctant to answer our*

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*questions after a hundred years? Except for Artimus, no one has held out a hand in friendship.”*

*Damon shot her a hard look. “And what about Angel? Have I not seen with my own eyes how much he wishes you were his and not mine?”*

*The hurt expression in her eyes made him catch his breath. But he didn’t recant his statement, for in truth, he was wild with jealousy. Angel was everything he was not, and he felt it keenly in the other vampire’s presence. “Why do you not go to him with your fears?”*

*“You know he has not been here in months, and if he were, I’d not take my troubles to him.” She gazed at him with sadness. “It is you I love and no other, as it has always been and always will be.” She tentatively touched his hand. “For eternity,” she whispered, reminding him of his vow.*

*For a split second he could smell the wildflowers from that long-ago day. The sunlight warming his face, the buzzing of a bee nearby. A pain of longing shafted through him at all that they had left behind. He shook his head. No, it did him no good to think of the past. Once they*

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*were children of the sunlight. Now, they were children of the darkness. Gabrielle would simply have to accustom herself to the change as he had. And with his help, he knew she would in time ...*

*Damon gathered her close, loving the feel of her in his arms. “For eternity.”*

*The scene faded from his sight.*

*He was lying on a cold stone floor, blood seeping from his wounds, and dying.*

*He could still feel the shocked dismay inside him, when he’d been unable to kill the stranger because of some inane coin. He thought of Gabrielle, and how she would grieve for him.*

*Suddenly something was different, changing; he sensed it immediately. He could feel himself shifting through the void. And then suddenly his vision cleared. He was no longer torn between his past-self and present-self.*

*With a stark clarity, he knew he was Preston Adams—vampire hunter. He was no longer in the void. Now, he stood in a stand of trees with a chilled wind at his back. He was almost sure he was in his own*

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*time, but then again ...*

*Anxiety pooled into the pit of his stomach. He glanced around, trying to get his bearings. He was in a forest. Fall leaves lay under his feet in a colorful carpet.*

*How had he gotten here? The last thing he remembered ... he searched his memory ... a void, floating without a body to encumber him, his mind flowing freely through time and space.*

*No, wait, he also remembered something about a castle. Pain—blood and smoke; he tried to grasp the memory but it floated out of reach, disappearing into the deeper recesses of his mind.*

*He eyed his surroundings with a careful gaze. The wind blew stronger, each gust sending whispers through the ancient oaks, rattling their dangling leaves. Even in the moonlight, it all looked so familiar to him. He'd been here before. And then it hit him like a sledgehammer out of nowhere. Gabrielle's woods. Somehow he was back in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, back on Gabrielle's mountain in the dead of night ... but how and why?*

*His vision blurred, dizziness overcame him. He staggered, closing*

## ENEMY MINE

*his eyes tightly. When he opened them, the landscape was different, changed. He was in a parking lot of a warehouse he'd never seen; several warehouses, in fact. One of those places that provided storage for a monthly fee, he thought. But why in the hell was he here?*

*He now realized he was dreaming, but he couldn't seem to shake himself awake. He stiffened in surprise when he saw Gabrielle running out of the darkness toward one of the warehouses. That was impossible. Gabrielle was with him in New Orleans. But the dream was so real, so vivid, he could smell the scent of fear emanating from her.*

*A cold edge of fear sliced through Preston at the terror he saw in her features. Uncertainty assailed him ... what if it wasn't a dream? Panic clawed at him. She was in trouble. He had to help her. But when he tried to move, he found he couldn't. He was frozen, helpless to save her from the unknown menace stalking her. She didn't see him as she ran inside one of the buildings.*

*The sight of his brother slipping soundlessly through the night, making his unerring way into the same warehouse, made Preston's*

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*blood freeze in his veins.*

*Dear God, Preston had to get free—had to save her before it was too late. He tried to shout a warning, but it caught in his throat. He struggled wildly against the ever-tightening invisible bounds that held him prisoner.*

*“Please someone ... help her,” Preston moaned, tears of frustration and despair blinding him as he thrashed about.*

*A scream tore through the building. His head jerked upright, his body stiffening. The sound sheared a nerve along his spine.*

*Gabrielle, he thought ... no, he didn’t think it. He shouted it at the top of his voice, his throat finally unlocked. The agonized sound crashed through the night air, rebounding off the metal walls of the box-like structures.*

\*            \*            \*

*“No, No, Nooo ...”*

*Preston jerked upright, breathing in great gulps of air. He could feel the wetness of sweat that layered his brow. He blinked, bewildered, in the bright light of day filtering in through the bedroom window. The*

## *ENEMY MINE*

events of his dream came washing back in on him, flooding his mind with images and places.

*Gabrielle.*

The thought of her drove him out of bed. She was downstairs sleeping, he tried to reassure himself. It didn't work. Something was wrong, he knew it.

He just couldn't put his finger on what it was. He tried to shake off the mood, but even after showering and dressing, it remained.

Suddenly filled with a sensation of urgency, Preston hurried downstairs to the door in the hallway that led to the basement. Gabrielle had to be there.

When he slammed into the basement, Debra looked up in startled surprise while Artimus continued his repetitive whittling. "Why, hello, I was beginning to wonder if you planned on sleeping the day away."

He shot Debra a look of incomprehension. "It can't be that late."

She shot back a wry smile. "It's four o'clock in the afternoon."

He rubbed his frowning forehead. "I didn't realize it was so late. I know it's strange, but I don't even remember falling asleep last night.

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Where's Gabrielle?"

She glanced away with a guilty look on her face. "I don't know."

He grasped her by the shoulders, turning her to him. "What are you hiding from me?"

"Young man, if you will please take your hands off her, mayhap I can help you," Artimus ventured in a cracked voice.

Preston released Debra and looked down at Artimus. He was already looking much better than the last time Preston had seen him. "Talk fast, old man. Where is Gabrielle?"

"I can't tell you, I gave my word. But I can tell you why she left."

"Tell me!" Preston demanded between clenched teeth. He felt like throttling the elderly man, but restrained the impulse. It would do no good to take his anger out on Artimus. His heart beat erratically and a sense of dread filled him as he waited for Artimus to speak.

"She left you, my son, to spare you any further unhappiness."

"She *what*?" Preston stared at the old man, incredulous disbelief welling up inside him. "Are you insane? She is what *makes* me happy. Why in God's name would she *leave* me to make me happy? I don't

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understand a damn thing you're saying."

The one-time priest sighed heavily. "When you were Damon, she regretted bitterly changing you into what she'd become. After the Blood War and your death, she became obsessed with the idea that, if not for her intervention in your fate, you would not have died such a horrible death."

"If not for her intervention, I would have died sooner," Preston exclaimed. "I was determined to die while still in human form. I didn't want to live without her. She saved me from that. It's not her fault what happened afterwards."

Artimus gazed at him with sad eyes. "I have tried to convince her of that indisputable truth, but to no avail. The child would not listen to reason, neither then or now."

"I have to know where she is, Artimus. I have a hunch my brother may not be far behind her. I have to get to her—be there to protect her."

