

DESCENDANTS of DARKNESS  
LEONARDO



MARIANNE LACROIX

## DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS: LEONARDO

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DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS

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BY

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*To Liz, Tracey, and Robin  
for their encouragement and support.*

# LEONARDO

“Oh, Christ, no!” the female vampire frantically pleaded, tears streaming down her face.

“God isn’t here to help you,” vampire slayer, Erin O’Connell, sneered. She shoved the vampire’s weakened body against the alley’s brick wall, then twisted the stake protruding from her chest. The wet, cool surface matched the vampire’s own loss of body heat. Dark, rich blood oozed from the massive chest wound. Without feeding, the vampire would become incapacitated as her precious life fluid pumped from her body.

The ancient belief of a stake through the heart was still the most effective way to impair a vampire. Only decapitation would ensure the final death, or the greeting of the morning sun, incinerating the remains into ash to be scattered with the wind.

The vampire lost consciousness and slid down the wall into a heap.

Erin had no time to wait hours for the sun. She pulled a machete

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from an inner pocket of her long trench coat, the polished blade gleaming in the soft streetlight. What a beautiful piece of equipment for such a dreadful task. But, it wasn't anything new to her. This vampire marked her fifty-first kill.

Raising her arm, feeling the weight of the weapon, Erin let all the inner hate and passion for revenge bubble up through her. With a scowl, she swung the blade and severed the head from the vampire's body.

She had been a slayer ever since one horrible night eight years ago when a male vampire had eased his way into her parent's home by dating her older sister, Karen.

Karen had been talking about Michael, a dark, handsome man she had met in the university library. She had thought he was a student, but it turned out Michael was a three-hundred-year-old vampire. Before their eyes, he had changed from the charming man into a bloodthirsty demon.

He fed upon them all, enslaved them under his magic spell as he drank from each at his leisure. When he had gotten to Erin, however, a vampire slayer interrupted him.

The slayer, Casey, a twenty-five-year-old man with dark hair and eyes, and a muscular build, had been delayed by one of the vampire's minions. He arrived in time only to save Erin from being drained. Unfortunately, Michael had escaped after the ensuing battle.

From that moment, Erin vowed to find the demon that destroyed her family, and all those who shared his lifestyle. Casey had taken her under his wing for two years, teaching her the art of slaying.

Convincing him to allow her to become involved in such a dangerous business had proven difficult at first, but he eventually relented. At nineteen, Erin began to learn how to hunt and kill vampires.

After a year with Casey, Erin began to care for him, wishing she could give into her inner desires. He, however, had been secretly in



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love with Karen. Teaching Erin the ways of the slayer had been his way to avenge Karen's death. When Erin eventually discovered the truth, she left Casey to continue her work alone. It hurt too much to see the man she adored yearning for her dead sister, so Erin immersed herself into her work to ease the pain wracking her heart.

Six years on her own as a slayer, she had sent fifty vampires to their eternal rest. She moved about the United States, all the while following Michael's movements. His hunting grounds became hers. He sought victims, meals for the evening, while she tracked him and those of his kind.

Then, three months ago, Michael disappeared. He had never gone to the ground, but she began to believe that was what he had done.

One night, however, she came face-to-face with him in the streets of Philadelphia. He had just fed off of a hooker in a back alley. Erin confronted him, and it became her most difficult skirmish. She got in a blow to sever his jugular, causing him to run off into the night faster than she could follow. But she hadn't seen him since.

Three days ago, she decided to visit the American vampire capital, New Orleans. She could almost sense the evil about her, and amid it, Michael, the damned night-walker who destroyed everything she held dear.

But, where was he?

While searching for clues, Erin had run into this female vampire. She persuaded the one called Titania to show her the city's vampire society. Titania, of course, was apprehensive. Erin tried weakening her with a special potion Casey had created to drain some of the vampire's strength. Still, Titania would not willingly reveal the secret gathering places of her fellow demons, so Erin had no other choice but to kill her.

Now, in the alley off Bourbon Street, darkness surrounded her as she stood over the corpse. Not a pretty sight. A grueling, messy job, but someone had to do it. And this one had been tough in the hunt, but again, Erin had triumphed.

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A male vampire, still hidden by shadows, burst onto the scene. Erin could feel his anger as he gazed over the staked, headless body.

“Who the hell are you?” he asked, rage spouting from his every pore.

“Your worst nightmare, vampire.”

Obviously, these two creatures had had a connection, bringing him to her with a pained call for help. *Perfect*. Now Erin could destroy two of them, making it a *very* productive evening.

He stepped from the shadows, revealing his handsome features in the dim street light. Erin gasped. His chiseled jaw, dark eyes, and short black hair, matched with a tall stature and a well-toned chest, washboard abdomen, and lean, muscular legs, made her heart leap. It felt as though all air had escaped her lungs. Lust shot through her body, betraying each and every instinct she had honed in the past eight years.

For the first time, she felt confused. How could her body react in such a way to one of the night-walkers? She had trained to kill them, no matter her feelings. But somehow, she couldn't lift the machete to strike out at him.

“Who are you?” she whispered.

“The one about to destroy you. Damn you, slayer!” He approached in ethereal speed, knocking her to the cobblestones. The machete flew out of her hand and into the dark shadows.

His hard, muscled body pressed her down into the equally hard alley. Erin struggled for release, but he securely held down her wrists on each side of her head. She gazed into his face and gasped again. He appeared more striking even closer. Moisture pooled between her legs as her traitorous body awakened with desires long denied.

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Erin’s entire being responded to the awakened passion. His tongue probed her mouth in a sensual assault, tasting her in sure strokes. Her body arched beneath his powerful mastery over her senses. His harder body answered the silent pleas of her own by pressing firmly between her legs. For a moment, she thought he’d take her there amid the alley and the nearby gore of her latest hunt.

That last thought slammed into her senses. She had vowed to track and kill the dreaded vampires, vile creatures that lived off the blood and lives of humans. This one was no different, no matter his allure.

She struggled against his kisses and embrace, refusing to submit to the intoxicating caresses. She would not let the enemy into her life other than in the role of “the hunted.”

When the kiss ended, the vampire once again stared into her face. He growled and leapt off her body. In a flash of speed, he collected the remains of the female vampire and dashed off into the night, leaving behind only the dark redness pooling over the ancient cobblestones.

Erin rose from the damp ground just as the sky opened up and rain began to pelt her. She continued to stand within the sudden storm and watched the blood wash into oblivion.

Quickly drenched to the bone, her hair matted to her body, she

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snatched her lost machete and placed it inside her long coat. No words would come to her. She had killed a vampire, and met another that affected her like no other male—human or otherwise. As she walked home, she couldn't help but wonder if she'd ever see him again.

\* \* \*

Leonardo laid Titania's remains upon the roof of her resting tomb in St. Louis Cemetery No.1. Many of his fellow beings had tombs in the historic cemetery. Luckily, the heavy stone doors kept them fairly safe from most humans, while rumors of ghosts and vampires kept the curious from finding out the reality of it all. Fear acted the main weapon to survival.

He placed a blanket over the battered body, knowing Titania would rather be remembered for her beauty than her means of destruction. There upon the roof, her remains would greet the morning sun, burn away to ash, and scatter in the winds. Vampires did not rebury their fallen. What was the sense? No, the body was only a vessel for the soul. Cremation via sunlight was the way to ensure the soul found eternal rest.

