



Winter's Blood

Hunt for the Elixir Series

Midnyte Dupree

Winter's Blood [Hunt for the Elixir Series Book Two]
by Midnyte Dupree

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by Midnyte Dupree

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The Hunt for the Elixir Book Two

by

Midnyte Dupree

WARNING: EXPLICIT CONTENT.

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Winter's Blood [Hunt for the Elixir Series Book Two]
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Thanks to all the readers of paranormal romance. I want to dedicate Winter's Blood to you and my family. Thank you to my editor, Chantal for helping me smooth this one out.

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Chapter One

"Why did they have to pick Christmastime?" Angel muttered under her breath.

Freezing wind whipped under her heavy coat. She tried pulling the coat tighter to her body, but the cold always found a way inside and curled next to her skin. Her teeth chattered, her fingers tingled, and her toes ... her toes felt like if someone touched them, they would shatter like glass.

The snow had stopped an hour ago, but looking up at the clouds against the coming night, they still held a threatening element. She had to force her feet to move through the six inches of snow that had already fallen on the sidewalk as she made her way to the shop, *A Christmas Night*. Once inside, she had to find a way to steal the formula for the glass ornaments the owner had made.

"Damn it," she said as her foot slipped against the ice. Looking to the sky, she prayed, "Please, no more snow. Just let me get my sister back. Then it can snow all it wants."

A video had arrived by special carrier first thing that morning. When she popped it into her VCR, her younger sister's face appeared huge before her eyes. At once, she knew something was wrong. Abby's dark blond hair looked oily and dirty, something her sister would have never allowed. Her mascara was smudged under her blue eyes and one wet streak raced down her pale cheek. Angel's heart had all but stopped.

"Angel," Abby said, her voice hoarse as it shook with fear, "you have to steal a formula. A very special formula. Or they will..." A heavy sob rocked her body. "Or they will kill me."

Those awful words still echoed in her mind. Abby said she had forty-eight hours to steal the formula for a special glass that only the owner of *A Christmas Night* possessed.

Angel shook her head in confusion. What could be so special about this glass that someone would kidnap her sister for it, she wondered—not that it mattered. The only thing that concerned her was getting her little sister back. Not who kidnapped her, or why he wanted this particular glass. None of it mattered, except getting the formula.

Abby was the last remaining member of her family. They often vegged out on the couch together during the Christmas season, letting the holiday cheer quietly pass them by. Together they would stock up on all the necessities that would last them through the month of December and cut themselves off from the world. It was a time for them to mourn the loss of their parents, who had died in a car explosion right before their big Christmas celebration three years ago.

The year after their death, Angel and Abby had tried to celebrate, but it only conjured up painful images of their once happy family, so they both decided to put away the Christmas tree and hibernate until the New Year. It soon became a tradition. It was something they both accepted, not knowing how to get past their grief.

Now, Angel was fighting the mad rush of people to get the one thing that would save her sister. Whoever these people

were, who thought they could abuse them this way, had another thing coming. She hoped getting the formula would be easy, so she could get her sister back and escape to another state where the bastards would not be able to find them again.

"God, I hate Christmas." She reached up, pulling her hat further down around her ears. A chilling wind whipped wildly around her legs as if seeking a way to breach the heaviness of her clothes. Window after window full of Christmas displays passed on her left, but she refused to look at them. The Christmas trees, the lights, the garland, everything made her cringe. *This would all be over soon* was the mantra she created in her head.

A few steps from the door to *A Christmas Night*, she pushed her blond hair over her shoulder, pasted on a big sweet smile, and blinked her eyes a few times to give them an innocent effect. *Just another job*, she thought, trying to get into the roll. Once inside, she could say she needed to use the bathroom, then slip off into the office and quickly search the files—if the owner wasn't occupying his domain.

Rethinking her plan, Angel decided it might be best to see how far she could get tonight and get a feel for the layout of the shop. Later, after the shop closed, she could then slip back inside and search the files.

Reaching out to grab the knob, she inhaled long and deep, opened the door, then passed over the threshold.

Cinnamon and spice assaulted her senses making her fight to keep from sneezing as the scents accosted her. "For Abby's

sake," she whispered to herself as she let the symbols of Christmas fill her vision.

She heard the jingle of the door that slipped back into place behind her, Christmas tunes played over a speaker. For a moment, she allowed the warmth of the shop to soak through her clothing and gently caress her skin. *Ahhh*, she found herself wanting to say. *Warmth*, her body replied, causing her to relax.

"May I help you?"

With a start, she grabbed her chest and turned to face the saleswoman.

The little woman, who was at least four inches shorter than Angel's 5'3 frame, had her hair pulled back into a tight bun. It was the whitest white, much like the fallen snow that blanketed the street. Wrinkles characterized her face; a wide smile and loving eyes looked expectantly at her.

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean to sneak up on you."

Angel looked at the little grandmotherly figure, resisting the urge to roll her eyes. Shaking her head, the tips of her lips curled up into a soft smile.

"No. It's quite all right." Angel lowered her voice, her smile growing. "I was just so caught up in the shopping list that I have running through my mind that I didn't hear you. Totally my fault." She threw in a little giggle at the end, knowing it made her appear less threatening.

"Who are you looking to buy for in here? We have all sorts of lovely gifts. My son said just the other day, 'Mama'—he always called me mama, never mom or mother, always mama. Well, anyway, he told me the other day that he hoped

I'd bring home one of Dante's newest ornaments. They have prisms on the inside, you see."

Angel just nodded as the old woman guided her around the shop, pointing to this ornament or that ornament. Each one had a special story, a unique tale that the saleswomen told in agonizing detail.

Angel fought the urge to flee the building and never look back, but she kept reminding herself that she had a job to do. "Um. Ma'am? May I use your ladies' room?" She managed to work up a blush and cheered herself. *Bravo!*

"Sure, deary. It's in the back. Second door on your right. I'll just wait right here for you."

Angel noted an odd glint in the saleswoman's eye before the front door jingled, and another customer walked in. The old woman excused herself and raced to the new customer, obviously eager for a sale.

"Perfect." Angel said under her breath, heading for the back.

Pushing through the door, she located the bathroom, but did not enter. Instead, she walked a few more feet further down the hall until she stood in front of the door marked OFFICE. The threat of the old woman discovering her was at the front of her mind. With any luck, the new customer would keep her busy for a while.

Looking back to confirm that no one had appeared, she reached out and grabbed the knob, silently twisting it, praying that it was unlocked. Her heart pounded against her chest, sounding loud to her ears in the deathly quiet hallway.

The door opened.

The room appeared very dark, grey shadows outlining the bookcases along the wall. Before entering, she looked down the hall again, then slipped inside, closing the door softly behind her.

She felt along the wall for the light switch and flipped it up. The room erupted in light just as she realized she wasn't alone. Angel's body froze in place as the hair on the back of her neck stood on end as her heart pounded, one solid beat against her chest. But, she refused to turn around.

A large hand reached around and covered hers, dwarfing her fingers as they rested on the light switch. His touch was like fire, and her hand began to throb inside the warm cocoon of his palm. Inhaling deeply, she allowed the oxygen to infuse her muscles, to relax them, so that her mind would stay focused. She had found herself in far worse situations than this before.

With little force, he squeezed, indicating to her that there was no way she would win if she decided to fight.

Angel took stock of their positions. Other than his hand, he was not touching her, but the warmth of his chest seeped into back despite the multiple layers of clothing. How odd.