"I don't believe you," Debra said, coming forward. "You will say anything to get us to reveal her whereabouts. We are not fools. We

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gave our word and we intend to abide by it. Nothing you can say will change our minds.”

“I’m afraid she’s right, dear boy. We did give our word. And a person’s word, whether he be man or vampire, is about all anyone has anymore. I’m sorry.”

“You can’t be serious,” Preston shouted. “My God, Gabrielle is in mortal danger and you two talk of honor. Is it honorable to let her die like an animal by my brother’s hand?”

A worried expression crossed Debra’s wrinkled features. She exchanged a frightened glance with Artimus. “I ... I don’t know what to do. How can we be sure he’s not telling the truth? What if something happens to Gabrielle because of our stubbornness?”

Artimus smiled. “Do whatever your heart tells you, little Debra. Whatever your heart tells you.”

Debra’s gaze locked with Preston’s for a long, drawn-out moment, and just when he thought he’d failed to convince her, she frowned. “Okay, since Gabby’s life is at stake, I’ll make an exception, but it will do no good. You can’t possibly reach her before tonight.”

## *ENEMY MINE*

“Tell me where she is, Debra. Let me handle the problem of getting to her.”

Debra closed her eyes, and then opened them with a reluctant sigh. “She went back home. She plans on packing up and leaving the country.”

Preston sharply drew in his breath, unable to believe what she’d said. The image of Gabrielle running into a warehouse to escape Cameron flickered in front of his inner eye. He knew for certain that it wasn’t just a dream. No, he’d seen the future and some presentiment told him tonight was the night his brother would make his move.

He glanced at his watch. His heart sank when he saw it was already fifteen minutes after five. There was no way he had time to drive to North Carolina, nor did he have time to catch a flight out of New Orleans. There was only two ways he could get there in plenty of time—Angel or Serene.

But would either of them help him? And would they arrive here in time for him to convince them of Gabrielle’s peril?

\* \* \*

### *ENEMY MINE*

“This is the last of it, Miss Warlick.” The delivery man shoved back the visor on his stained baseball cap. “If there ain’t anything else you need us to do, I reckon we’ll be on our way.”

Gabrielle smiled. “Thank you, Otis. I’ll make sure to pay you overtime for coming out tonight.”

The man’s homely face reddened. “Glad to help. If you like, I’ll see you to your car.” He glanced around the deserted parking lot of Pat’s Rent-A-Storage. “I don’t cotton to a woman being alone here this late at night. It ain’t safe.”

Gabrielle tilted her head to look at him, a hint of a smile on her lips. “I can take care of myself, Otis. You just get on home to your family. There are a few things I still need to do before I leave.”

He hesitated. “You sure, Miss Warlick? I can wait, if need be. Alice’ll hold supper a while longer.”

“No, please go. I’ll be fine.”

“Okay, if you say so. You’re the boss, I reckon.”

Gabrielle waved as the trucker climbed into his cab and pulled out of the parking lot. She shook her head with a wry smile. Southern men

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were the most gallant in the nation. In many ways, they reminded her of knights in medieval times, she mused on her way back to the warehouse doors.

Like Preston.

She shoved the stray thought to the back of her mind with a determination she didn't really feel.

She stopped dead in her tracks.

Something didn't feel right. A ripple of disquiet made its way into the pit of her stomach. Her legs trembled as she revolved around, slowly searching the deserted, endless expanse of cracked pavement. It appeared ghostly under the sodium pole lights, somehow threatening with its graveyard silence.

Gabrielle's car, a dark shadow in the distance, reassured her. She shook her head. Surely, she was imagining it. Otis' words of caution had lodged in her mind, and now she was overreacting.

The danger was gone, defused by Angel and Serene. She had nothing to fear—nothing at all, she told herself firmly. Her waning powers were playing tricks on her senses, that was all. And no wonder;

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she couldn't remember the last time she'd fed. She pushed back the blood lust. She would hunt soon, just as soon as she was done here.

Much as she disliked the process, she would have to rectify the situation soon, or the hunger would rage out of control, and then she would be too weak to hunt. She had taken it to a dangerous edge, but all she'd been able to think about was Preston—nothing else; not even the blood hunger could stop the hurting in her soul.

She turned back to the warehouse, taking the key Otis had given her out of her coat pocket. Her shoes clicked along the pavement, echoing oddly in the deadness surrounding her. She hurried her pace. She would lock up the building that contained her furnishings. After that it was only a matter of choosing where to go. Somewhere far enough away that neither Preston, nor his family, would be able to find her.

“I knew you would come back sooner or later.”

Gabrielle stopped, unable to take another step. A chill ran the length of her body at the amused voice. She spun to face him.

Cameron.

At the sight of him, she felt as if her body had been plunged into ice

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water. Her skin rose in gooseflesh. Instinctively she rubbed her arms. She tried to speak, but nothing came out but a funny-sounding croak.

His lethal air belied the relaxed smile he had on his lips. “Surprised to see me, I gather from your reaction.” One eyebrow lifted. “Of course, I don’t know why you should be. Surely, my brother told you I never give up on my quarry.”

“Yes ... but I thought ...”

His gaze locked with hers. “You thought the slight damage your friends caused would be enough to deter me, didn’t you, Gabrielle?”

She nodded, her thoughts in turmoil. She had to buy time. Perhaps if she tried to reason with him, he’d leave. In her heart she knew she was fooling herself, but what else could she do? She was on her own. No Angel or Preston would suddenly appear and help her out of this jam.

“I thought so.” He shot her a satisfied grin. “Your kind is always underestimating the Adams hunters. By the way, where is your erstwhile boyfriend? Surely he’s not run out on you already?”

She forced herself to laugh. “He decided a vampire was not to his

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liking after all. Nothing in it for him.”

Cameron let out a shout of laughter, strolling toward her with an air of confidence that frightened her even more.

Gabrielle licked her suddenly parched lips, eyeing the distance between him and her car. If she could get past him, she might have a chance of reaching her car before he knew what was going on. But how was she going to catch him off guard long enough to put her plan into action?

The blood hunger rose inside her, sharp and greedy, reminding her of her lack of proper nourishment. She swallowed a sob of frustration as he closed the distance between them. She barely had the strength of a human female at this point. Her preternatural powers were almost nonexistent.

“I could have told you my little brother wouldn’t stay around very long.” He spoke casually.

Gabrielle stifled a hysterical giggle. Any passersby would see just two people in the night, discussing nothing out of the ordinary. They would never suspect that Cameron intended to kill her.

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“Oh, why is that?” she asked.

He halted a few feet away from her. A sneer curled his upper lip. “Because of what you are.”

She forced a smile to her trembling lips. “And what might that be?”

His glacier blue eyes regarded her with a lustful stare. “A bloodsucking monster, with the face and form of a goddess. I can see why my brother would be gullible to your obvious charms. I think it only fair that I get a sample of those undeniable charms.” He grinned. “After all, what’s fair for one brother ought to be fair for the other. Don’t you agree?”

She really tried, but she couldn’t control the look of disgust and contempt she cast his way. She knew it was a mistake. God help her, he would kill her now for certain. There would be no more stalling the inevitable.