"I heard what happened." In mid-shift from a gray owl, Raife landed on the neighboring tomb's roof. "Any idea how Ti met a slayer?"

"No, and we may never know."

Leonardo looked up at the blonde vampire, who had been his friend since they met in England back in 1600.

Then, Raife had been a privateer for Elizabeth I, and questions began to rise as to why he didn't age while his queen deteriorated. Leonardo had met him in a house of ill repute, drinking from one of the ladies of the night. Leonardo took the fledgling Raife under his care and taught him the finer points of vampiric life. They eventually left England and traveled to the Americas. As the years rolled by, they considered themselves Americans and had sided with the rebels when

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the Revolution began.

After the Americans won their independence, Raife wished to return to England for a visit. It was then the vampire told his story of his sweetheart, having been a vampire, and consequently, making him one as well. She had “turned him” during a night of debauchery while he celebrated a British victory over the Spanish Armada. He had been angry with her for a long time, yet wished to find the woman whom he’d never stopped loving. As time passed, however, he discovered her true nature—an evil vampire, without any remorse for her actions. Raife was heartbroken, and existed with the knowledge the woman he once loved was a demon.

While Raife and Leo were in England, the residents of Whitechapel were amid panic with a gruesome killer on the loose—the Ripper. The man left his victims in such a horrid state; only a man in possession of a truly deranged mind could have performed such crimes. Of course, the vampire community knew the truth—Jack had been a vampire, the worst of their kind. Unfortunately, he disappeared from the scene before the police caught him and solved the mystery. Leonardo and Raife both agreed, the demon had gone to ground to seek his rest. He would emerge once again someday.

Afterward, they traveled to Leonardo’s home in Florence, Italy, where they stayed until the break out of World War I. At that time, they chose to return to America, having already fought in too many of the human battles. They arrived in New Orleans, and had been there since.

In all his time as a vampire, having been transformed during the Italian High Renaissance, Leonardo had never met a woman to take away the pain of his loneliness. He had relieved his physical urges with numerous women, but none ever stood apart from the rest.

That was what made the encounter with the slayer this evening that much more disturbing. As soon as he had touched her, he felt the connection. There was no other explanation; she was his life-mate. But after waiting hundreds of years, why did she have to be his enemy?

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Her image haunted him. Her softness and scent intoxicated his senses. She had yielded beneath him, as though instinct had taken over. Her body fit to his to perfection, and he grew hard at the thought of her naked, giving into her desires to bond with him.

Her long, dark, auburn hair would flow freely about her shoulders, and fan along the pillow as her body arched upward in anticipation of his touch. He could already imagine her creamy white skin glowing in the moonlight as he bent to taste her erect nipple. He already knew it would taste sweeter than any berry, and his mouth watered to sample its texture against his tongue. He had smelled her womanly arousal, and the scent permeated him. Her nectar would be a delicious treat before he eventually drank her rich blood, combining their souls for all eternity. Yes, the thought of her drinking from him aroused him more than he'd ever dreamed possible.

"Leo, what's wrong?" Raife interrupted his thoughts.

"It's the slayer. I can't get her off my mind."

"We need to avenge Ti's death. Why didn't you kill her?"

"I just couldn't."

"But why?"

"She's the one...the one I've been waiting for."

Raife growled. "She cannot live after destroying our own. She must be punished. You know the rules."

"I'll see to it that she's punished for her crimes. I promise you that, but only *I* will deal with her." Leo glanced up into the angry face of his long-time friend. "Don't touch her, understand?"

Raife nodded in silence as his eyes grazed Titania's still figure. "We must seek our rest for now. The sun approaches." Raife shifted once again into an owl and flew off to his own resting place.

Leonardo's troubled mind would not let him rest easily. He jumped down from the tomb and wandered through the cemetery as others of his kind sought their rest.

He spotted Lucius and his mate entering their resting place and

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securing the door behind them. Loneliness crashed into Leo's soul as he thought of the few who had found their mates. Never had he dreamed such a *demoni* like Lucius would fall under the spell of eternal love and devotion. So much had changed in a few days.

Stopping by the tomb of Marie Laveaux, Leonardo examined the several Xs that decorated the ancient stone. Humans believed in the Voodoo Queen and her magic to help those in need. Perhaps he should ask for help this time. It wasn't everyday he found his life-mate, but for her to be a slayer, it became a deep problem not easily solved.

"How am I to proceed?" he asked aloud, placing a hand against the cool tomb wall. "She is destined to be my mate, but will she love me—or kill me?"

The stone vibrated in response beneath his fingertips.

\* \* \*

Erin stretched her aching muscles while she lay in bed. She had fallen asleep as soon as her head hit the soft pillow that morning. Glancing at the clock, she realized she had slept away most of the day. It was already three in the afternoon.

It wasn't as though she had rested easily. Images of the vampire that tackled her to the street filled her mind. By God, he was everything sexy and desirable. She had always thought Casey was her dream man, but he couldn't compare to the dark, handsome vampire from last night.

Her body had hummed beneath his touch, and when he kissed her—no, it wasn't a kiss. He had marked her with that meeting of mouths.

Trying to put the disturbing thoughts of his effect on her senses, she climbed out of bed and took a quick shower. After dressing, she made coffee. Even while she sipped the dark, bitter brew, she couldn't get the remembrance of the vampire's body covering hers from her mind.

This would not be tolerated. She couldn't let a man—a vampire, of all things—deter her from her duties. The problem had only one answer—the vampire had to be destroyed.

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But how would she find him?

Then again, if he felt the same powerful attraction as she, he would find her.

Erin smiled. Yes, he would search for her—and she would be ready.

After gulping down the last of her coffee, she set the cup in the sink and proceeded to gather the tools she'd need for her trap.

The vampire would likely come for her tonight, and she'd use herself as bait. She checked her coat for all her supplies—four wooden stakes, her weakening potion mixed in pig's blood, Holy water, and her trusty machete. Everything was there, ready for use.

She didn't bother with things like mirrors, garlic or crosses. Garlic irritated a vampire, as well as humans. You didn't attract *anyone* with garlic in your pocket. Mirrors were of no use, a silly superstition that a vampire did not reflect. They were solid beings, therefore they *had* a reflection. And crosses were only as powerful as the beliefs of the owner. Watching her entire family brutally murdered by a vampire still on the loose ate away at any belief in divine justice.

Now she had to plan the place of the upcoming confrontation. The graveyard? Out of the question, being the worst place to confront a vampire. You never knew when more night-walkers would show up to join in the battle.

What would be a good place for her to set her trap?

As she touched the clean blade of her machete, the answer hit her—the rooftop of her apartment building. The good flat-top roof, high above the city, would be a perfect place to confront the vampire.

Glancing at her watch, she saw it was almost five o'clock. If she hurried, she could get to the roof before darkness fell and the vampire would rise from his rest. When he came for her—and he *would* come to her—she'd be waiting.

\* \* \*

Leonardo rose from his tomb in the St. Louis Cemetery No.1.



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Sniffing the air, he could almost sense the slayer, smelling her sweet perfume upon the wind. It was a combination of herbal shampoo, body lotion, and her unique scent. Did he truly smell her, or was it remnants of the night before when he crushed her body beneath his? That was something he wanted to do again—and soon.