She jumped as his scorching breath brushed across the skin of her ear, the heat radiating down her neck and traveling to parts of her body she tried to stay unaware of. She could smell a fragrance of exotic flowers drifting up from his clothes, accompanied by a pure male odor that screamed at her to let down her barriers. Something about this man made her body burn to be touched.

Angel found herself easing back into a hard chest, shocked at how unmovable it felt. His muscles molded against her body, sending more heat through her insides. Moisture seeped into her lacy underwear, making her desire undeniable. She squeezed her thighs together to dispel the ache that started between them.

"It is not often you mortals come of your own freewill."

She was too caught up in the feel of his hands for his words to register. The room grew hot, or maybe it was just her who was hot. A drop of sweat raced down the path between her breasts, her nipples pushed against the silk of her blouse.

He moved their joined hands away from the wall, bringing hers to rest at her side.

She *wanted* to turn around and sink into his chest, to let his arms settle around her shoulders. But, she *needed* to get away from this man that was awakening her body from its long slumber.

Angel broke free and turned around, quickly realizing that it was not the smartest thing to do. His eyes caught hers, holding them to his dark gaze. "Oh. I'm sorry. I was just on my way..." She cringed at the seductive whisper of her voice. It sounded husky, and passion filled even to her own ears. She tried to remember why she was there, but his lips filled her vision, pushing all other thoughts out of her mind.

"Shh," he said, placing one warm finger to her lips. "You are beautiful. I would have chosen you, had I seen you first."

With a light touch, he ran his finger over her lips, slowly over her chin, and down the line of her neck. Goose bumps

erupted down her spine, making her shiver. Long pent up passion flooded her veins. She had built emotional walls after her ex-fiancé betrayed her, now this man's touch was battering at them.

His finger continued gliding down until he parted her shirt, leaving her breathless for his next move. He paused for a moment, then continued his searing path over her flesh until his finger rested directly in the valley between her breasts.

Angel's skin was on fire where he touched her. "What are you doing?" she asked.

"I am admiring your ... neck."

At his words, she self consciously rubbed at the exposed flesh. His eyes were so dark, she thought she could see her own reflection. The pupil and the iris faded together, outlined with a ring of gold.

She covered her neck and his eyebrow cocked higher, silently commanding her to drop her hand, which she did obediently. The man exuded power in a way she could not deny.

Angel fought to remain calm. She had been in more precarious situations—this was nothing. Once, shortly after her father past away and she had taken up being a professional thief, she had been caught stealing a piece of art. The owner had taken one look at her curvaceous body and thought he would have his way with her. He had almost succeeded, until she kicked him so hard in the balls she thought they would come out of his mouth. She had gotten away, the painting clasped tightly in her grasp.

Even during that situation, she had been completely aware of her feelings, knowing she wanted to escape, never wanting the owner to touch her body, not like this. She was totally consumed by the man before her, and her mind was growing fuzzy the longer she looked into his eyes, her thoughts growing slower, lazier.

Her eyelids dropped.

Angel forced her eyes to open, to watch the seductive way he lowered his head to hers. She thought he would kiss her, and anticipated the feel of his lips, but at the last moment, he angled his head and instead brushed his lips across her neck.

A jolt of electricity raced from the spot where his cool lips touched her neck and nearly all thought fled. It had been so long since she had been touched like this. She closed her eyes. She wanted more. Much more. She wanted to feel his palms rub across her nipples, down over her flat stomach and caress her even lower.

Erotic images of the two of them naked, splayed out across a bed of crimson sheets played against the back of her lids, his hands cupping her breasts while the heat of his mouth seared her nipples. Even now, she felt the cream begin to soak her panties as her body called out to his to fill her.

She inhaled deeply, bringing herself back to the here and now. Placing her hands on his chest with the intent to push away, her fingers began to stroke over his muscles. Feelings warred within her, fighting to let him continue, and fighting to remain in control. Her passion won out as a sensual longing infused her. She was in the arms of a complete stranger, and she was allowing him free reign, and it felt so right.

This was insane.

That thought made her tense up and she tried to pull away, but he cupped the back of her neck with a large hand, holding her steady.

"Shh..." His warm breath caressed her neck and goose bumps broke out over her arms.

He kissed the area over her collarbone, teasing her skin. A moan escaped from deep in her throat, and she angled her neck to give him better access. Why was she allowing this man such freedom? Was it because it felt so good? Or was it because her body had taken over her brain?

A deep haze wrapped around her thoughts as her body slowly succumbed, wanting him to take what he wanted just as long as he did not stop. She needed to feel more of him. Her hands continued rubbing over his muscled chest, his shoulders, stroking up and down his arms. The world around her became unimportant as she arched into him.

Out of nowhere, something pierced her skin. Angel's eyes flew open as fire raced through her veins. She did not have time to scream before her body became languid and the room dimmed. A chill overcame her body. Finally, she closed her eyes, allowing the darkness to claim her.

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Chapter Two

Sitting alone in his office, Dante Von Wolfe contemplated Angelina Francesca Truheart, the woman whom he had fed from earlier that evening. How odd that he had found her in his office. However, what a lucky break, because he did not have to search out his evening meal.

She had tasted sweet, her blood had a hint of spice. It had taken much control to only feed. The scent of her arousal had hardened his cock until he thought he would throw her on the ground and take her there in his office.

He rubbed his fingers over his lips. He could still taste her sweet essence as it slid so deliciously down his throat, bringing his blood to life. Her energy wrapped around each of his cells and made his power pulse to a new level. It was intoxicating, unlike anything he had ever tasted before.

It was most peculiar, but one he would not mind encountering again. His lips curved in knowing smile.

He pondered over how strange it was that she had not been afraid. The bitterness of fear that laced most blood was absent in hers. Could that have been why he experienced so much more from her? A heavy dose of lust had laced her life force, and he could have done so much more to her with her sweet body wrapped around his cock. He could feel her pent-up passion and was tempted to feel her explosion around him.

There was something about this one, though, something that intrigued him enough to want to know her. Maybe it was

the strong will that he sensed as he fed from her. Her scent, and the explosion of her taste across his tongue, hypnotized him like never before. He had almost wanted to drain her of life when the tiny spark had touched a part of him. Once he had lifted his head from feeding and looked down upon her, seeing all the color drained from her face, he realized that she would be completely his.

Dante knew he would be seeing her again, soon.

It had not been difficult finding out where she lived. Her wallet had all the pertinent information. Handbags were a marvelous thing; they contained almost everything about a woman anyone ever needed to know.

When he had placed Angelina on the bed in her apartment, he couldn't help standing aside for a moment and looking down at her. Her blond hair fanned over the cerulean pillow like a golden halo, her lashes highlighted her rose colored cheeks. She looked heavenly lying there.

He was shocked when she moaned softly in her sleep, and his cock jerked in response. He wanted to curl up behind her body on the bed and pull her close to his chest.

Now, as he sat in his office trying to get his mind back on his work, he just wanted to push that memory away.

"Mr. Wolfe?" A soft voice drifted into the room.

Dante pulled at his pants, where his cock had grown hard, before slowly turning his chair around to face his assistant.

"Yes, Mrs. Delight."

"Oh, oh. I'm sorry to interrupt. This just came for you." She extended her hand, a white envelope in-between her fingers. "Some man in a dark suit dropped it off."

Reaching out, Dante took the envelope and placed it on his desk. "Thank you. How are sales this evening?"