For an instant, pure fury flared in his merciless eyes, a dark, vicious wave of menace directed at her. Then without warning, they went calm and cold. He smiled a swift, brilliant smile. “Have it your way. If we can’t play, I suppose there’s no reason to put this off any longer. I

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really must get back to Virginia.”

Gabrielle gasped as he ran toward her with a lightening speed that amazed and alarmed her. She spun and ran blindly to escape.

She didn't realize she'd run into the warehouse until she noticed the cardboard boxes, stacked on pallets six feet high, towering above her. Gabrielle silently cursed herself for panicking; now she was trapped with nowhere to go. Her only chance lay in trying to outsmart him.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are,” Cameron chanted in a singsong voice.

She moved like a silent wraith to another stack of boxes on the opposite side, hugging the them, holding her breath as she heard his movement. He was getting closer. If Gabrielle was going to make a break for it, now was the time, her inner voice shouted. Oh yeah, and then what? The bastard would be on her before she took a dozen steps, her rational voice argued.

“I mean it, Gabrielle. I don't have time to play this silly game of hide-and-seek.”

Her body trembled as she realized his voice was coming from

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around the corner where she was hiding.

“After I’m finished with you, I plan to go after your friends. I can’t wait to see the horror on their faces as I destroy them. It will be a vision to behold, something to remember always.”

Okay, it was now or never. She swallowed hard and braced herself. He was almost beside her—just another split second.

She glimpsed his silhouette out of the corner of her eye. Without giving herself a chance to think about what she was going to do, she lowered her head and barreled into him with all the force she could muster.

A whoosh of air escaped his lungs as his knees buckled and he went down, his hard hands latching onto her shoulders and dragging her with him.

She let out a shriek of terror, kicking and clawing at his face and shoulders with everything she had. His grip tightened into a vise hold, his fingers digging into her flesh.

She fought until her strength was exhausted and when she could no longer struggle ... she ceased.

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The shock of defeat held her immobile in his arms. Numbness began to spread within her as she waited upon the inevitable ...

## *CHAPTER 18*

Preston rapidly paced back and forth in Debra's basement, waiting for Angel to appear. He halted and glanced at the wall clock. "Dammit, Angel, where the hell are you when I need you?"

"He'll be here, Preston. I just know it," Debra said.

Her voice sounded calm, but Preston could see by the worried expression in her cloudy eyes that she was just as on edge as he was.

Artimus wasn't doing so well. Ever since dusk had fallen, he'd repeatedly gotten out of bed and tried to mist. He failed each time, and now his face was grave with concern over Gabrielle's fate.

"Where is he?" Preston asked for the hundredth time in the last hour. He knew he was repeating himself, but he didn't care. He had to

## *ENEMY MINE*

find Gabrielle, before it was too late.

“Where is who?” an amused voice asked from behind.

Preston spun to find Angel, leaning nonchalantly against a storage bin in the corner, his arms crossed in front of him.

Preston forced back the annoyance he felt every time the vampire showed up. “You, that’s who. Take me to Gabrielle.”

Angel smiled. “I don’t think so. Gabrielle made it very clear last night she didn’t want to see you again. So why would you persist in running after her?”

Preston could feel the muscle throbbing in his cheek. He shoved back the urge to cram his fist into the vampire’s smug expression. “I don’t have time to argue. Gabrielle is in trouble, and she needs help. Are you going to take me to her or not?”

Angel snorted disbelief. “How do I know you’re not just saying that so I’ll take you to her for reasons of your own? Which brings me to the question of how do you know she’s at risk? Have you been in contact with your brother perhaps?”

“Why you—” Preston stalked forward and grasped Angel by his

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shirt lapels. “I would do nothing to betray her, damn you. Get it through that Neanderthal head of yours that I love Gabrielle, and when this is over I’m going to do my best to convince her I don’t give a flying leap about what she is or what I am. None of that matters; we were meant to be together, and by God, we are going to be together, despite what your or my people think. Do you get that?”

Angel flicked away Preston’s steel hold as if he were merely brushing away an annoying fly. “I get it, as you so succinctly put it, Adams. Nevertheless, I have no intention of taking you anywhere, much less to see Gabrielle. Not without evidence of this so-called danger you claim she’s in. You can whistle Dixie, as the old timers so delightfully say in Gabrielle’s mountains.”

Preston hesitated, not sure how to tell the skeptical vampire about his dream. “All right, if you must know. I saw it in a dream. Now are you satisfied?”

Angel’s mouth momentarily gaped open, his eyes widen with amazement. “You expect me to believe such an outlandish fairy tale? Please ... you insult my intelligence with your wild fabrications. I

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have better things to do than to listen to your crazed ramblings.”

Debra stepped between them when Preston reached out to grab Angel. “I believe he’s telling the truth, Angel.” She nervously eyed the two men. “I don’t think he’s the kind of man to make up such a story merely to get you to take him to her. Why, he could easily track her down himself. He has been trained to do that, remember?”

Artimus nodded. “I have to concur with Debra. I don’t think the lad would make up such an incredible tale if he didn’t know it to be true.”

Angel let out an amused laugh. “Humans will say or do anything to get their own way. Both of you should know that by now.”

Preston grabbed Angel by the shirt collar, his eyes glinting with anger. “Listen to me, you pompous fool. My brother is stalking her this very moment. If something happens to her because you are too damn thickheaded to see that I’m telling you the truth, there won’t be a place left on God’s green earth for you to hide from me. Because I will find you—” He paused, giving Angel a level gaze. “And when I do ... I will kill you.”

“What is all this talk about killing?” Debra asked, placing a hand in

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the center of each man's chest. Preston felt the trembling in her frail body. "There is not a person in this room who wouldn't give his right arm for Gabrielle." Her voice quavered. "We are all on the same side, and I want you both to keep that in mind." She faced Angel, with tears rolling down her cheeks. "I have never asked anything of you. But now, I must. Please take him to Gabrielle. I'm afraid for her. If he's right and something does happen to her, you will never be able to forgive yourself."

Angel studied her for a long moment. "All right, Debra. I'll do it for you." He shot Preston a veiled look. "But if you're wrong—there won't be a place left on this earth for *you* to hide, my friend."

\* \* \*

Gabrielle wondered why he hadn't already killed her. Unless, he got a kick in dragging it out as long as possible. She'd heard rumors about Cameron and his killings, but they were so sadistic and cruel, she'd not put a lot of stock in them. Not even after what he had done to Artimus. But now, she knew them to be horribly true.

"Get up," Cameron shouted, pushing and pulling until she was back

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on her feet. He shoved her toward the entrance. “Damn little hellcat, aren’t you? Well, no matter, I still caught you.”

“What are you waiting for? Kill me—get it over with,” Gabrielle rasped between bleeding, swollen lips. During their struggle, he had slapped her several times, and now her mouth felt like somebody else’s mouth, or to be more precise, like she’d been given a shot of undiluted numbness.

His maniacal laughter bounced off the metal walls, ringing nastily in her ears. “I want to see your face when I stab you with my—uh—special weapon. Besides, this place is too damn crowded for my liking. I need the wide open space to correctly do my job.”