Attraction to any human was almost foreign to him. Since he became vampire all those years ago, he had touched only one human woman in lust or desire. That had been a disaster.

It had happened just after he turned vampire at the hands of another vampire wearing the guise of an angel. The creature had changed Leo into a *demoni* before he even realized what had happened. The vampire eased him over to this existence instead of deserting him to die in a Roman alley, drained of blood and substance.

His creator did not wait around and instruct Leo in the vampiric ways, but left him to his own volitions. That had probably drew him to Raife years later, who had been left the same way, hungry, alone and scared.

The human woman, a simple servant, had attracted him. He had watched her during his humanity, passing her in the marketplace while he ran errands for his master, Michelangelo. Later he found out she served his master's rival, Raphael. Not to cause problems between his artistic dreams and learning the ways of fresco painting, Leo never touched her—until he turned into a night creature.

The hunger within him clawed and fought for attention, to be sated by none other than the sweet girl. He approached her and coaxed her to his side, using his powers of persuasion and animal magnetism. She came willingly, reeking of sexual excitement and curiosity.

He took her that night, easing the hunger raging within. He became rough and very much the *demoni*. Her sweet virginal blood tasted like wine over his tongue, and plunging into her tight sheath undid his last hold on control. He realized the ferocious way he treated her in the nick of time, then sent her into a deep sleep and took her home. If he hadn't

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come to his senses when he did, he would have killed her. Since then, Leo promised never to become involved with a human woman again.

He'd sip from them, but he never took it further. Coupling the hunger with sexual pleasure made it difficult to control the consequences. He refused to hurt another female. Controlling his lust and desire along with his need to feed would be just too much for him to guarantee the safety of the woman involved.

Hunger for the female slayer, however, grew overbearing. He wanted to taste her, feast upon her blood and body in a sexual mating. He needed to make the slayer his for all eternity.

But how could he do that without confronting her anger? She killed his kind for a living, and turning her would be difficult. Was there any way to make her his ally instead of his enemy?

Darkness covered the cemetery, and he stood watching the vampire community arise from its rest. Alonso and Jolie left their tomb amid small embraces and stolen kisses. Alonso playfully nipped the tender flesh at her neck, and she laughed in complete delight.

Jealousy coursed through Leo's every fiber. He wanted to have a loving relationship with his mate. He just didn't know how he could ever get the tempting vampire hunter to fall in love with him.

"Leo?" a familiar male voice asked from behind.

Leo turned to gaze into Raife's concerned face. "I'm sorry. Once we go feed, I have to meet up with the slayer."

"Sure you don't need help?"

"No, but if I do, I'll call."

"How are you going to make her pay for her deeds?"

Leo gazed into the distance toward the city and said soulfully, "I'll make her one of us."

\* \* \*

Erin waited in readiness to confront the sexy, dark vampire. She had to stand firm to her beliefs—vampires were evil and must be destroyed.

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She gripped the handle of her machete; it felt comforting as she awaited the confrontation. If she acted quickly, she'd have no time to reflect on how his deep brown eyes gazed upon her, sending shivers of excitement through her body. Maybe she could ignore the moisture gathering between her legs and end the creature's existence without yearning him to fill her to the core, pounding into her body with a relentless tempo, marking her as his own.

*Damn it.* Thoughts like those were dangerous and completely unlike her. So much for being unaffected. Her body already hummed with anticipation for his touch.

The slightest movement in the darkness caught her attention.

"What is your name, *mia slayer dolce*, my sweet slayer?" His voice broke through the night, cutting into her heart already longing for his love.

*Shit.* Did she just think the word "love"? Where the hell did that come from? "Erin," she said, annoyed with herself.

"Erin, the Irish lass who captured my heart the moment I laid eyes upon her beauty," he said as he stepped into the pale moonlight. His features were as handsome as she remembered. He exuded male charm and charisma, and Erin found her purpose for tonight wane into oblivion.

"I can't get involved with you...who are you?" Her voice wavered as he stepped closer. His scent of spice intoxicated her senses. No man had the right to smell so wonderful.

"Leonardo, *mia amore*. I know you have your reasons for what you do, but what I feel right now transcends all reason. I have searched for hundreds of years for the *one* woman—my life-mate."

He stood inches away from her body. Even without touching, Erin could feel the heat from him, searing into her own. She thought if she did touch him, her fingers would surely burn.

"Life-mate?" she whispered, trying to keep her senses. He was just too seductive in his movements and enticing in his voice.

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“*Si*, Erin, you are my life-mate, *mia compagna di vita*.”

Oh, Lord, she had always been a sucker for a man with an accent, an Italian accent at that.

She released her machete, and it fell to the rooftop with a clank. He was too powerful. His seduction was too hypnotic. She laid a hand on his chest, feeling it rise and fall beneath her fingers. He was hot and so real, so tempting. She should listen to her inner voice. What was it saying?

All thoughts left her mind as he laid his hands on her shoulders, pulling her to him. Fire shot through her body at the points she came in contact with his.

“*Il mia slayer dolce del mia cuore*, my sweet slayer of my heart, let me kiss you,” he whispered.

All her resolve or doubts melted away as their lips joined in a tender kiss. Nothing so gentle could be evil, could it?

The pace quickened to a feverish urgency as she clutched his body, opening her lips for him to taste her, sample her. His tongue plunged into her mouth, dancing with hers, drinking in her essence.

A small moan caught in her throat, a surprise even to her. She was being swept away by desire and passion for a vampire. And she didn't care. Years of hatred and hunting had become lost with the touch of his lips, the brush of his tongue, the caress of his fingertips.

Oh, the sensation! He deepened the kiss as his hands explored her body, molding her form to his lean, hard one. She fit perfectly to his, her soft curves a perfect match to his muscled carriage.

Her hands became hungry for more, wanting to feel flesh next to her own. Clothes became a barrier, a nuisance, a wall between her and the man assaulting her mouth with his tongue.

When his fingertips traced the curve of her breast, she thought she'd fall apart in his arms. He cupped it in his hand, making her groan. Pinching the nipple, already hard and erect, straining against the constraining fabric of her bra, he blew apart all resistance.

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Damn it, she needed to have him inside her. *Now.*

Tugging at his clothes, not breaking the contact of their mouths and tongues, instinct took over and she peeled away the barriers. He did the same.

Her trench coat landed in a heap at her feet, thudding from all the weapons concealed within. Her pants and shirt and the scraps of undergarments followed. As he stripped her, she pulled off his shirt, baring the sculpted sinew beneath his bronze skin. Running her hungry hands over their hardness, she memorized his body, mapping her way with each caress.

After she unfastened his pants and pushed them down, his penis stood large and full from the dark nest at his groin. By God, she never thought anything could look so wonderful, so tantalizing. Her mouth watered to taste the engorged head and the small droplet forming upon it.

She dropped to her knees and faced the masterpiece of male anatomy, then gingerly touched it with her fingertips. He moaned as she stroked its length with her fingers. His stance wavered, and when she looked up, his eyes closed and he tossed back his head, absorbed in the sensations she created. Such power over a man felt intoxicating.

She touched the droplet of pre-come with the tip of her tongue. Relishing the salty taste, she covered the swollen head with her full lips, massaging the pleasure point with delicate strokes. He moaned and dipped his fingers into her thick hair, urging her to continue her sensual assault.