"Good. We've done quite well tonight. One woman came in and bought all her family members an ornament from the special Starlight line. It was about a dozen, total. That really is a special line, Mr. Wolf. Very popular."

"Starlight, hmm?"

"Yes, sir. She said they warmed her heart and hope they'd do the same for her family." Mrs. Delight moved out of the office to the doorway before turning back to look at him, her soft gray eyes studying him as they always did. She was a special woman who had been with him for many years. He had saved her life after a vicious attack by two punk kids wanting her bag. After he healed her, she was so thankful he had decided to use her as his human servant. She had been more than happy to help him out.

"Thank You. I hope you have a good evening. Turn off the shop lights when you leave, please." Dante's thoughts went to the Starlight ornaments as Mrs. Delight closed the door, leaving him alone once again.

A mixture of irises, sand, and crystal made up the formula for the Starlight ornaments. Each flower instilled faith and wisdom in its owner, with a hint of a compulsion spell for happiness. This line of ornaments was the most popular this season. It also was unique because he had decided to hide one-half of a special formula the Vampire Council had given him before each of them left their post to travel the world. Easily concealed in the ornament formula was the elixir. He

couldn't use too much of it, but it had only taken a small amount to get the desired effect.

Until a Vampire Queen was born to take possession of the formula, it was his to guard with his life. Once his half of the formula was mixed with the other hidden half, it would form a mixture called The Elixir of Life.

Too bad he couldn't contact Eli to let him know of the danger he was now facing. They had thought it would be better to not communicate with one another until the time came to join each half of the elixir.

Someone had been sending Dante letters to surrender the formula for his popular ornaments, and ever since he opened the shop there had been break-ins. He assumed that it was just a nuisance, kids misbehaving, so he'd ignored it, but this year he felt like something bigger was happening around him. He could feel a sense of danger.

What was Ms. Truheart after? Was she looking for the formula or was she after something else?

Dante turned back to his desk and his eyes fell on the envelope. He felt uneasiness laced with dread as he stroked his finger over the smooth surface. In deep dark letters, his name flowed in curves and loops, large ancient strokes on the surface with real India ink. He could smell the plant extracts drifting up from it.

Flipping the envelope over, Dante reached in, removing a small folded piece of a paper.

Mr. Wolfe—

You cannot hide. We will find the formula. No longer will we be denied.

M.

He balled the paper tightly in his hand as his fury ignited. Jumping up from the chair, he threw the crumbled note across the room where it landed on a pile of books. A guttural growl escaped from the back of his throat. They would never locate it.

"You will not get Starlight," he vowed.

Dante walked to one of the walls and pushed on a hidden lever which opened a small door, allowing him to enter before it closed with a soft swoosh behind him.

A dim hallway was lit with tiny lights in the ceiling, and a path was just wide enough for him to walk comfortably. A few steps down the hall, he came to the end of the tunnel, well, it would appear to be the end to anyone that stumbled upon the first door. His fingers slid along the top until he felt the tiny indentation in the panel and pushed. It opened another door that led into a large room.

Three large caldrons dotted the floor. Smoke bellowed out of one as Dante made his way over to it. The smell of lilies drifted in the air as he gently stirred the brew. His body stirred as his thoughts went back to Angelina.

Angelina Truheart, her driver license stated. She lived in the Bay Towers on the seventh floor. She had blond hair that drifted, ever so lightly, down to the middle of her back. Dante's mind wandered as he remembered the way her skin felt under his fingers, the way her innocent blue eyes flashed with desire. Closing his eyes, he relived the moment he traced the path between her breasts. If he had gone lower would he had found her wet? Her breathing had remained

steady as he explored, and her feminine scent saturated the room.

Dante shook his head to clear it. Then a new question entered his mind. Why had she been in his office? Mrs. Delight had said that she was looking for the restroom, but the restroom was clearly marked. Soon after her visit came the latest note. Could they be connected? Those questions needed answering and the only way to get them answered was by visiting Ms. Truheart.

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Chapter Three

Angel awoke to a great pounding in her head, and the covers over her body felt like a ton, weighing her body down. She tried turning, but her body rebelled, pain shooting down her limbs. A moan escaped, and her neck throbbed.

Grabbing her head, the pain behind her eyes viciously beat with the rhythm of her heart. "Oh God, just make it stop. I'll be good, I promise." Her voice filled the empty room.

Placing her arm over her eyes, the weight of it helped ease the pain. Why was she in so much pain? What had she done the night before?

Her bedroom door swung open, crashing loudly against the wall. She cringed and let out a small groan, then she squeezed her eyes shut.

"Angel, baby, are you going to sleep all day?" Raul's sing-song voice drifted in on a cool breeze.

Angel pulled the covers up to her chin trying to hold in all the warmth her body possessed. She hated being cold. "Go away, Raul."

"Oh girl, let me see you." The air in the room stirred as he approached the edge of her bed.

The cold seeped deeper into her body. The chill went all the way to her bones, as though she had slept outside in the snow. She realized she was shaking.

"Oh!" He exclaimed, rubbing a cool hand across her cheek. "Rough night, honey? You look like hell, so I hope he was

worth it." His grin exposed perfectly white teeth. "If anyone deserves a wild night, it's you, right?"

Raul was a wonderful friend she had managed to pick up from her first job at a fashion boutique after her parents were murdered. He was the only male associate at the store, and the only one the customers sought for advice on their wardrobes. Just looking at him, a person would never know he was gay.

In the last two years, he had taken up body building. He was tight and curved in all the right places, reflecting the outward image of the perfect man. Many women had been disappointed after finding out he liked his own kind. Even Angel was disappointed at first, despite swearing off men years ago.

She had come to love him in her own special way. Raul was a wonderful man to have around, and she did not have to worry that he'd try to get in her pants. Angel had given up on most men, because it seemed like all she ever found were losers. Plus, if they were to get too close to her secret, she would have to dump them anyway. Raul never made demands on her time; therefore, she kept him around.

"I'm so glad you like how I look," she said, her sarcasm apparent as she narrowed her eyes at him playfully.

"Angel," his voice took on a concerned tone, "you are as pale as a ghost." His fingers grabbed her chin, turning it right then left. She watched as he studied her closely. "And just look at these dark circles ... Have you been in bed all day?"

"All day?" Angel stole a glimpse of the digital clock. "Tell me it's 7:00 a.m., not p.m." The movement of her head sent

a new wave of pain straight to her brain. Grabbing her temples, she moaned.

"Sorry, darlin'. It's pm."

"Just go away. Please. Let me die in peace." She pulled a pillow over her head.

How could she have been so careless as to sleep the day away? Actually, night and day away. What happened last night?

A dip in the bed indicated Raul had taken up resident beside her instead of making his way out the door. "Where's your sweetheart of a sister? Why isn't she taking care of you?"

Angel shot up, causing pain to shoot behind her eyes. Dropping her body back to the bed, she covered her head once again.

Oh God. Her sister. Her kidnapped pain-apparent-on-her-face sister.

Ignoring her own throbbing pain, she moved the pillow and forced Raul to look in her eyes while she held his chin. He did not move, but looked at her with a raised eye brow.

"Raul. Listen to me." He nodded, indicating he was listening. "You have to leave and not return until I or Abby contact you. Understand?"

He lowered his brow. "No. I don't."

"Just do it, okay. I don't want to see you hurt."

Raul snorted. "Ha! Me get hurt? Woman, I may be gay, but I am one of the leading body builders in our area. I can handle myself." He flexed his muscles.