She let out a bitter laugh. “Is that what your family is calling it nowadays, a job? We are still old-fashioned enough to call what you intend to do to me ‘murder.’”

He pushed her onto the pavement. She let out a yelp when she tripped over the door seal, and landed painfully on her hands and knees.

“How can you murder something that is already dead?” he sneered,

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eyeing her with such contempt, a cold shiver shimmied down her spine.

He reached into his jacket and pulled out a thin stiletto made of wood with an ivory handle. He caressed it lovingly, eyeing the wooden shaft in a way that made her feel sick.

“How do you like my pretty toy?” he asked in a soft but deadly voice.

Gabrielle swallowed hard; she imagined it piercing her chest with the ease a butcher would use to carve a joint of roast beef. Merciful God, this man really did enjoy handing out death. It meant nothing to him.

She scrambled backward, her breath catching in her throat as he moved toward her.

“Drop it, Cameron.”

The voice was at once familiar and menacing. It was a voice Gabrielle knew well. It belonged to the man to whom she’d given her heart so long ago.

Her heart soared, her breathing quickened, when she saw Preston

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walk out of the shadows into the dingy light.

“If you want to use that toy on somebody, use it on me. Leave Gabrielle alone.”

Cameron grinned and pushed her aside. “You will have to wait a bit longer, my dear. It seems I must teach my kid brother some lessons on manners. He doesn’t seem to know how to wait his turn in a polite and dignified manner.”

“I can handle this piece of human waste if you like, Preston,” Angel remarked casually. He strolled around the edge of the building as if he were walking into the theater or going to the opera. Not a care in the world. Not a hair out of place.

Gabrielle knew better.

He came over and took her hand, lifting it to his lips with a graceful motion. “I’m happy to see you are still alive and well, love.” He tilted back her head to see the extent of her injuries. His eyes glittered in the ghostly light. “If Preston doesn’t kill the whoreson, then I intend to, rest assured.”

Only Gabrielle knew the seething fury hiding behind his elegant

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facade of indifference. “No. Let Preston deal with his brother,” she said, reaching out a hand to prevent him from interfering.

Preston caught her gaze, his love for her shining forth like a beacon. She drank in the comfort of his nearness, loving him more at that very instant than she’d ever loved him before.

“Oh, he is definitely going to pay for each and every bruise or cut he inflicted upon you, my love,” Preston said quietly. “I promise.”

A shadow of concern touched her. Surely he didn’t mean to— “Preston. No ...!” she cried.

She was too late. The two brothers were already warily lunging at each other. And only one of them would survive.

“Do you want me to intervene?” Angel asked, eyeing her with a worried expression.

“No ... no,” she faltered. It hurt to breathe as she watched the two brothers circle each other in a bizarre battle dance that made no sense to her. “Preston has to do this if he ever is to get rid of his demons.” She reluctantly said the words, yet she knew she was right.

Sweat beaded Preston’s brow as he fainted away from the knife his

brother wielded expertly.

Cameron laughed and lunged again. “I see all those lessons in hand-to-hand combat weren’t a total loss. You know enough to stay away from my knife. But not for long. You should have paid more attention in class, little brother.” With that, he crouched low and shot up past Preston’s defense maneuver, slicing him across his stomach with a brutal swipe.

Preston felt a trail of fire lick across his belly. Instinctively, he clutched his middle, staggering back a couple of steps.

Dimly, he was aware of Gabrielle screaming. He didn’t let it distract him. Fighting back the wave of pain and nausea that threatened to overcome him, he straightened, his hands coming away from his body dripping with blood—his blood.

A scalding fury overtook him as once again his brother moved past his blockade and, with expert ease, carved another line into his midsection. He muttered a curse as Cameron danced out of reach with a smug grin.

Hell, he knew Cameron was playing with him. But he also knew

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Cameron would grow bored with his game and move in to finish him off. If he could just hang on until the right moment, he thought dazedly. Just a little longer, he cautioned himself.

“I always knew you were nothing but a coward,” Cameron taunted, moving in for the final kill. “I told Granddad over and over to get rid of you. But no, he wouldn’t listen to me. Up until the very last moment, he hoped you would turn out to be a decent hunter. But when you finally turned against us, he lost all hope and realized the truth. You’re just no damn good. You aren’t worthy to carry the Adams name.”

Preston saw the hatred glittering in Cameron eyes. Hell, he could feel and taste the hatred emanating from his brother. A hate that bordered on insanity, he realized with a sickening clarity.

“No, you’re wrong. I didn’t do anything to destroy our family. Granddad did that when he took us away from Mom and made hitmen out of us. If you want to talk about broken hearts, what about our mother’s heart? A part of her died when he took you into training and the rest of her died when he forced me to join his madness. The old

## *ENEMY MINE*

man might as well have taken a gun and shot her, because she died completely that day.”

“Lying bastard,” Cameron shouted. “You deserve to die for what you did to our family.”

Cameron raced forward, his wooden dagger high in the air. Preston braced himself for the impact. Just a couple more seconds, and he could turn this fight around.

Just as Cameron’s weapon touched him, he sharply twisted his body. But to his shocked amazement, Cameron anticipated his ploy and moved to intercept him.

The next thing he knew he was grappling with his brother for the knife. The sharp point inched nearer to his throat with a relentless drive. Cameron laughed a bestial sound, full of triumph. A sound that made the hairs on the back of Preston’s neck stand up.

With a heart-stopping cry of anguish, Gabrielle hit Cameron broadside. He went down with her on top of him, kicking, punching, and going for his eyes. Her hand caught the glint of metal and flung it outward. The medallion hit Preston square in the face, and then

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bounced off onto the pavement.

Preston staggered forward, anxiety clutching at his throat; waves of pain running jagged through him. *I have to keep Cameron from hurting her*; the thought blazed in his mind. He tried to move faster, but it was as if time had slowed. He was moving in slow motion, one frame at a time. He gasped for breath. Almost there.

He reached out as Cameron jerked her beneath him, and with a triumphant cry, plunged the knife into her chest.

Preston came to a screeching halt, unable—unwilling—to believe what he was seeing. He wanted to scream, deny what he'd just witnessed. He wanted to freeze the scene and run it backward.

This time he would save her. He would throttle the life out of his brother for even thinking about harming her. He wanted a second chance. He needed a second chance to save her.

*Please, somebody give me another chance. I swear I won't foul it up again.*

“Gabby-Skye!” The sound of his anguish seemed to go on forever, shattering the darkness with his grief.

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Another voice rose over his, a battle cry accompanying his wail of mourning. And then Angel was pushing him aside, an angel turned into a demon by Gabrielle's brutal slaying. He lifted Cameron off of her bloodied body, high in the air, and pitched him forward with every ounce of preternatural strength he possessed.

The grin on Angel's lips made Preston shudder, but he didn't give a damn what the vampire did to his brother. He had to reach Gabrielle. Galvanized by fear, he lurched forward. *Please don't let her be dead.* The phrase kept going around in his head, making him sick with despair.

"Dear God, let her live and I'll gladly walk away from her. Anything you want, I'll do, but please let her live," he moaned, his knees buckling. He dropped to the pavement at her side. His heart nearly exploding with the need to have her alive and well—vampire or human, he didn't care as long as she lived.