Sucking at his length, Erin lost all notion of time. He tasted wonderful, and his groans encouraged her to suck harder. She felt in control, completely in ecstasy in pleasuring this handsome male.

Her hands traveled over the sculpted muscles of his thighs and his ass. Magnificent. She squeezed his cheeks, drawing him farther into her mouth, and he moaned as she took him deeper.

Finally, he grunted and pulled her away. Erin licked her lips as he

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gazed down at her face.

With a husky voice, he said, “You’ll make me come before I have a chance to give you pleasure, *mia dolce*. I want our joining to be relished and enjoyed by both of us. I don’t view you for my pleasure only. I want to give as well as receive.”

“Leo, I don’t think I can be patient enough right now. I need you inside me,” she said, lying back on their discarded clothes, padding her body from the rooftop. Propping herself up on her elbows, she smiled seductively and opened her legs for him to gaze upon her moist jeweled center.

She knew how she looked, the temptress exposing her core to his gaze. Her pussy was wet, weeping for his touch. Even her clit throbbed; just the slightest attention would send her over the edge. She could feel her labia part to expose her slit more to him, communicating her desires in her scent and actions. Teasingly, she’d part her legs, then close them, tempting him to attack her body.

*But he’s a vampire!*

Her inner voice pleaded with her, the trained sensibility attempting to reason with her desires. It would not work. To have his cock deep into her sheath, pounding into her heated core—the thoughts made cream form around her opening. All reason fled as she poised to mate with him.

“You don’t want me to take it slow?” he asked, bringing her attention back to his face instead of his proud cock.

“Fuck me, honey. I just want you to fuck me like you hadn’t had a good fuck in centuries.”

He crouched down to her, balancing on the balls of his feet, his elbows resting on his thighs. “Oh, I’m going to fuck you, *mia amore*. I’ll be the only one to have that pleasure for the rest of eternity.” Before she could answer, he commanded, “Now, turn over onto your stomach. Lift that luscious ass in the air and part your legs. I want to see that pussy beg for my cock to fuck it into tomorrow.”

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Erin realized how much control she had, and liked it, but now she wanted him to have the power—dominance over her body and heart. Only Leo could make her intimate muscles clinch with anticipation at this request. She turned over, leaned on her forearms, and raised onto her knees. She spread her legs to allow him the view of her pussy. She'd trimmed the hair that afternoon while in the shower, even though she denied her desires for him to touch her tonight. Perhaps that secret wish made her do it, but she was ready. Her juices flowed and her clit ached.

“Now, *mia slayer dolce*, I want you to touch yourself. Show me where you want me to touch you.”

“Aren't you going to—”

“I said, touch yourself, don't question it, just do it. Feel sexy as you perform for me, knowing I watch you bring yourself to ecstasy.”

She gulped, unsure about this request. She wasn't used to taking orders, but somehow it excited her. Most of all, she'd never masturbated for anyone before, and the thought of doing it for this dark man more than excited, more than stimulated her. It felt climactic.

Leaning on one elbow, she brought her free arm beneath her and gasped when her fingertips brushed the swollen nubbin. Slick with her juices, she stroked her clit in slow passes. He growled, low and primal, and it encouraged her further to explore this new situation. It seemed as if she really *did* hold the power by pleasing him, following his command.

As she stroked her clit, her vaginal muscles clinched. God, she just wanted him inside her, to grip that tasty cock while he held his hips tight against his groin.

She steadily climbed the precipice of arousal. Just when she thought she'd orgasm, she felt his fingertip trace the wet entrance. She whimpered as she climbed higher, while his fingers slid through her wet folds, spreading the moisture up to the tight rosette of her anus. He paused, then slid back down to her feminine opening. She thought

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she'd burst from his intimate caress.

He pulled away his fingers, and she moaned in frustration. She wiggled her hips to tantalize the return of his touch.

"Just like the finest Italian wine, sweet and delicious," he said. She heard him taste her juices from his fingertips.

Groaning once again, Erin ached to find release to the pleasurable torment. She needed him to plunge into her. When she heard him move behind her and felt the warm brush of his flesh against her backside, she jumped in anticipation. Then he took her hips between his hands and positioned his cock to enter her.

He paused, then said in a barely controlled voice, "Erin, *mia amore*, I'm going to fuck you now. I want you to come for me when I command it, not before. Do you understand?"

How could she hold back her body's reaction to his invasion? "Yes," she croaked, unsure if she'd be able to comply, especially with her already at the breaking point.

"Putting off your orgasm will enhance the experience. If you come before I tell you, I'll have to punish you later."

She nodded in understanding.

He entered her, filling her slick passage to the hilt, giving her the missing part of her soul. She screamed, and her body reacted, clenching around his cock, hugging it, inviting him to go in farther.

Tears burned her eyes as he began to move within her, thrusting into her sheath, then retreating...thrust, then retreat...thrust, then retreat. He'd slam into her body, his balls knocking against her mound, juices running from her, lubricating his passageway to paradise. She met his thrusts by moving her hips, and it quickly escalated into a frenzied pace. His tempo increased along with his breathing. His grip on her hips became stronger as he guided his cock in and out of her canal. He pressed slightly into her anus with a finger, and she about lost control. She could feel her orgasm approach when he yelled to her, "Come now, Erin. Come for me."



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She couldn't stop the climax that shuddered through her body, her vaginal walls squeezing his penis, milking him of seed as he joined her over the edge of reason, past conscious thoughts and actions, and into the land of blissful ecstasy. He called her name along with a howl, appropriate to the moment, as though he announced to the world his claim to her body and soul.

This vampire completed her in a way she never thought possible. How could such a connection occur so quickly and with such intensity?

As he eased out of her body and lay upon their discarded clothes, he pulled her down to rest in the curve of his arm. They spooned, chest to back, and his arms wrapped around her.

She sighed. Yes, this *was* the man for her. Yet, he was a vampire. Why didn't he bite her? Why didn't he drink from her?

"We aren't all the same, *mia dolce*," he said as if reading her mind. "There are different types of us just as there are different kinds of humans."

"What do you mean? Vampires are..." She just couldn't call him a beast. He wasn't, yet the thought went against the teachings she had learned since the day of her family's death.

"There are bad vampires and good ones. Ones who hunt and kill for their meals are the worst of our kind. Many of us do not follow such a lifestyle. Only a few have slipped to the dark side and become the terrors to all, including vampires."

She turned over in his arms so she could look at his face. He looked so handsome in the moonlight, dark skin with jet-black hair and sensual lips. His brown eyes could heat her with one look, melting her into a puddle of quivering flesh. "But I thought you'd bite me. Why didn't you?"

Tracing her cheek with his index finger, he said, "I was tempted. It was a battle not to, even now. All I'd like to do is sink my teeth into your soft skin and sip from your veins the fluid I long for." He paused. "I don't think that would be the right way for us to begin, forcing you

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to become what I wish you to be.”

He wanted her to become as he...an immortal vampire? “But you commanded me to...to do things I’ve never done before.”

Chuckling, he held her closer. “I ordered you to give your body pleasure. You followed my instructions by choice. Changing into a vampire, however, is something I wish for *you* to choose.”

How could he even think of making her a vampire? “Never!”