Still cupping his jaw, she smiled. "I know. But please just listen to me."

Raul pulled away, "Where is Abby?"

"Raul, no questions."

Their conversation was cut short by a banging on the door as if trying to break it down. She covered her ears.

Raul patted her knee and said, "I'll go see who it is."

"No, I'll go. Just hand me my robe." As she reached for her terry cloth robe, she realized she was still wearing what she wore the night before. How odd.

Confused, she shrugged her shoulders and made her way down the hall, Raul following close behind. Heavy pounding continued on the door, and in her head.

"Just a minute," she screamed, and winced.

Standing on her tiptoes, she looked into the peep-hole. A large man with long dark hair stood in the hallway. His features seemed familiar, and her memory touched briefly on a thread of recognition before it disappeared. A large black cloak covered much of his body, but an opening in the front revealed a dark suit.

A sudden fluttering in her stomach caused her to question the wisdom of opening the door. She did not feel anything threatening from the man, but she could not help her uneasiness. A spot on her neck began to tingle with a warm sensation. Reaching up, she rubbed at it, then taking a deep breath, opened the door.

"Yes, how can I..." When the man looked up, she felt the world begin to fade. Time no longer moved forward, instead it was perfectly content to hold onto this moment.

A smile curved his lips as he took a shallow bow. "Angelina Truheart?"

Angel felt Raul's touch at the middle of her back, forcing time to move forward once again. His aura of strength helped her find her own. She imagined him sizing up the dark stranger in her doorway. Her lips turned up at the corners in amusement at the thought of Raul trying to protect her.

"Yes. I'm Angelina. How may I help you?"

Dark eyes roamed over her, starting at her feet, over her hips, and up until they rested for a moment longer than they should have on her breasts. She raised one eyebrow. They then continued their slow progress to her neck, her lips, and finally reaching her eyes.

A shiver raced down her spine. Somehow she knew that her life was about to change.

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Chapter Four

Raul's voice startled her. Angel's mouth dropped open at the sound of it, which suddenly sounded deep, very manly, and very, very protective. She fought back a giggle.

"The lady asked you a question." He pushed up further behind her until his chest brushed against her back. What had gotten into Raul? Her eyes locked onto his mouth wondering how he could change the sound of his voice so easily. He winked at her before she turned back to face the stranger.

Her eyes locked with the man in her doorway. His gaze stayed on her, never acknowledging that Raul had spoken. His lips curved ever so slightly at the edges, as if he knew a great secret.

"Ms. Truheart," he said, "I need to speak with you alone."

Images of them flashed through Angel's mind, and they were doing everything but talking. She fought back the blush that stole across her cheeks. No man could do this to her. Frustration followed the lustful thoughts, making her burn with a different type of fire. Anger. Anger at allowing this man who she didn't even know to have such an effect on her body.

"What is this about?" She hoped her voice was as cool as intended.

"I would rather speak with you alone, if your ... friend does not mind." His attention falling on Raul for the first time.

"Raul, I'll call you later. Please remember what I said."

In a low voice, Raul responded, "I do not think this is a good idea, Angel."

Covering his chest with her hands, she lifted up on her toes placing a kiss on his cheek. "I'll be fine," she whispered in his ear.

Reluctantly, Raul walked past the stranger, but not before he glared hard into his eyes. "I'll call you, Angel," he said over his shoulder.

Angel's attention went to the man, the absolutely gorgeous man, standing at her door.

"I am Dante Von Wolfe. I own A Christmas Night." He extended his hand.

Uneasiness crept down her spine, but she did not want to seem rude, so she grasped his outstretched hand. A jolt of electricity raced up her arm. She jerked back and looked up into his blank eyes. Had he felt that too? A smoldering flame danced in her stomach.

Dante started to step across her threshold then stopped. "May I enter your home, Angelina?"

Rubbing her hands together, Angel could still feel the tingling from the earlier jolt. "Oh, sure. Come in." Stepping out of the way, she allowed him to pass over the threshold.

As he walked past her, a scent of exotic flowers stirred some memory that remained just out of her reach. She almost didn't notice how the light in the room dimmed a little bit. It was subtle, but her experience as a professional thief taught her to notice the slightest changes in everything. Maybe a light had burned out somewhere.

"Was that your male?" he asked as he continued his scrutiny of her apartment.

His question confused her. "My male?" What an odd way to put it, she thought.

"Uh, no. He is just a friend."

"Not your companion?" Turning around to face her, his dark eyes studied her.

"No." Heat stole into her cheeks. Damn the hormones. What was it about this man that brought to life feelings she had locked deep inside? He was dangerous. Dangerous to those carefully hidden emotions.

She tried telling herself that over and over, but nothing, however, kept the dampness from growing between her thighs. He oozed sex, filling the room with pheromones that tickled her senses. Something about him seemed so familiar, but she couldn't place it.

"Angelina," his words broke into her thoughts, "why do you not have a Christmas tree in your home?" His furrowed brows and questioning look startled her. He almost seemed angry.

Suddenly, he moved across the room in the blink of an eye. Her breath escaped in a hurried whoosh. He held her shoulders, and she felt that she had been in this position before. How could that be possible? This was the first time meeting him, right?

Ignoring his question about the tree, she asked, "Why are you here?"

"You were in my store last night. You left before Mrs. Delight could inquire about what you wished to purchase."

His deep voice made her heart flutter. Oh God, his eyes danced in inquisition, burning right through her.

He continued, "I take my customers seriously. I would like to find out what specific ornament you would like to purchase."

If the room got any warmer, she would have to run from the building naked into the snow outside just to cool down. She could listen to the way his words drifted off his full lips for hours. His foreign accent was so exotic she wanted to beg him to say her name over and over. Angel felt herself falling into his dark eyes, while the vision of the room narrowed, leaving just him.

"Angelina? Why were in my shop last night?"

He was touching her again. His touch was fire and ice combined, each battling to be dominant. She knew she could not tell him the truth, but something ... something in her mind was telling her that she had to tell him. Tell him the truth about needing the formula. She felt her lips moving, but she fought the impulse of the words on the tip of her tongue ready to spill out. There was too much at stake. Her sister. For her sister, she needed her to remain strong and focused.

"I ... I was looking for ... an ornament for my sister." The lie burned through her brain. Something pounded inside her to tell him the truth. Tell him. She shook her head, breaking eye contact. Suddenly, she sucked in a breath. She felt light-headed and reached out to grab the wall, but stumbled.

"Are you okay, Angelina?" He grabbed her elbow to guide her over to the couch, placing her down gently. "You look very pale all of a sudden. Even more so than when you answered the door. Are you sick?"

Grabbing her head, she buried her face in her hands. She was far from being okay. Her head felt funny, and the room would not stop spinning. Was she sick from stomping through the snow last night?

"I just need to lie down. Maybe we could conduct this meeting another time?"

The cushions dipped at her side making her painfully aware of his large body beside. More of his exotic scent drifted over to her. She couldn't help taking in a deep breath and was surprised when the ache in her head receded some.

"I have brought something for you. I was hoping you would display it for me on your ... uh, Christmas tree."

"I don't plan on putting up a tree, or decorations for that matter. It's a long story," she said to him as her mind went back to that unfortunate Christmas.

Her father was a spy for the government and Jonah, her boyfriend, almost fiancé, had gotten close to her just to get to know her dad. *Just to kill him*. Unfortunately, when the deed was carried out, her mother was with her father when the car exploded.