Preston reached beneath her with trembling hands, cradling her head in his arms. He smoothed back her long, dark hair and he knew the truth. He could no longer deny that she was dead.

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He threw back his head, screaming out his pain and grief to the heavens, the moon and the stars. A droplet of water stuck his face, and he knew nature itself was sharing his pain. Numbness gradually settled over him as the rain beat down upon his upturned face.

For he also knew with an utter certainty, that his heart had died with her.

That's when the screaming began ...

\* \* \*

Cameron's mind went blank when Angel lifted him so abruptly and tossed him into the air like so much garbage. When he landed, a sharp pain tore at his ribs, and every time he took a breath, the agony intensified. He knew, without looking or examining his rib cage, that several were broken. It wasn't the first time he'd broken his ribs, and he doubted it would be the last time. At least he was still breathing, albeit painfully.

He felt the presence of someone else and looked up, arrogantly expecting to see his brother—expecting him to be apologetic for the hell he'd put him through, not to mention the rest of the clan. He'd let

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him blubber for a while, he decided, and then maybe he would forgive him. Or make him think he was forgiving him, and then catch him off guard, and stick it to him the same way he'd stuck it to his interfering girlfriend.

His eyes widened as the tall, dark figure of the vampire that had treated him so abominably loomed over him. A tiny trickle of uneasiness coiled into the pit of his gut. He tried to dispel it. He didn't have anything to worry about. Didn't he wear the medallion? No vampire could strike a killing blow to the wearer.

He fumbled for it, telling himself he just wanted to feel it under his hand. His hand groped the skin of his neck. His fingers grasped nothing except thin air.

His only protection against the wrath of the creature who stood before him was no longer around his neck. For the first time in his life, Cameron Adams felt the faint stirrings of fear.

The vampire grinned a savage grin, oddly enough bringing more beauty into his perfect features. In his anger he was magnificent, Cameron had to admit. A fierce and loyal warrior, something Preston

## *ENEMY MINE*

knew little about, he thought with a great deal of rancor.

“Looking for something, vampire hunter?”

“No ... uh, nothing at all.” Cameron erased the anxiety from his face. He’d show this soulless creature not a smidgen of fear. He was an Adams and he would damn well die like an Adams, with grace and dignity.

“Perhaps you lost something?” Angel held up his hand. Dangling from a slender index finger was the medallion on its thin strand of gold links. It swayed in the rising wind, the dim lighting overhead illuminating its shininess.

“Give it to me,” Cameron demanded. He braced his ribcage with his left arm and jumped to his feet. He reeled slightly as a white-hot lash of pain whipped his upper body. He didn’t let it stop him from lunging for the necklace.

“Oh no, you don’t,” Angel said, jerking it out of arm’s reach. He leaned nearer. “I want you to know how close you are to the means of your deliverance as I do unto you what you have done unto others. I am going to make you suffer the way you’ve made my kin suffer in

## *ENEMY MINE*

their final hours.” He leaned closer. “I want you to feel what they felt, see what they saw, and know you are dying.”

Cameron shrunk away from the vampire’s venom, his hands going to his neck in an automatic gesture of protection.

Angel threw back his head and laughed. “I don’t plan to let you off that easily.”

Bells of warning went off in Cameron’s mind. Okay, if he didn’t intend to turn him into a bloodless husk, what did he intend to do? Cameron ticked off the remaining possibilities. He could think of nothing worse the monster could do to him. He decided he could afford a display of bravado.

“Are you too afraid of reprisals against you and yours from my family to risk killing me?”

Angel said nothing.

Cameron let out a hoot of delight. “That’s it. You don’t want to mess with my family.” He lowered his voice to a conspirator level. “Between you and me, I can’t say I blame you. I tell you what, let’s you and me cut a deal. Let me go, and I’ll make sure your name never

## *ENEMY MINE*

shows up on any of our files. You will simply vanish from sight, and nobody from my clan will ever know you existed.”

Angel’s mouth clamped shut, and thinned into a hard line. His hands snaked out, without warning, his fingers digging deeply into Cameron’s shoulder blades.

“Hey, what are you doing? I offered you a deal.” Briefly, Cameron struggled. Angel forced him to gaze into his eyes. Despite his growing fright, Cameron found himself fixated on the shadowy depths of the vampire’s gaze.

Cameron looked hard, and could see his own image staring back at him. It was fascinating. A swirl of vibrant warm colors replaced his image. He found it intriguing. A warm lassitude came over him as he swayed toward Angel.

Angel lowered him to the ground without losing eye contact. So warm—so peaceful. Just like diving into a heated pool of water. It was the most delightful experience Cameron ever had, and he wondered why the vampires kept it to themselves? Selfish of them, but they weren’t human, so what could he expect?

*ENEMY MINE*

Deeper and deeper Cameron dove, and when at last he came up for air, he found that he was in hell.

He began to scream ...

## *CHAPTER 19*

Gabrielle felt a sensation of ripping away and then she was free. She could see the scene below her. She viewed it with a sense of detachment. Preston's tears mingled with the rain as he leaned over her torn and bleeding body, and she wondered—why he grieved so?

Didn't he realize that at last she was free from the chains that had bound her to earth? She marveled at the loss of blood hunger, the warmth of her skin. She was dead, but she was free from the bondage of vampirism.

She wanted to shout her joy to the world. And she wanted Preston to know about it and be happy for her.

But suddenly, as she lingered to watch him, she could feel the

## *ENEMY MINE*

intensity of his emotions seep into her center being.

Gabrielle tried to go to him, comfort him. He needed to know she was at peace. But she found she couldn't move in his direction. Each step she made only took her farther away from him until she was viewing him from the end of a long tunnel.

"Not yet," she whispered. "He's suffering so. Please let me go to him—explain the situation," she said aloud. She peered through the dimness, looking for anyone that could help her. But she was alone—and she felt more alone than she'd ever felt in her endless lifetime.

Involuntarily, she reached out to him when he began to rock back and forth, her motionless body in his arms, crying her name. *Dear God, please let me comfort him.*

"Gabrielle, it is time for you to come with me."

Her head whipped around. Her eyes fixed on the pinpoint of blue light shimmering on a canvas of blackness. The glimmer expanded and then expanded again, growing brighter with each expansion. She closed her eyes against the brilliancy. The crystalline bluish light blinded her.

## *ENEMY MINE*

A gentle touch beneath her elbow made her open her eyes in alarm. Standing next to her was the wisewoman who had raised her, who had attended her deathbed more than two hundred years ago. Sarah had found her as a child weeping over the bodies of her parents, both dead from the plague.

At first, Gabrielle had been frightened of the old woman with squinty eyes and rotten teeth, but Sarah had taken her in and treated her like a daughter. She'd taught Gabrielle everything she knew about the healing arts.

"I'm sorry, dearie. But you must not tarry any longer. The others are waiting."

"What others?"

The wisewoman smiled. "You will see soon enough, dear. Come along. We mustn't be late."

Tears stung her eyes. "I can't leave Preston like this. He needs me. I have to find a way to let him know that I'm fine. That everything will be all right."