She jumped from his arms and stood naked before him. Even now, she could feel her body betray her in reaction to his closeness. She’d just had sex with a vampire who wanted to make her one. Not while she could still fight. But her body still glowed from sexual satisfaction even though he was her enemy. Or was he her lover?

Leo snapped his attention from her to an area in the darkness. Quickly, he shot up and threw Erin her clothes. “Get dressed, *mia amore*, we have visitors.”

“Yes, Leo, you do indeed.”

Erin gasped as she pulled on her shirt. That voice sounded all too familiar.

“And look, Michael, he’s got a new playmate,” a female voice said and laughed from behind the dark figure.

“Michael, what the hell are you doing here...and with *her*?” Leo spat as he stepped into his jeans.

The new couple approached, and Erin’s rage replaced her desire when she realized the creature that destroyed her family was there.

She crouched to the rooftop and reached for her machete. There was no way she’d let this opportunity slide away. Leo knew her enemy, her long-sought prey? What was their connection?

“Oh, now, Leo, my brother, you didn’t expect me to go through this existence alone, did you?”

“I told you a century ago *never* to call me brother again!” Leo said, fuming in his own rising anger. His entire body appeared rigid, on alert, like a cat poised for an upcoming attack. “You’re no relative of mine

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anymore!”

*Brother?* Erin fought to keep her strength from failing. How could they be brothers? One was loving and kind, while the other was nothing but a monster! She rose silently, clutching the machete by her side and waiting behind Leo.

“But, Leo, you are the only relative I have left. After all this time, we have only each other.” Michael smiled, and his dark features took on a sinister aura. Evil permeated the air about him, while Leo radiated sexual appeal.

The beautiful, olive-skinned woman with mysterious dark eyes seemed strange to Erin, but she fit Michael’s character. Her long black hair hung loose down her back. Dressed all in black, she could easily blend into the night as one of its creatures. When she smiled, she hissed. Her gaze slid up and down Erin, making the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. “Who is this little Patty?”

Erin felt more than tempted to slice the smirk off the woman’s face.

“She is my mate,” Leo said, placing himself between them. “Back off, bitch.”

“Now, now, Leo, is that any way to talk to *my* mate?” Michael asked, placing a hand on the woman’s shoulder and stilling her advance.

“Eva is bad news, Michael, and you know it. She turns men into monsters, then leaves them to fend for themselves, unaware of the changes to come.”

The woman laughed. “Poor little Raife. You have been protective of my former playmate for centuries. He was a big boy, and has done well.”

“You left him hungry and scared. Not only that, but you hurt him deeply.”

“Perhaps I should renew my suit for his heart and watch him fall for me all over again.”

“I have to say, Leo, I’m surprised you were able to get into the

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slayer's panties," Michael said, looking at Erin with an intense glare. "She's been chasing me for years after I had a wonderful feast with her family. She wants to kill me so badly, she can taste it. She hates us, Leo. All of us. I've seen how she slaughters us. She is not one to mate with either, brother. Fuck her if you must, but then kill her. She'll only slice off your head one day when she realizes what you really are."

"You fucker! You don't deserve to live!" Erin spat. If she got close enough, she would indeed end his existence, severing his head from his body, killing the devil she had chased all these years. Leo wrapped an arm about her waist, stopping her advance.

Michael stepped closer, his smile feral. "You were always feisty, Erin. Maybe I should have taken you first instead of your sister. But she was a good fuck, screaming for me to ram into her. Too bad it ended like it did."

Enraged, Erin swung out, but Leo pulled her back. She struggled, fighting his iron-like grip to the sound of Michael's laughter. "I'll get you, you bastard! You'll pay for killing my family!" She managed to raise her machete.

Michael's laughter subsided, and he backed away. Even Eva seemed less amused.

"Not now, *mia amore*," Leo whispered against her temple. "This isn't the time. He'll kill you in a moment. Wait."

Erin heard the words, but they didn't completely sink in. The bastard not only mocked her with each breath he took, but she wanted desperately to exact revenge for the memories that haunted her. Images of her mother with her throat shredded. Her father lying in a pool of blood, his face drained of color, skin white as paste. Then Karen—poor Karen. The devil had screwed her before her parents' eyes as life drained from them. And Erin, conscious and aware of the entire night, yet immobilized by some sort of vampiric magic. Michael had been cruel in saving her for last. She remembered his words as he rose from Karen's limp, lifeless body, his lips dripping red. "Sweet little girl,

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virginal blood is a delicacy to be savored. And as I drink from you, I'm going to send you into ecstasy and you'll give that precious hymen to me." His laughter echoed in her mind even now.

But Leo's gentle hold reassured her. Perhaps he was right. Any attempt on her part right now would end her hunt in her own death.

"I'll bide my time," she said in a low voice, venom tracing each syllable.

When Michael laughed again, she fought from lashing out. Within Leo's arms, she felt protected, but at the same time, he gave her that feeling of equality. He stood with her toe-to-toe against her foe, silently promising to fight by her side.

At that moment, she realized this man—this vampire—*was* meant to be in her life. He had mentioned she was his life-mate. It *must* be true.

And she liked the idea.

Could a slayer and a vampire truly overcome their differences to love?

At that moment, she hoped so.

\* \* \*

Leo glared at Michael and Eva as they faded into the night. The confrontation wasn't over; they would soon meet again. If Leo knew his brother, Michael wouldn't rest until Erin was dead.

What exactly was the reason for her hatred of vampires in connection to Michael? No doubt it was horrific. Perhaps Erin would open up to him her reasons.

"Would you like to go inside?" she asked, bringing his gaze back to her as they finished dressing. Lord, she was beautiful, and her auburn hair was wild and unruly, just like her spirit. He loved that untamable quality about her.

He knew she liked to take control, but in her deepest self, longed to relinquish that control to be loved. How fortunate Leo was to find his

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life-mate to long for the exact type of sexual play he preferred. Just the remembrance of her toying with her clit on his command made his body harden once again.

“Do you wish for me to go in?” He wanted to test her desires. As they proceeded in this relationship, her ultimate sacrifice would be required.

“Yes,” she whispered, stepping closer. The sexual heat poured off her body and called to his. She placed her hand on his chest. “I want you to make love to me.”

His eyebrows shot up. Before she wanted to “be fucked.” Now she wanted to “make love.” Had her feelings for him changed in a few passing moments?

“*Mia amore*, you *are* my life-mate. I wish to love you for all eternity. Can you understand the commitment and price for me to love you?”

She stood in silence, then rested her head against his chest. “I understand.”

He tilted her chin so he could look into her eyes. Within the blue depths, he saw a new light. Perhaps it *was* possible for a slayer to love a vampire.

“Which floor do you live on?” he asked, scooping her into his arms and walking to the edge of the roof.

“Third floor, fourth window from the left.”

He transformed into a mist, but still held her within his arms. Vampires could shift into any form at will, including that without physical barriers. She nestled and he flew through the air to her window. With a brush of his cloudy hand, it opened, and they drifted inside.

In her apartment, he transformed back into his natural form. She seemed unaffected by his transformations. “No surprising you, is there?”

Lying down upon the white comforter of her bed, she moaned, “I’ve

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seen more than you can know.”

While working on stripping away her clothes again, he let his hands ease over her skin, massaging her muscles in small circles, relaxing her into his touch. “What did Michael do to make you want revenge so much?”