After the explosion, when she needed Jonah the most, he had packed up and left her. Left her alone with only her little sister remaining of what was once a tightly knit family. Angel had been angry and hurt. For her sister, she pulled herself out of her depression, took up the reigns of her father's trade, and hunted down the answers to her questions about her parents' death. All the answers she needed and more, she found in a government official's home.

Jonah Mathews was a hired killer. Hired to kill her father for not carrying out a job he was hired to do. Her heart broke, no, shattered it as she looked at his picture beside his credentials. After that day, or actually, it was the day he left her, she packed up her heart, her feelings, locking them away. Getting close to another man just was not in the cards for her.

Taking after her father, she put her skills to use. However, unlike her father, she worked solely for herself as a professional thief. Taking money from rich men and women to steal things that mattered most to them. She could enter a room, a house, a mansion, an office, anywhere, without so much as moving the wind.

"Angelina?" Dante's voice broke through her train of memories bringing her back to reality. "Rest, we will continue our talk tomorrow evening."

Dante rose, allowing her to stretch out on the couch. She felt very tired. "Sure ... we'll talk ... tomorrow." She forced the words from her lips; they felt so heavy on her tongue. All she could think about was sleep. Who cared if there was some strange man she didn't know standing in her living room. She needed the rest.

Unable to move, she felt something heavy drape across her body, then the pleasantness of warmth surrounded her. Barely managing to open her eyes, she saw Dante reach down and push back her hair. His gesture was so nice, so ... caring. She wanted to sigh, which she probably did. God, what was wrong with her?

"I'll see you then," he whispered.

Winter's Blood [Hunt for the Elixir Series Book Two]
by Midnyte Dupree

Somewhere in the distance, she heard the door open and close. There was silence, her headache was easing away, she was warm, and sleep could not be refused a moment longer.

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Chapter Five

Wild images plagued Angel's dreams all night. Pictures of blood flowing across her body while shadows danced around her. Just as the images grew worse, a warm embrace made it all disappear. Her dream moved her into a darkened room, where she stood all alone, but feeling as if someone were watching her.

Slowly her body came awake, leaving the images of the nightmare behind. She was on the couch with bright rays of sunlight filling the room.

Angel lay there a moment, trying to dispel the uneasiness of her dream. Had yesterday really happened? Did Dante Von Wolf actually show up at her door, enter her living room, and tuck her in on the couch?

She ran her hand through her long hair, pulling it away from her face. Thankfully, her headache was gone and her body felt, at least, a little better. Pushing the blanket aside, she set her foot on the soft cushiony texture of the carpet.

"I'm meeting him tonight?" She rubbed her temples trying to recall the conversation. "But where?"

As she got up and walked to the kitchen, she noticed a white envelope lying on the floor in front of the door. Bending down, she picked it up and noticed it did not have any distinguishing marks other than her name in bold black letters across the middle.

She opened it, and her heart jumped in her throat.

Ms. Truheart:

I hope that you have made some progress in your little endeavor, and did not just sleep your day away. Your sister is counting on you.

M.

Crumpling up the paper, she threw it across the room, watching it bounce off the wall to land in the fireplace. "Just where it needs to be." She kicked the air. "I've lost a whole day. A whole damn day."

She drank a quick cup of coffee and dressed. Oh, how she dreaded stepping out in the cold once again. Before she left, she dropped her lock pick tool in the pocket of her jacket.

Reaching the parking deck, Angel jumped into her car, turning the heater to high. A rush of cold air blew in her face. "Damn, damn, damn." Pulling out of the lot, she angled the vents away from her hoping the warmth would flow in soon.

A Christmas Night sat between two other stores. One was a dress shop that tried to capture the essence of summer through its window display. Angel wished she could fly somewhere warm like that. The other store window had winter coats wrapped securely around mannequins. *A Christmas Night* displayed two large Christmas trees lined with different color ornaments on the branches. For anyone else, the display would represent love, happiness, hope. Angel just cringed and tried to focus on her task.

She twisted the knob, knowing it was locked. She peered over her shoulder in both directions before she casually pulled out her tools. Without even looking down, she flipped open the lock pick.

"Angel?" A voice startled her, making her almost lose her grip on the tool.

She looked over her shoulder as she carefully slid it back into her pocket. "Raul? What are you doing out here?"

"I could ask you the same question," he said with a wide grin. He came up beside her and rubbed her shoulder. "You're looking better."

"Oh yeah, I do feel better." Angel tried for a cheerful voice, but she knew she did a bad job of it. "Are you out shopping for your friend?"

Angel tried moving them away from the store so they could talk without him becoming suspicious of her actions. She had managed to keep him from figuring out she was a thief. Only her sister and the few clients she worked for knew about her special talent.

"Oh girl, I got this fabulous scarf for him. Let's go somewhere for some coffee and I'll show it to you."

"I really can't right now."

"Oh, of course you can. Unless, you're planning on shopping for me." He winked. "Then I'd let you go." Throwing his head back, he laughed.

Angel could not help but laugh with him. "You know I don't do Christmas, Raul."

His face took on a solemn look. "Oh right, right. I'm sorry. But really, Angel, I need your opinion on some things. Would you please come along with me today?" He lowered his eyes and looked at her with a sad, begging expression.

She stole a quick look at the store. It might be better to return later when they were open. She could possibly get some information from his employee.

"Sure. Let's go."

* * * *

Dante felt her presence close to the shop. He had been resting in the special room he had made when he opened *A Christmas Night*. It was here he did most of his experiments on the glass and where he slept during the day.

The winter sun was not as damaging on him as the summer sun, but he still could not walk around outside for long. If he had to walk in the daylight, it had to be in the early morning or the late evening.

In his mind, he felt her at the door and the rush of her blood in his veins beckoned him, reminding him of the way it tasted. He needed to taste her again, but the next time he would be very careful not to take too much.

When he had seen her at home, the shock of her darkened eyes and the paleness of her skin had frightened him. He fought with himself not to grab her and pull her into the protectiveness of his arms and tell her how sorry he was.

Then that man had appeared behind her. His bitter scent made Dante wonder why Angelina would be with someone so dishonest. So ... evil. It had made him fight even harder to resist the urge to pull her from the room and take her to his home.

Dante left his room to go out into the store where he could see her in the doorway. Maybe he could figure out why she

had come to him. What was she after? He remained hidden in the shadows of the darkened shop, watching as she tried turning the knob.

"What are you doing, my sweet," he whispered into the room. His eyes studied her as he watched something slip between her fingers before she turned around.

Unable to stop himself, Dante moved closer to the door, hugging the darkest shadows. He needed to see more of her. He wanted her to come into the store where he might be able to hold her again.

"Ah, her friend," he said as he watched Angel and the man from last night converse. After talking for a few minutes, she walked away with him down the street, his arm linked with hers.

"Nooo!" Dante growled through clenched teeth. Something inside him tightened. His fists curled into balls at his side. His mind screamed for him to run after her, to stop her from walking away from him. He wanted Angelina Francesca Truheart. He wanted her for his own.

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Chapter Six

The slow movement of the sun across the sky annoyed Dante. It was crawling across the sky at a snail's pace that angered him more with each passing second. He waited in his office with impatience for the fading light to be dim enough for him to brave its rays.

"Mr. Wolf?" an elderly voice beckoned.

Dante turned around just as Mrs. Delight appeared in the doorway, wringing her hands in a nervous gesture.

"Yes, Mrs. Delight?" He leaned further back in his chair waiting to hear what she needed.