"Sweet one, I understand. But Saint Peter hates to be kept waiting."

### *ENEMY MINE*

The old woman frowned. "This could be used against you in Judgment."

With wide-eyed fright, Gabrielle began to back away. "I'm to ... to be judged? God's teeth, the church was right. I am going to be judged and weighed in the balance. I will be thrown in the fiery pits of hellfire. Dear God, what next?"

The wisewoman giggled. "That's not exactly the way it is, child. Come along and you will see."

What choice did she really have? It wasn't like she had anywhere to run to escape the fate awaiting her. "And Preston? What will happen to him?"

The old woman shook her fuzzy head. "I don't know. He's not my concern; he has his own angel. But you are my concern, and I take my duties very serious." The wise woman held out a gnarled hand. "Please ..."

Gabrielle brushed away her tears and took the hand. Together, they walked into the sphere of light.

Gabrielle blinked in surprise when they emerged on the other side.

## *ENEMY MINE*

Everything was a brilliant shade of white. She looked down to see that her simple pants and shirt had been transformed into a beautiful white gown that blended in perfectly with her surroundings.

Her hand tightened around the old woman's scrawny fingers. "Is this heaven?"

The old woman laughed. "Lord no, child. This is what we call the waiting room." She snapped her fingers, and before Gabrielle's stunned gaze, a door appeared in the white landscape.

She turned her head to look at Gabrielle. "Ready, dear?"

Gabrielle felt bewildered by everything that had happened. "I guess. But I wish you could tell me what is going on. I feel lost ... and alone. I don't think I'm going to like it here very much."

The wisewoman winked. "You are not alone, dearie, and this place tends to grow on you. Don't worry, I'll be close by. Whatever the court decides, I'll be right here for you. Now go on in."

Gabrielle stepped over the threshold and turned back with a puzzled frown. "Aren't you coming?"

"I can't, dearie."

## ENEMY MINE

“But what am I being accused of? I don’t understand any of this. Please come with me.”

The wisewoman shook her head. “This is something you will have to do yourself. But remember, I’m right out here waiting.”

“Thank you,” Gabrielle murmured.

Then the door disappeared, and she found herself staring at a wide expanse of white. She fought down the sense of panic that was threatening to overtake her and slowly pivoted.

She heard her heart pounding in her ears as an overlong judge’s bench appeared. Sitting behind it were three men she’d never seen. They were wearing flowing white gowns, and had beards that reached their chests.

*This is as bad as the first time I stood before the tribunal.* Two courts in less than a week didn’t bide well for her, she thought. Well, at least she didn’t have to worry about this court sentencing her to death. She was already dead.

Still, she felt a shiver of apprehension. It was entirely possible this heavenly host could do much worse.

### *ENEMY MINE*

“You are Gabrielle Christina Skye Warlick?” asked the older man in the middle. He thoughtfully stroked the length of his reddish-white beard as he studied a sheaf of papers stacked in front of him.

Gabrielle threaded her fingers together to halt their trembling. “Yes, I am Gabrielle Warlick. Please, tell me—what am I doing here?”

His grizzled head came up, and he studied her with an intensity that made her even more nervous. “It says that you were supposed to join us on April 25, in the year of our lord 1688. Can you explain why you did not?”

“A vampire by the name of Angel transformed me into a creature of the night.” Her eyes narrowed. “If you are God, then why do you not know this?”

The three men stared at her for a split second and then burst into laughter.

Gabrielle felt even more bewildered. “I don’t think my question was all that amusing. And I would like an answer, if you please.”

The man in the center wiped the tears out of his eyes. “I am not God. I am Peter.”

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“I’m sorry,” she said. “I just assumed you were God, and that one of the other two was Peter.”

The man on Peter’s right, who resembled Howdy Doody with a beard, snickered. “The big guy doesn’t bother himself with the minor cases.”

Gabrielle stiffened at the hint of insult in his voice. “Well, he should. If I am understanding this situation correctly, somebody up here made one helluva mistake, and I want to know who it was.”

The one on Peter’s left, who looked a lot like Charlton Heston with a long white beard, stared at her as if she’d suddenly sprouted horns. She resisted the urge to touch the back of her head to check.

“How dare you insinuate the mistake was ours? Someone in accounting messed up. Not us.”

Gabrielle’s heart twisted as she realized that Heaven had been responsible in robbing her of countless lifetimes with the man she loved. She could have avoided the heartache and pain she’d suffered over the centuries.

Someone should have been watching. Someone should have

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intervened when she was dying before her time. But only Angel had—no one else. They had no right—no right at all. Anger surged through her, giving her courage to speak her piece.

“What does accounting have to do with people dying? You—you three are responsible, not your damn accounting department.”

Peter noisily cleared his throat. “They keep the numbers in the book of life. We don’t see the book. But never mind about that. What we have to do is rectify the mistake made three centuries ago.”

Gabrielle couldn’t keep the irony out of her voice when she asked, “And just how do you intend to do that? It’s not like you can run back time or anything like that.” Her eyes rounded, hope rose in her chest. “Or can you?”

Peter shook his head. “That’s not my department.”

“I say we should go ahead and let the Angel of Death claim her,” Howdy Doody said.

“No. I think she should be given a second chance with her soul mate,” Charlton Heston declared. “What do you think about the year 2050, dear?”

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Gabrielle shook her head, her hope dying a quick death. Tears scalded her eyes. "Please, just let me go back now. I can finish out this lifetime with Preston. Please, that's all I ask. After that you can send me wherever you like."

Charlton Heston shook his head. "That's not an option, dear. I'm sorry."

Peter sighed. "We must come to a decision on where you go from here." He glared at the two by his side. "I believe you should be allowed to go through the gates. Since you did cheat Death for so many years, I feel it's only right that you should not go back at all." He frowned down at her. "After all, indiscretions should be punished, and you did break the rules."

"How can you sit there and say that?" she asked, her voice bitter. "It wasn't my fault Death got cheated out of his prize. Blame that one on Angel. He's the one who changed everything. Or even better, you can blame the Angel of Death; he came for me forty years too early. He's the one who has the ultimate responsibility for what happened."

"Be that as it may, I'm not entirely sure you deserve another

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chance,” Peter said firmly.

“But Peter, there’s a notation on page three about her sacrificing herself for the sake of true love. Aren’t we supposed to take that into consideration?” Charlton Heston asked. “Perhaps we should rethink this particular case.” He shuffled the papers and handed Peter the one in question.

Peter read it, occasionally pursing his lips as he studied it. “Hmm ... it does say that.”

“It also states that her soul mate has been unable to realize his potential in every subsequent lifetime he’s lived without her,” Charlton added helpfully, shooting Gabrielle a more understanding glance.

Peter threw up his hands in disgust. “Someone from accounting should be horsewhipped for such a sorry state of affairs.” He studied Gabrielle with an unreadable expression. “This is a very unusual case.” He paused for a moment and studied her thoughtfully.

She could feel the muscles in her stomach tightening as she waited for him to continue.