The muscles in her legs tensed, every inch beneath his fingers bunched. He had been reluctant to ask the question, but he needed to know the answer. It might help them in the coming battle with Michael. He caressed her body, starting from the arch of her feet and slowly working his way up.

“He killed my family right in front of me. The memories of that horrible night will live with me forever.” She continued to tell him of the way Michael romanced her sister to get inside the home, only to make a feast upon all of them. She also told him of the man who saved her and later trained her to become a slayer.

Leo knew Casey all too well—a menace to the vampire community wherever he chose to hunt. He was ignorant in picking his prey, killing vampires that didn’t deserve to meet such cruel deaths. In doing so, he had marked himself, and was hunted down and killed. Leo remembered that night on the bayou, the leader of a band of vampires who had hunted the hunter. That Erin admitted to having feelings for Casey was indeed an unfortunate development.

“Erin, *mia dolce*, I hate to tell you this, but about Casey—”

“I know he’s dead. I heard about it through the hunting community.”

“He was killing innocents.”

She sat up after sliding away from him. “No, he wasn’t.” She cocked her head. “But how would you know?”

He sighed and sat on the bed, his back to her, another trial for them to confront. Opposite worlds shouldn’t fall in love. “Because I led the search for him. One of my duties is to protect the vampire community from slayers.”

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She gasped, then whispered, "Like me."

He turned and nodded.

"So what will you do to me?"

"For killing Ti, I'm supposed to destroy you." He paused. "Instead, I propose you come with us, join us, help us protect others from those who endanger our existence." He looked into her eyes, reading her confusion. "You know there are demons among us. As I told you, there are the good and the bad. You can help us hunt down the demons that threaten everything and everyone that crosses their paths."

Silence enveloped the room as she considered his suggestion. He knew it wouldn't be easy for her to digest after spending much of her life hunting all vampires.

She sighed, then lifted a hand toward him. "I can't explain the connection between us, Leo. I've never felt such emotions before, but I don't want it to end. If you think I can help by hunting the evil of your kind while also giving us the chance to love forever, then it is all right by me."

He took her hand. "I promise, eternal love is what I'll give you. There's no other for me."

She tugged on his arm, urging him to cover her body. Lying upon her felt as intoxicating as any wine. Clad only in panties and a bra, she had on way too many clothes, but he had no time to pull away. She opened her legs and clamped her thighs about his hips, inviting his cock to seek the warm moisture of her core. His chest rubbed against her silk-covered breasts, but nothing could hide the hard points. They seared into him like hot tips of desire, pulsating heat with each touch.

Her body fit perfectly to his, her softness meshed with his hard muscles, yet he could feel strength in her toned body. She was fit for her job, and just staying alive all these years in hunting vampires, she had the talent and the power to defeat any obstacle that would cross her path. He couldn't love her any more than he did right now. She was the woman who could fight by his side, and he would have no worries



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about her abilities.

Running his hands over her outer curves, from her hips up to her waist and to her chest, he wanted more than anything to worship her. He brushed a stray strand of auburn hair from her face and looked deep into her eyes, bright with newfound love. No, she may not have actually uttered that word, but he saw it in her eyes.

He covered her lips in a gentle kiss, wanting to show her his deepest devotion. Tenderness was called for. Earlier they had rutted to ease their carnal desires, but now, he needed to show her he could be a considerate lover, gentle and caring.

Her soft and inviting lips opened to him to receive his mouth. He deepened the kiss, plunging his tongue into her sweet mouth, tasting her unique flavor and relishing it. She had a taste that could drug any man, but this was only for him. No other would ever know the intimacies of this woman.

Erin was his.

He broke the kiss and gazed down into her flushed face. Passion suited her; she never looked more beautiful than with the pink blush of desire.

“Erin, are you sure I’m not forcing you into...becoming a vampire?”

The love that shone in her eyes made him lose his breath. “Bite me, Leo. I want to be yours forever.”

Heat surged through his veins as his controlled desires surfaced. She had given permission for him to drink from her—the ultimate sexual high for a vampire and his mate.

His cock, hard and pulsing with eagerness to enter her, slipped around the crotch of her panties and into her wet folds. He gasped at the heat surrounding him. It felt as though liquid fire engulfed him in a velvet sheath made just for him. As he began to move within her, she moaned, making it difficult to hold back any control. When she screamed out in a quick orgasm, it sent all reason flying into the night.

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At her neck, he bit into her soft flesh through to her vein, drinking the precious fluid coursing through her body. By God, it tasted like the sweetest honey!

Erin was his life-mate for all eternity...

But first, they had to destroy her greatest enemy—his brother.

\* \* \*

Erin had never felt such pain as when Leo started the process of her transformation. She must come close to death, then be returned, with him giving the fluid she needed to complete the change.

He sliced his wrist with his fang protruding from his mouth and offered the blood to her. She was hungry, and as she drank, the sensations that wracked her body became unbearable.

At some point, Erin passed out from the pain.

When she awoke, she was unsure of her surroundings and how much time had passed. The pain, however, had ebbed to a dull ache, and an unbelievable hunger.

“Erin, *mia amore*, wake up. The night awaits us.”

She groaned as she moved, while her stomach growled. “What happened? Where am I?” Darkness surrounded them, but she could make out his silhouette next to her.

“After we exchanged blood last night, I brought you here to my resting place to wait out the daylight.”

She sat straight up in shock. “I slept the entire day without knowing it?”

He chuckled as he brought her hand to his lips. “*Mia dolce*, that is normal for a fledgling. Right now you need to feed, and then we shall prepare for the battle tonight.”

“Feed? Battle?” Damn, she had been out a long time!

His fangs grew before her eyes as he nibbled the pulse point in her wrist. The tips grazed across her skin, sending tiny shivers along her nerves. “Feed from me first, then we’ll make plans to meet Michael.”

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She watched in wonder as he took his own wrist and ripped open the skin. Dark blood flowed forth. Bringing his wrist to her lips, she realized the extent of her hunger. She thought drinking blood would repulse her, but his blood tasted exquisite. She glanced into his face, where she saw ecstasy etched in each line.

“Drinking the blood of one’s mate is very sexual, *mia amore*.”

She couldn’t deny that. Her own body seemed to respond to the rich fluid she drank from him. Hot liquid tricked down her throat as her pussy flooded with a different kind of moist heat. Her clit ached for his touch, and she wanted to shatter in his arms as she took in her nourishment.

It was then she realized she lay naked, her skin burning against him as he ripped away his wrist from her lips and closed down upon them in a possessive kiss. His body engulfed hers as he quickly entered her core. White-hot cream surrounded his cock and the satiny walls milked him into her further.

Within a few brisk and urgent thrusts, he sunk his fangs into her neck and came. Shots of searing hot semen flowed into her as he drank from her vein. She convulsed around him and joined him in the towering inferno of passion.

The spoke no words in this quick coupling, a taking to answer the needs of each. She wanted to have him drink from her over and over. Paired with the steely length of his penis within her channel, she prepared to orgasm once again.

“Shhh...*mia dolce*. We have the rest of eternity to mate with each other.”

“Can’t we just stay here and fuck all night long? I just need you inside me, Leo.” She couldn’t believe she’d said this, the woman who had long denied her womanly needs. Now she wanted to just have Leo use her body for his pleasure...and hers.