A familiar tingle played along his neck as he inwardly smiled. Angelina. She was close. Very close.

"A Miss Angelina Truheart says she needs to speak with you. Should I bring her back?"

I'm sure she knows her way, he muttered under his breath. "Yes, please bring her." He fought back the urge to rush from the chair and meet her in the hallway.

Mrs. Delight disappeared around the corner. He felt her movements down the hall and out into the store. Then he felt Angelina's essence moving closer to him. His body stirred in response as the pleasant scent of lavender drifted into the room. Dante wanted to close his eyes and inhale the sweetness until it encompassed his whole body. Instead, he watched her enter, her eyes quickly scanning the room.

Her coat was unbuttoned revealing the pink shirt underneath, accentuating the curvature of her breasts. Dante

balled his fist at his side, holding back the urge to adjust the sudden heaviness in his groin.

"Miss Truheart," When she smiled, he felt the world light up for him; he was sure her smile would light up a million buildings. He felt undone, but he managed to rise and extend his hand. Did he dare touch her soft flesh?

Yes he did dare, and it felt wonderful as she grasped his hand. Her grip was firm, but gentle, with expert fingers that would play havoc across his skin.

"Hi, Mr. Wolf. I wasn't sure if we had planned to meet elsewhere. Sorry about last night, I was a little off yesterday."

"Do not worry." Dante fought with the sudden hunger roaring inside him. The beat of her heart and the steady flow of her blood ignited his hunger.

As Angel took a seat very close to the one he had occupied, Mrs. Delight entered the room. "Sorry, Mr. Wolf. We have an irate customer who is demanding to see you. She says she is unhappy with one of the ornaments."

Dante sighed. No one was unhappy with his ornaments. A spell in each of them would not allow it.

He turned to Angel, catching her looking at his desk. "I'm sorry, I'll be right back."

"It's okay."

* * * *

Angel watched as Dante left the office. God, could it really be this easy? She got up to peek out the door to make sure no one was coming, then hurried over to his desk to check out the carefully laid out piles of paper.

She began searching through papers, recipes, and notebooks, knowing he probably wouldn't have the formula just lying around. "It's probably in his head for all I know." She peaked out the door again. No one. Turning back into the room, her foot caught on the floor and she stumbled forward into the wall. She landed with a thud.

"Damn it."

Pushing herself upright, a hidden door opened, revealing a secret hallway.

"What the..."

She couldn't see much past the opening. Angel's heart beat hard against her chest as she pondered what to do. Feeling panicked, she rushed back to the door to check if he was coming. Relief flooded her when she found the hallway still empty.

Excitement and curiosity coursed through her. She turned back to the opening, walking cautiously, unsure if the secret door were booby trapped. Her heart raced in anticipation. Could the formula be behind there somewhere? Conflicting emotions warred for supremacy—should she enter or not? For all she knew, he kept some type of wild dog in there. That thought made her body tremble with uneasiness.

She positioned herself even with the threshold and leaned her head in as far as it would go. All she saw was darkness. Taking a step inside, she was overcome with the odor of exotic scents. So many, she couldn't distinguish the different smells. A variety of flowers and perfumes seemed to live in the passageway, making her even more curious about what lay ahead.

"Miss Truheart?"

Angel turned quickly, coming face to face with Dante, close enough that his breath danced across the skin of her cheek. His eyes narrowed in anger. She could swear that she saw tiny lightning bolts flash in their depths before his glare darkened. Her throat closed up.

He grabbed her shoulders in a fierce grip. "What are you doing?" his voice rumbled low.

Obviously, he was not happy.

"I ... I ... I tripped on the carpet. This door opened, and I was curious."

Never before had she felt her calm slip away so easily. Not even drawing on her experience eased her shattered nerves. Her heart pounded, her palms grew damp, and her nerves tingled as if her life were balanced carefully on this one moment.

She knew what she had to do to take his attention away from her discovery.

Angel leaned up, planting her lips firmly on his. Her arms, unsure of how she managed to move them, came up and captured Dante in a loose embrace. As their lips touched, everything disappeared, replaced by an urgent need to give herself fully to him. His lips felt cool as she darted her tongue out to touch the flesh, to taste, to lick, to devour the sweet feel of him.

Angel kissed along the edge of his lips before she coaxed him to let her inside his mouth. His tight body relaxed under her ministrations, and a hot rush of fire raced to her groin as he wrapped his arms around her, roughly pulling her into his

embrace, chest to chest. She had only meant to distract him, but she found the kiss too good to stop.

He tasted like air. The sweet rush of it infused her. She didn't think she would have to breathe ever again; his kiss would supply all that she needed to survive. Her tongue touched his, rolling against each other in an exotic tango. She was lost, overcome by the sheer power of his lips, the curve of her body snug against his.

Dante cupped her head keeping her from pulling away. Not like she wanted to, she imagined she could do this all day without any coaxing from him.

He kissed along her jaw line up the curve of her neck. "Oh Angelina," his sweet words caressed her ear. Allowing him to push her back against the wall, she realized the door had closed. She moaned as his body seemed to melt into hers; it felt as if they were one, so perfectly did they fit. His lips found their way back to her neck. "You taste so sweet."

Only a moan escaped her throat in response. His hand came up to caress her breast possessively, he played with the tight little bud of her nipple.

What was she doing? She did not mean for it go this far. Angel pushed at his chest forcing him to step back. She rubbed at her eyes, hoping they didn't betray how affected she was by him.

His eyes were no longer a black abyss, but a deep brown and heavy lidded with passion. Dante touched his lips. "I'm sorry, Angelina."

"No, no. I'm sorry, Dante. I should have called or something instead of just coming by here." She pushed away

from the wall and headed to the door. A cool hand grabbed her around the wrist.

"Wait."

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Chapter Seven

Dante pulled her back roughly against his chest. Her lips were a mere inch away from his. "Angelina, I cannot let you run away, my sweet."

He bent his head, brushing her neck with his mouth. Hearing the fast flow of the blood in her veins woke a terrible hunger for her. He clamped down his need to sink his teeth deep into her flesh. It would happen soon enough, now he just wanted to hold her, kiss her.

Angel's palms spread wide across his chest in a gesture that would allow her to push away from him, but he felt the apprehension in her touch; her wide eyes looking deep into his told him that she wanted this as much as he did, but she was scared.

Leaning in, he captured her lips, not allowing any other thought but of himself to enter her mind. It took a moment before she relaxed against him. Feeling her surrender was a seduction in itself. He needed to feel her, taste her.

"Dante." His name escaped her in a whisper causing him to close his eyes and savor the feeling.

He let her passion filled plea infuse him. She was holding back, but he planned on making her break loose. He wanted to feel her explode around him.

Pulling her harder against his him, he captured her lips. He deepened the kiss, exploring her mouth with everything he had. When their tongues touched, she shuddered, then surrendered. She tasted as if she were made from one of the

exotic flowers he dealt with every day in his lab. The scent of her caused him to wish that he could capture it in a flower and mix it into one of his formulas for a very special lovers ornament.

Her hands moving on his chest made him groan, her palms of her scorching his skin. He cupped her face, holding it so that he could kiss along her jaw before traveling to her neck. Should he taste her now?

"Dante," she whispered, her head thrown back exposing the length of her neck.

"Yes, my sweet," he replied against her skin. He felt her shiver, and it made him smile.

"You really must stop." She tried pushing him away, but he wouldn't allow it.

"Tell me what I want to know."