“Although I realize that none of this fiasco is your fault, I must

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come to a decision about what is to happen to you, based on the material I have in front of me.” He paused again as if trying to collect his thoughts. “It is the decision of this court that you, Gabrielle Christina Skye Warlick, are to go through the gates, and remain there for no less than one thousand years. That is the final decision of this court.”

Gabrielle gasped aloud; she could feel the blood draining from her face. “You can’t do this to me. I’ll never see Preston again. We will never have a chance to find our happiness in another lifetime.” She stiffened, her hands balled into fists at her sides. “No, I won’t do it. You can’t do this to us. If this is heaven’s idea of a fair trial, it stinks. I want to appeal. I want to see God, himself. Surely he will understand my predicament. I was taught how merciful he was. Surely he will show that mercy now.”

Peter shook his head again. “Sorry, little one. But rules are rules and I must abide by them.”

“No,” she moaned. Bittersweet memories of a hundred lifetimes shared with Preston hurled themselves at her. Memories lost in the

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passage of time, lost to her when she was on earth, now emerged inside of her.

Her throat swelled; warmth gathered in her eyes. Never to see him again. Never to feel the touch of his hands again. Never to hear him whisper words of love into her ear. How was she to go on without him?

“It can’t be. Please, it just can’t be,” she said. Her voice broke and trailed off into a whisper.

Dear God, how could she bear it? She buried her face in her hands and wept.

Now she knew for certain she still had a soul, for it lay inside her shriveled and broken.

\* \* \*

Hundreds of miles away, Debra clutched her chest and cried out.

Artimus sat up, his wrinkled features lined with concern. “What is it, child? Are you ill?”

But there was no response in her eyes; they were shielded and dull as she moaned yet again.

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A surge of fear made him struggle out of the bedclothes and stumble to her side. “Debra, what is it? Is it your heart?”

She struggled to speak. “It’s Gabrielle. Something terrible has happened to Gabrielle.”

He took her by her shoulders and shook her hard. “What are you saying, child? Nothing’s happened to Gabrielle. Angel and Preston are with her right now. Get hold of yourself. We must be strong for Gabrielle.”

Tears of pain flooded her faded eyes. “No, something’s happened to her. I feel it, Artimus. I think—I think she’s dead.”

He closed his eyes against the sudden stab of pain at her words. *Not Gabrielle. Sweet, innocent Gabrielle.* God could not be so cruel. But when he gazed into the hollow, heartbroken eyes of Gabrielle’s adopted daughter, he knew she spoke the truth. He felt a tight band of grief around his chest, making it difficult for him to breath and, without warning, he was plunged back into the cold darkness of a hell he’d thought he’d escaped two hundred years ago.

## *CHAPTER 20*

Preston didn't know how long he rocked back and forth, holding her in his arms, pleading for God to let her live. It seemed like forever in one sense, but in another sense, only a fleeting moment seemed to have passed.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see Angel staring down at him. Rain plastered his dark hair to his head. His eyes were dark and haunted. Preston wondered if he had that same haunted look in his own eyes.

"We should go now, Preston. The sun will rise soon."

"I can't leave her here," he answered, gazing down at her ashen face.

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“I’ll take you to Debra’s and come back to take care of her. But we can’t stay here.” Angel’s voice was harsh with grief.

Preston shook his head; his grip on Gabrielle became tighter. “No, I want to stay with her just a few more moments, Angel—please.”

Angel stepped back into the shadows. “Just a few moments, and then we must go.”

“There you are,” Serene said, popping in with a bright smile. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you. Debra told me about—” She abruptly stopped chattering. She glanced from Preston to Angel. “What is it? Something’s happened. I can see it in your faces.”

Angel moved away, and her gaze fell across the body Preston held so tenderly. “Dear God,” she breathed, her hand going to her mouth as she approached. Her knees gave way, and she sank to the pavement beside the still body of her friend. “I should have insisted on staying with her last night. I felt uneasy leaving her here alone. But she told me to leave.” Serene’s eyes glimmered with unshed tears as she faced Preston. “I never should have listened to her. Preston, please forgive me. If I had only followed my instincts, maybe I could have kept this

from happening.”

Preston shook his head. “This is not your fault. You had no way of knowing the future.”

Serene’s pixie face hardened. “Who did this to her?”

“My brother,” Preston announced past the lump of tears in his throat. “I should have taken him out last night. Then, perhaps—”

“Stop it, both of you,” Angel growled. “Neither of you is to blame. It happened, and Gabrielle is dead. There’s nothing we can do to bring her back—nothing. It’s over.”

Serene wiped the tears from her eyes and looked at Preston with a puzzled frown. “What happened to your brother after he—after he—”

Preston remained silent. He was bewildered by her question. He had no idea of his brother’s whereabouts.

“I don’t know,” he finally said. “After he stabbed Gabrielle, I could only think about her welfare.” He let out a bitter laugh. “Of course, it didn’t do her a whole lot of good. She was dead before I could even get to her. God, how I wish I could do it all over again.”

“Cameron Adams is paying for his crimes,” Angel announced in a

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husky voice. He glanced over his shoulder with a satisfied smile.

Preston and Serene followed his gaze. Serene let out a gasp of surprise. Cameron sat with his back against Gabrielle's car door. He stared sightlessly into the distance, his face contorted with the horror of what only he could see.

"What did you do to him?" Preston asked. Strangely enough, he felt nothing for the stranger who sat some distance away with saliva drooling down his chin.

Angel gave him a fierce look, almost as if he expected Preston to object. "He is getting exactly what he deserves—no more—no less. A chance to live through the horrors he inflicted on my kind."

Preston cast an inquiring glance at Serene. She shifted uneasily. "Your brother will never come out of the hell Angel created in his mind."

Preston's gaze returned to Gabrielle. He felt a surge of dark joy at the punishment Angel had handed down. But then an image of his brother as a young boy floated before his eyes. God, he'd admired his big brother so much.

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Admired and loved him fiercely, he thought, feeling an overwhelming sense of loss and sadness. He couldn't help but wonder how his brother's life would have turned out if he'd been raised in a normal family.

"So many lives destroyed by my family's obsession." He sadly shook his head. "We have all lost too much to this insane war."

"But it's over now," Serene said, reaching for his hand. She squeezed it gently. "Preston, you have to go on. Put the past behind you and build a new life. It's what she wanted for you."

The darkness inside him pressed outward, threatening to spill over and leak onto the pavement. "She was my life."

Preston could see the effort Serene was making for his sake, not to give in to her own grief and pain.

"She's gone, Preston. There is nothing you can do to bring her back. Go with Angel. I will take care of Gabrielle's remains."

Preston shook his head. "I want to help bury her. I need to know where she will rest so I can visit—" He couldn't go on as he thought about her in the cold embrace of the earth—alone in the darkness. A

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fresh wave of pain washed over him.

“We don’t bury our dead,” she explained. “We cremate them like the Vikings. It is our way.”

“Then I want to be here when you do it.”

Serene and Angel exchanged glances, speaking in a silent language of their own, and at last Angel nodded.

Serene sighed. “You win, Preston. But we must move away from her. I don’t want you caught in the backdraft.”