He sighed as his cock slipped from her sheath. “As much as that sounds like a dream, we have something to do first.” He backed away

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and reached for a nearby shirt. “Michael will come again tonight. He will know you are now one of us. You’re not safe until he’s dead.”

*Michael!* Suddenly serious, she sat up in bed. “When will he come? And where?”

Knowing my brother, he is already close. He’ll be bringing a few friends for this final battle. He knows it is either he or I who will come out of it alive.”

“How many do you think he’ll bring?” she asked, scurrying around the small, dark room for her clothes. Her feet touched carpet. “Can we have a light on, please?”

“Oh yes, sorry.” He flicked on a small lamp, giving off a dim illumination.

“Where is this?” she asked, stopping to look about the stony walls.

“My tomb.”

*I should have guessed.*

“Your sight will improve as you feed more. Soon, the night will be as clear as day. You’ll pick up scents on the wind and increase in strength with time.” He dressed and stepped to the door. It opened without any visible help, and he peered out.

“Will we get any help in this battle?” she asked, slipping on her overcoat and securing her machete in the inner pocket. She was ready, but how strong could a fledgling vampire be against an ancient?

Leo turned to her and took her by the shoulders. “*I will be there to help you, Erin. Together with my friends, we will destroy the creature that murdered your family.*”

He caressed her with a new mental connection, and she felt the tension ebb from her muscles. They were about to complete her life-long quest—together—she and her mate.

“Leo, we’re ready,” a voice called from outside.

Leo planted a kiss on Erin’s forehead. “Are you ready?”

She nodded. “This is the night in which Michael pays.”

The door to the tomb opened wider with a magical hand. Erin saw

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four males, one female, and a lone wolf waiting outside.

“Leo, we’re all here to help,” said a handsome Italian man Leo introduced as Alonso. He kept a hand upon the pretty woman beside him, his mate, Jolie.

But the big blond male looked more menacing. Impeccably dressed, he carried a cane with a silver tip on the end. The large gray wolf leaned against his leg. “Michael dares to come into *our* town to hunt? I warned him about ever coming into my hunting grounds.” He stepped forward and bowed to Erin. “Forgive me. My name is Lucius.”

Leo went on to introduce Tala, Lucius’s wolfen mate, and the two other male vampires, Raife and Vincente.

The latter were both dressed like pirates, complete with rapiers fastened to their hips. At Erin’s questioning look, Raife explained in a clipped British accent, “We were going to do some fencing practice at Pirate’s Alley when we heard the word about Michael threatening Leo’s mate.”

Vincente, a Spaniard with olive skin and long, black hair tied into a queue, offered his hand and swept down in an elegant bow. “You’re a beauty, *senorita*. It’s my pleasure to help destroy the enemies of my friends and their mates.”

“All right, enough is enough, Vince. Don’t try and romance my mate away from me on her first night.”

Vince laughed as he backed away to stand next to Raife. “Can’t blame a horny vampire for trying, *el amigo*.”

“Well, isn’t this a heartwarming scene,” a voice said from behind them.

Erin sniffed the air and caught the evil vampire’s scent, along with the scents of two other males and the woman, Eva.

Tala growled and stood by Lucius. He patted her silvery coat in a calming gesture.

“You all come together just to face me?” Michael laughed as he and his companions began circling.

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Each male radiated danger, and Erin grasped a stake from her inner pocket, but kept it hidden. At the first chance, she'd immobilize that bastard.

But how could she possibly get close enough?

"Michael, I warned you never to come to my hunting grounds." Lucius stepped forward. He appeared calm in this crowd of masculine vampiric power.

"Lucius, you Viking raider. I see you got yourself a wolf-bitch. Why the hell would you care about where I hunted?"

Growling low, Tala stepped forward, but Lucius still talked in a cool manner. "I would be careful how you talk about my mate. She has a certain dislike for bastards born to whores."

Erin gasped and turned to Leo.

*"Michael is illegitimate. My father had a mistress..."* Leo whispered into her thoughts.

Michael glared at Tala and Lucius, then backed off a step to proceed toward Erin and Leo.

"Raife, darling, long time, no see, my love." Eva broke from the other vampires and edged up to Raife. "I think it has been...what? Two centuries since I felt you between my thighs? I could use your special brand of loving, sweetheart." She grasped his crotch and rubbed his cock through the material. "You always had an impressive sword to impale me with, darling," she added in a low husky voice.

Raife grabbed her wrist and ripped her hand from his groin. "I wouldn't want to fuck you if you were the last female on earth."

Her eyes slid between Raife and Vince, then she smiled coyly. "Perhaps you two would like to have a threesome. Both of you could fuck me at once. I'd give you the best head you ever had this side of eternity. I—"

"Enough!" Vince commanded, unsheathing his sword and pointing it under her chin. "We're not interested, so back off."

"Eva," Michael interrupted. "Get back with the others...now."

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“But—”

“I said now!” Michael raised his arm, and the female vampire flew backward with an invisible push.

Erin had noted Michael’s interest in Eva’s attempts at seduction. He got visibly excited at her suggestions, then when Raife and Vince declined, he seemed disappointed. Could a similar tactic by her turn him on? At least enough so she could get close enough to stake him? Worth a shot!

“You shouldn’t have told her I was illegitimate, brother. That wasn’t very nice.”

*He had heard their thoughts?* But of course! They shared the ultimate blood bond—same parents—or in their case, a shared parent. Therefore, Erin decided, she couldn’t let Leo in on her plan to get close to Michael.

“I warned you about her, Leo. She wasn’t meant to become one of us. Think of all the vampires she’s killed. Now, you lie with a slayer. You, my brother, are the enemy.” Michael paused in front of them, unaffected by the other vampires.

*Cocky bastard.*

“I’m not the enemy, Michael. You are. You kill for the joy of it, the physical rush of a most deplorable kind. You’re the one who needs to be destroyed!”

“After this night, brother, you’ll never have to worry about seeing me again. I’ll leave you out to face the sun while I take your little cunt and fuck her in every orifice. It’ll be for *me* to screw her virginal anus into the next century, and all the while, the one who made her a vampire will be long forgotten.”

Leo’s anger became palpable, and the muscles in his jaw twitched in irritation. Erin found her chance, but just prayed Leo would forgive her.

\* \* \*

### ***DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS: LEONARDO***

Leo wanted to throttle his half brother. The bastard had existed way too long. And threatening Erin went beyond the limits. Just the slightest thought of her with anyone else but him became unbearable.

Just as he prepared to slash that smile from Michael's face, Erin purred next to him, "Oh wow, fuck me in every way imaginable? I have to say, that *is* tempting."

"*What the fuck are you doing?*" he mentally asked, but she refused to answer.

Michael laughed as he wrapped an arm about her waist. "All it took was a taste of blood to see the glorious darkness." He leaned toward her ear. "You fought so long against us, and now you are one of us. You shall replace Eva as my mate, Erin, and we shall rule the vampires to hunt and kill. Imagine all the feasts we shall have, then I will fill you to the hilt. Oh yes, I can see it now, fucking you up the ass as you drink from your latest victim."

When Michael licked her cheek in a gross gesture, it proved too much for Leonardo, but everything seemed to snap at once.

Erin drew out a stake and plunged it into Michael's chest. His scream filled the night and he clutched her hair, drawing her with him as he backed away in pain. Blood gushed from around the wound, spraying red upon Erin and surrounding tombs.