Dante felt Angel's body stiffen, and this time when she pushed away, he allowed her a little room, but kept his arm twisted around her waist.

Angel looked up into his eyes. "Why I'm here? You believe I'm after something when it was you who said that we were going to talk today."

The room grew still around them as he considered her words. "Yes. I did." He studied her, trying to penetrate her soul as if he could determine what true reason she had for visiting his shop when her home held nothing of Christmas.

He felt the rush of air brush over his face as she let out the breath she had been holding. Slowly, her body began to relax and her palm eased their tension against his chest. Did she think the subject dropped?

"Dante?"

Angel looked up through her lashes, the blue of her irises glowed and sparkled in hope of distracting him. It worked. Everything in him told him to pick her up and carry her far away, so that he could make her his mate. Holding her in his arms felt like the best thing in the world. He never thought he would be able to feel this way about anyone. Now, as she stood in his arms, he felt the hardness he had developed around his heart over the centuries begin to soften. Suddenly, his power flared and he felt a shiver race through her. Pulling it back into him, he rubbed her shoulders to warm her.

"Yes, my sweet?" he answered, his lips curving in a wry smile. "Tell me what you are after. It is not ornaments for you have no tree. It looked to me as though you do not even celebrate Christmas. Tell me what they hold over you."

She pushed again. He did not want to let her go just yet, but when he saw the pain in her eyes, he released her from his embrace.

"I can't tell you," she said before she escaped through the door.

* * * *

Angel ran quickly through the isles with only one thing on her mind. Getting home. She was failing at her job. At every turn there was some obstacle, especially one huge obstacle she was not counting on—Dante.

He was more of an obstacle against her heart than anything and angel could not allow such a thing. As much as she wanted to melt into his arms and confide in him, she

could not. Her sister's life was in danger. She needed that damn formula.

The bell jingled wildly as she rushed out into the cold air. Night had fallen, and the streetlights cast eerie golden rays on the snow-packed ground. She buttoned up her coat as she rushed down the sidewalk.

The world around her blurred as the severity of her failing engulfed her. Tears fell fast down her cheeks. She brushed them away with the back of her hand.

From behind her, she heard footsteps making their way through the snow. Fearing that he had come after her, she looked over her shoulder and picked up her pace.

Turning around, she ran into a solid wall of muscle. Her eyes slowly scanned the massive chest in front of her. Enormous hands clamped roughly on her shoulders; her eyes jerked up to the darkened face of her captor.

A voice came from behind, laced with contempt. "Where you successful, Angel? Did you get the information?"

Angel struggled, but the man's arms tightened on her shoulders, slowly lifting her off the ground. "Let me go," she said through clenched teeth.

Just as she spoke, a hand came out of the darkness slapping her hard on the head. She winced at the new pain, but fought from crying out. These type of men loved to see pain on their victims' faces.

"Answer me!" he growled, yanking on her hair, causing head to arch back until all she could see was the darkness of the sky. "Answer me, damn it woman! Do you want to see your sister alive?"

"No, I haven't gotten it yet. One more day. I'll have it tomorrow." She thought for sure he was pulling out fistfuls of her hair; pain sliced through her skull. She tried to reach up to grab her skull in hopes of easing the pain.

Warm breath touched her left ear, "One more day, Angel. This time tomorrow, you'd better have the formula."

He released her suddenly, causing her body to collapse to the ground. Looking around, the sidewalk was empty. Her frustration mounting, she raised her fist and pounded the pavement. Fresh tears rushed down her cheeks.

She did not care that a few people had materialized on the sidewalk; none seemed too keen on helping her anyway. They just walked past as she slowly made her way to a nearby bench. Even the cold did not matter anymore.

That was how Raul found her. She had long since stopped shivering as she sat staring at the dirty snow lining the walkway.

"Angel?" His voice was soft, and his arms wrapped around her. "Are you okay, honey?"

"Oh God, Raul." The cold started seeping into her clothes making her body shiver again. He pulled her close as she lowered her head into her hands.

"Take your hands off her." A dark malevolent voice came out of the darkness.

She felt Raul stiffen. Looking up, she saw a dark figure outlined by the streetlamps, even in the shadows he stood tall and powerful. He stepped further into the light, his eyes narrowed on Raul.

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Chapter Eight

Upon seeing Dante, she wanted to throw herself into his strong arms, tell him everything and beg for his help. Maybe if he knew that a life was at stake, he would give her the formula. He might even be able to help her find her sister.

Raul's deep voice cut through her thoughts as he rose from the bench, blocking her view. A shiver of fear raced down her spine. "You're that shop owner, aren't you? Angel is my friend and if you have done something to upset her, you'll have to answer to me."

Angel looked up to see Raul had moved to stand inches from Dante, chest puffed out, hands fisted at his side in some male projection of authority. What had gotten into him? He was never this protective of her. Even odder, his voice had taken on that strange deep male tone again.

She studied Raul's broad back, noting how muscular he was. The jacket he wore stretched tightly over his shoulders, dropping off at his narrow waist. Dante was not as bulky as Raul, but Angel knew that he would not be the one getting hurt if this came to blows.

Dante spoke, his voice more powerful than Raul's. It made Raul's sound like a boy trying to play being a man. She closed her eyes and let the cadence gently glide along her skin. It infused her body, wrapping her in a cocoon of warmth and security.

"Yes, I am he, and I am taking Miss Truheart back with me. Move aside so I may collect her."

"The hell you are." Raul's voice spiked with agitation. Why was he so upset?

Standing, she went to Raul's side, placing her hand on his sleeve, hoping her presence would soothe him. "Raul. Calm down."

"I will not calm down," he said, his eyes never leaving the locked gaze he held with Dante.

"Raul, please. I'm fine," she pleaded. "What has gotten into you?"

Slowly he turned his head, the anger in his eyes pierced through her. She release him and involuntarily backed away. At that moment, she wasn't sure if she should run from them both. Her feet took a few more steps as if urging her on, pleading with her to flee the two wild beasts in front of her.

Watching both of them carefully, she backed away, hoping not to attract their attention. She needed to escape. She had to figure out a plan to get her sister back. Just as she got around the edge of the building, she slipped on the ice.

She closed her eyes anticipating the unrelenting ground, but it never came. Instead, she landed in strong arms. Angel hated seeing who they belonged to, but she was thankful that she hadn't fallen on the hard cement. How could that have been? Both men were standing many feet away, too far to prevent her fall.

Looking up, she saw in his dark eyes that he wanted to punish her for such a foolish action. Dante looked pissed that she had tried to escape.

She gave him a sheepish grin as she tried not to focus on his arms wrapped protectively around her. Even through the

thickness of their clothes, she felt the pounding rhythm of his heart, her own fluttering to keep in sync with his.

Still smiling, she studied the dark recesses of his eyes. Streetlights and shops around them faded, until all that remained was her Dark God holding her in his embrace.

No, she couldn't allow this. He was another man that if allowed behind her defenses would not only shatter the wall she had erected, but destroy her as well. The smile that just moments ago graced her lips slipped away.

"Are you okay, my sweet?" His eyes dropped to her lips. She fought the urge to moisten them.

"Yes, I'm okay. Please put me down, Dante." Angel struggled in his arms as he slowly lowered her down the length of his body until the tips of her toes touched the sidewalk. Putting a little distance between them, the strange pull to his body faded. She moved closer into him to feel it again.

Raul was there wrenching her out of Dante's grasp.

"Let's go, Angel." With a tight hold on her wrist, Raul pulled her down the street.