Preston swallowed hard as he gazed at his Gabby-Skye for the last time. “I wish we had found each other sooner, my love. But I will make you a promise. Someday we will be together again. We will have that eternity I vowed to you so many years ago. I love you more than I have ever loved anyone or anything in my life, and I will search for you in every lifetime after this one until I find you, and fulfill my vow.” He leaned down and pressed his lips to hers. “Good-bye, my darling.”

Serene tugged at his hand and, reluctantly, he lowered his precious burden to the ground with great care. He pushed to his feet, and with

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one final lingering glance, he followed her to a spot several feet away.

Angel moved to Gabrielle's side, his arms going out in a wide sweeping motion. To Preston, it was as if the vampire was embracing the very universe. He could hear him intoning something in a unfamiliar language. Latin, he thought, but he couldn't be sure.

Preston could see the bloodstained tears that streaked down the vampire's smooth cheeks. And he wondered if Gabrielle had known how much Angel had loved her?

He could only imagine the pain Angel suffered when Gabrielle didn't return that love, and fell in love with him instead. He shuddered to think of never knowing the warmth of her enduring love. He felt sorry for Angel, but he would never regret their love for each other.

Preston was startled to see a white stream of brilliant light erupt from Angel's hand, and then the next thing he knew, Gabrielle's body was consumed in the flames. Agony needled his heart as he watched the fire spark upward, reaching toward the canopy of heaven. He watched until there was nothing left but a small pile of gray ashes ... and still he watched, unable to look away.

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He brushed away his tears with the back of his hand. She was really gone, he thought dazedly. “How do I go on without her, Serene? How do I build a life without her in it?”

“One day at a time,” Serene whispered, wrapping her arm around his waist. “One day at a time.”

Angel approached them, his face grim and hard. “Let’s get out of here.”

As one, the trio turned and began to walk away. Preston didn’t try to think or reason. He felt numb and he prayed he stayed that way for a long time. He never wanted to feel again. His mind knew the reality of her being gone, but his heart wouldn’t listen, wouldn’t believe she was really dead. Her name throbbed inside of him with every step he took until he thought he would go insane.

“You promised me eternity.”

Preston froze in his tracks, unable to comprehend what he had just heard. It couldn’t be. It wasn’t possible. Lord, he was losing his mind, because now he could hear her voice as plain as day. Impossible.

But when he glanced hesitantly at Serene and Angel and saw their

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stricken faces, he knew he wasn't dreaming it. They'd heard it, too.

Preston's breath came in short, quick gasps as he spun around, her name on his lips. His heart was pounding; his palms were wet with sweat.

If he was dreaming, he hoped it lasted forever.

She stood in a wondrous glimmer of pure blue light, her long, dark tresses flowing down her back and shoulders, her beautiful purple eyes shining with love.

With his heart in his mouth, Preston watched as she tilted her head and gave him that sensational smile of hers. A smile that always made him feel ten feet tall and still growing. He took a step forward.

God in heaven. It was her. *Gabby-Skye*.

He raced toward her, praying she wouldn't disappear. And then she was in his arms, and they were both laughing and crying at the same time.

He lifted her into the air and whirled her around and around. Joy filled his heart, and he wanted to weep at its poignant sharpness.

"Preston, I'm getting dizzy," she laughingly exclaimed. "Please,

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please put me down.”

Preston lowered her to the ground, his arms still locked around her waist. He rained kisses on her eyes and mouth, unable to get enough of her. Time seemed to cease to exist for them. Gabrielle was back where she belonged and he would never let her go again.

“Beyond eternity,” he whispered huskily.

“Beyond eternity,” she agreed.

\* \* \*

“My God, I can’t believe what I’m seeing,” Serene exclaimed. She watched the reunion with tears of joy. “It’s a miracle. An authentic miracle. Who would have ever thought something like this could happen?”

“She is no longer one of us,” Angel said, his voice husky. He wondered about the curious ache in his heart at the sight of the young couple expressing their love for one another. “She is free now from the bonds that held her prisoner to our world of darkness and blood. Gabrielle can walk in the bright of day again without fear. Feel the warmth of sunshine against her skin. Oh, how I envy her freedom.”

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“Well, I think our work here is done, and we should leave them alone.” With that, Serene popped out of sight.

Angel regarded the couple a moment longer. A solitary red-tinged tear tracked a path down the slope of his cheek. His chest tightened with longing for something he could never have. Something he didn’t know existed, until now ...

To love someone so much, he could not even begin to imagine. It was not meant for creatures such as he. The thought made him feel a sadness he didn’t understand or care to understand. He had to be content with what he had in the shadowy world of night he inhabited. A world he would no longer share with Gabrielle Warlick.

“Be happy, my sweet Gabrielle,” he whispered, blowing a kiss in her direction, and then, without further ado, he misted.

## *EPILOGUE*

A band of pain wrapped itself around her middle, and she thought she would die with the intensity of it.

“C’mon, honey. You can do it, just push a little more.” He kept his voice low and reassuring, just like they’d taught him to do in childbirth classes.

He reached over to the bed stand and fished out a few shivers of ice from the plastic bucket. He touched them to her parched, chapped lips, and she gratefully sucked on them.

“Hang in there, sweetie. We’re almost home free.”

She smiled wryly. “That’s easy for you to say, since I’m the one doing all the work.”

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“Your husband is right, Mrs. Adams. Listen to him. He seems to have learned his lessons well.”

Gabrielle gasped, her eyes widening as yet another pain caught her in its grip. “Oh God,” she breathed as it carried her away on a sea of agony.

Dimly, she was aware of the doctor’s encouraging voice and Preston’s excited one, as the room blurred, and then came back into focus at a dizzying rate.

“One more push, honey. Come on now,” Preston urged, his mouth near her ear.

Once again, a red tide of pain swamped her. She bore down with it, catching it as it crested, and riding it into completion.

The sound of a baby crying brought tears to her eyes, and she slowly opened them to see Preston grinning proudly as he placed the tiny bundle in her arms.

“She’s just as beautiful as her mother,” he whispered with a misty smile. “I know we discussed names and decided on Stacy if the baby was a girl, but I would like to name her Skye Anne, after you and my

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mother.” He spoke in a hesitant voice, as if he didn’t know if she’d approve.

Gabrielle nodded absently, unwrapping the blanket so she could examine her daughter. A sense of wonder and awe swept through her at the perfection of the tiny limbs.

A living breathing miracle of life. Something she thought she would never know in this lifetime.

She sent up a prayer of thanks to the powers that be that allowed her judges to break the rules and send her back. If not for their understanding and compassion, she would have never known the deep abiding love she shared with her husband. With each passing day, their love grew stronger and deeper. She knew without a doubt that they would love for a lifetime, and when this one ended, she would look forward to the next and the next because, in her heart, she knew a love like theirs was hard to find and even harder to keep.

Gabrielle glanced up at Preston, her eyes brimming with happy tears. “I think Skye Anne is a perfect name for our daughter. And, Preston, I love you.”

# About the Author

Jewel Dartt lives in the beautiful North Carolina mountains. She has written and published many short stories, but paranormal is her first love, and she is thrilled to bring you her first book, ENEMY MINE.

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