The other enemy vampires advanced, and Lucius, Tala, Alonso, and Jolie took action. Ripping flesh and vicious howls rent the air.

Eva screeched and flew toward Michael, still holding Erin by the hair. Raife and Vincente stopped her. Swords cut through the air and her skin, slicing her throat, clogging her voice with bubbling blood. She grasped the pumping wound and hissed, then transformed into a mist and disappeared into the night. Raife and Vincente nodded at each other before also shifting into clouds of mist.

Leo advanced upon the struggling Michael, but his hold on Erin's hair dragged her with him. Michael eventually staggered and fell, losing his grip upon her.



### ***DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS: LEONARDO***

Behind him, the sounds of the fight faded into silence as his friends defeated Michael's henchmen.

"It's time you pay for your evil deeds," Leo said.

Blood seeped from Michael's mouth. "You don't have the stomach to kill me, brother. I *am* your own brother, *your* blood. You can't do it."

Leo looked solemn as he watched Michael beg for his existence. But he couldn't let him live. He'd continually be a danger to all.

"It's not Leo's place to kill you, vampire!" Erin spat as she pulled the machete from her trench coat. "That pleasure is all mine. It's past time you went to hell."

In a split second, she lifted the weapon and severed Michael's head from his struggling body.

Leo exhaled, unaware he had been holding his breath.

Erin stood over the body, breathing deeply as she calmed her own nerves. He took her into his arms. She dropped the machete, and it landed with a thump next to the corpse.

"It's over. It's over," she repeated as she held onto Leo tighter.

"Leo, Eva got away. We took off after her, but lost her," Raife said behind them.

Leo turned with Erin still in his arms. "She'll have to recover before she appears again."

He gazed at Lucius and Alonso, stroking their mates. Tala, still in wolf form, nuzzled against Lucius as he whispered to her in soft tones. Alonso held a shaking Jolie, apparently surprised at her newfound instincts to protect.

"Well, Leo," Raife said, "I think you have a night of hunting with your mate ahead of you. Vince and I, however, have plans at Pirate's Alley. After we clean up this mess, we're heading out."

Leo nodded and led Erin into the cemetery, now eerily quiet compared to only moments ago. He soon felt the others depart, leaving them alone.

He looked over his shoulder. The several vampire corpses and their

### DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS: LEONARDO

detached parts had been gathered into a pile. With a wave of Leo's hand, the mound burst into flames. Ordinarily, he would have let the sun incinerate the remains, but being early in the night, he felt it better to take care no one tripped over a body. The sun would burn away any blood left behind.

"How about we get cleaned up before we find our meals?" he said as they stopped walking. The moon shone brightly, and the flickering flames behind them lit the night. Apart from the crackles of fire, he heard only the heartbeats of small animals scurrying among the tombs.

"Just promise me something first," she said, tilting her head toward his.

"What?"

"That I *never* turn into a beast like Michael."

He kissed her forehead and held her by the back of the head, relishing her silky hair beneath his fingers. "That could never happen. Michael was disturbed when he was mortal. Turning vampire only amplified his problems."

"And one more thing."

"Whatever you wish."

"Love me forever. Don't ever stop."

"I'll always love you, Erin. That is something I can't help even if I tried."

She wrapped her arms about his neck and whispered against his lips, "I love you, Leo."

"I love you, too, *mia slayer dolce*. For all eternity."

\* \* \*

Voices, cheering and jeering, rose above the area called Pirate's Alley, located between Chartres and Royal Streets, and separating the Spanish Cabildo from St. Louis Cathedral. It was rumored that the ghosts of pirates such as Jean Laffite gathered there nightly, practicing their swordsmanship and drinking ghostly rum as they rooted for their

### *DESCENDANTS OF DARKNESS: LEONARDO*

favorite duelers.

Rapists, murderers, and criminals...they had made up the base of the original population in New Orleans. Even after death, they still haunted the city's bars and hotels. But only in Pirate's Alley did they gather to relive their glories.

Among voices rising in excitement, steel clashed against steel. Instead of ghostly pirates, two vampires fought a duel.

Raife and Vincente practiced here in order to remain close to their departed friends. Dueling reminded them of their glory days of sailing the seas and fighting for their countries. In life, Raife and Vincente had been enemies; now, centuries later, they were comrades.

As they fenced for the crowd, a voice came loud and clear through the cheers—a feminine voice singing.

Raife held up his hand and stopped Vincente's advance. The ghostly audience moaned and groaned in disappointment, for the fight had been going so well.

"You hear that?" Raife asked his friend.

Vince laughed. "I don't hear anything but our *amigos* screaming out for me to finish you off."

Raife heard the voice calling to him more clearly...

*"Come to me and sample the sweets of love. I call to you, mon chere."*

He looked around, searching for the source of the voice, so sweet in tone.

Then, trotting from amid the pirates' spirits, a black cat appeared on the field of battle and rubbed against Raife's legs.

He picked up the cat and looked intently at it. Then, he heard her again...

*"I call to you. Come to me..."*

"What is it, *amigo*? A witch's spell?" Vince asked.

The cat mewed, and Raife knew it had answered the question.

A witch called to him...and he felt powerless to resist...

## MARIANNE LACROIX

Author Marianne LaCroix aka Shaylee O'Hara dreamed of becoming an author ever since her parents gave her a little typewriter as a child. Luckily, her parents supported all of her creative outlets, be it oil painting or creative writing. When it came time for college, she majored in English and took art classes on the side.

In 1994 Mari earned her BA in English, married and moved to Georgia from her childhood home in New Jersey. There she worked in an office for about two years before feeling restless. She made a dramatic move and quit the desk job, then returned to school for nursing. She earned a diploma in Practical Nursing then went to work in her local hospital, and eventually to a nursing home. Each night when she got home from caring for others, no matter how tired, she'd sit down and write tales of ghost pirates or roguish vampires.

When Mari got pregnant with twins, she said goodbye to nursing for a while. The twin girls were born in March, 2002, and Mari has been a stay-at-home mom ever since. When the girls would go to bed, Mari would get on the computer and write. She also worked hard on starting and establishing the review site, *LoveRomances*. Then in early 2003, she decided to write romance seriously, not just as a pastime. Her break came with *Lady Sheba*, closely followed by *Another Chance*. Both books have received glowing reviews, and *Lady Sheba* has been a *Road to Romance* Reviewer Choice and a selected group read for the Erotic Readers Haven Yahoo Group.

What can readers expect in the future? Marianne's erotic romances are filled with everlasting love and hot encounters, and Shaylee's romances are brimming with action, adventure and love. More tales of the paranormal with vampires, ghosts and fairies are on the way!

You can visit her website at: <http://www.mariannelacroix.com>

\* \* \*

***Don't miss Descendants Of Darkness: Raife  
by Marianne LaCroix, available 2004,  
from Amber Quill Press, LLC***

*Raife is an adventurer at heart. As a former privateer, he had sailed the seas and lived the life of a buccaneer. He continued his roguish ways centuries later by meeting up with friends of old in the haunted Pirate's Alley in New Orleans. Then one night, while fighting a friendly duel amid the cheers of ghostly pirates, Raife hears her calling to him. Soon, he finds that the magic of a French Creole witch holds more in store for him than one night of sensual bliss...*

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