Glancing back, Angel swore she saw two glowing orbs where Dante's eyes should be. She looked away, shaking her head to clear the hallucination, because clearly that is what it was, some trick of the streetlights.

Raul squeezed her wrist, so that she could focus solely on him. The way he was pulling her down the street infuriated her.

"Let go of me. I am not a child," she said, yanking out of his grasp.

He stopped abruptly, casting a quick look behind them. Apparently pleased that Dante had not followed, his attention turned back to her. "What the hell was that about, Angel?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Are you in trouble? Who were those men that held you?" His brows drew together as his questions flew from his lips. Angel listened, but she wasn't concentrating on his words and the meanings, but on the way he delivered the questions.

Something wasn't right with him. No sweetheart, honey, or sugar accompanied his words, and the feminine lilt he usually spoke with was gone. In its place was the newly acquired masculine southern drawl.

"Angel, why did you visit his shop again? There is something not right with him."

"Raul?" She could not stop watching his mouth. Surely, any second he would ease back into the flowery tone. She watched. She waited.

His hands came up of their own accord and rubbed her shoulders. She stepped away.

"Angel. What?"

"What happened to..." Her hand waved wildly through the air. "...your voice." Slowly her mind started processing his questions. The men? How had he known? "Raul, how did you know about the men?"

He lowered his head until he could whisper close to her ear. "I know more about you than you think. I'm Jonah's partner. I'm with the FBI, sweetheart."

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Chapter Nine

Somehow, Raul managed to bring her back to her apartment. His voice drifted in and out, but she could not focus on what he was saying. He was going on and on about something her father had done. She had thought she would never hear Jonah's name again.

As she sat on the couch, her head buried in her hands, the only thought that registered was regret for not telling Dante what he wanted to know. He could have helped. She sensed that he would. They had a connection.

Angel was not even sure what kind of connection or how it was forged, but it was there. Even in the back of her mind, she felt him. The touch was like a soft cashmere sweater wrapped protectively around her, he was there.

"Angel, you better start listening to me. Have you heard anything that has come out of my mouth since we walked through that door?"

She didn't even have the energy to look up at him, but visualized him pointing at the door. How could Raul have betrayed her? He acted like such a friend when all others could not be trusted to accept her the way she was. He looked beyond that, to the person hidden behind the pain. Now, finding out that he was part of the group that had her family murdered, she felt as though she was reliving the whole accident all over again.

When his hand grasped her shoulder, she jumped to her feet.

"Don't you touch me," she screamed, glaring at him. Pulling her hair over her shoulder as if she could rid herself of his touch, she worked her fingers wildly through the strands.

Raul's eyes sparkled, and a nasty smirk formed on his mouth as he walked closer to her. "Oh, I'll touch you." He ran his finger down her cheek. She cringed. The look in his eyes grew lustful. Her heart tore into pieces, as the friend she once knew disappeared.

"Why?" she managed to ask.

He laughed. "It's simple really. Your dad failed. And we watched you, Angel. We watched you grow into your abilities. Better than your father even." Raul turned and paced the room.

Angel could not believe what she was hearing. She went back to the couch and sat down, letting his admission wash over her as new grief consumed her.

A strange feeling, a subtle invasion of sorts, calmly made its way outward to her limbs; in its wake, her muscles relaxed. Shaking her head, she could not imagine what was going on. She rubbed her temples hoping to ease the tension housed there.

"My sweet, you need me. I feel your distress." The words formed inside her mind.

Angel glanced around the room knowing that it was Dante's voice that she heard, but she was not sure how. Her eyes scanned the corners, even the darkened recess behind the chair. Nothing, but she felt him wrap a phantom arm around her shoulders.

"How?" She tried forming the words in her mind, a little surprised that she even thought to try it. Shrugging, she reached out on the mental link.

"You were right thinking that we are connected. Why are you distressed?" His words caressed her mind.

"Raul. He's bad, Dante. God, I'm so sorry. I should have told you everything."

"Shhh ... " Dante whispered, gently stroking her mind into calmness. *"We'll discuss this soon."*

A tight grip on her chin snatched her from her thoughts. The pain sliced through head, and she wondered if Raul planned on breaking her jaw. She tried to pull away, but Raul's grip only tightened, forcing her to look into his eyes.

"Have you not been paying attention to me? AGAIN! Damn it, Angel. Abby is at death's door, and you're the only one that can save her."

"Let me talk to her, call her" she pleaded, tears threatening behind her eye lids. "Please."

Raul pushed her away from him and resumed pacing the room.

Angel dried her tears, she could do this. Her father would have been able to handle this.

"Yes, maybe by talking to her you'll get your ass in gear." Facing away from her, Raul pulled a cell phone out of his pocket. Dialing, he lowered his voice as someone answered. Angel strained to hear the conversation, but all she heard was mumbling, nothing that made sense.

Remembering her conversation—could she call it a conversation—with Dante, she reached out with her mind

hoping that it wasn't just a one way connection. *"Dante?"* She whispered with her eyes closed, as she tried to focus.

No answer.

"Dante?" She tried again, this time focusing on projecting the words to him. Soon, she felt the breeze in her core and the gentle tingle working outward to her fingers. The feeling was stronger making her aware that he was close.

"Yes, my sweet," he answered. She didn't realize how anxious she was to feel him in her mind.

"Will you help me rescue my sister?"

"What do you need?"

"I need the formula for your starlight ornaments."

A long pause had her wondering if he had severed the mental link. Then he answered, *"I am sorry, Angelina. I cannot."*

She broke their connection abruptly as Raul thrust the little phone into her face.

"Here," Raul said with his lip curled in disgust. "Make it quick."

All thought of Dante vanished, but she felt the renewed connection and his sorrow that he could not give her what she needed. She was hurt that he thought his formula was more important than a human life. Her sister's life.

Trying to forget Dante, she quickly grabbed the phone. "Abby, baby? Are you okay?" Emotion washed over her as she heard the rough intake of breath on the other end.

"Angel? Oh, Angel?"

Angel's heart exploded at the sound of Abby's weakened voice. Unable to hold back her tears any longer, she let them

flow freely. "I'm so sorry, baby." She stroked the phone, wishing that she could ease the pain she heard in her sister's voice.

"Angel, I'm so scared. Please, hurry. Do whatever they want. It's awful here."

"Yes, sweetie, I will. I'll have you out soon. I promise."

Raul yanked the phone out of her grip and slammed it close, cutting off Abby's screams for her sister.

"God, No! Let me talk to her." She pounded her fists into Raul's chest.

He grabbed them, holding them tightly together, then pulled her up until her toes barely touched the floor. He forced their eyes to lock, "Get the formula, Angel, or you and your pretty little sister will end up like your mother and father."

A new rage consumed Angel. She felt something inside her break, infusing every cell throughout her body and she realized what she had to do. Checking the clock, she knew that if she wanted that formula, she would have to wait until morning. She was not sure how or why the information flooded into her mind, but it was there.

"I'll get the formula, but it has to be in the morning. He works odd hours, and he'll be away from the shop then. I know it's there. I'll get it for you."

Her body stiffened as he held her close. "I'm coming with you to make sure the job is done this time."

"No. I have to do this myself."

Angel couldn't believe she had allowed this man into her life. He was supposed to be one of the safe ones. One she

didn't have to worry about doing anything to hurt her; he was her friend.

As she opened her mouth to argue with Raul, the door burst open sending shards of wood flying throughout the room. Raul dropped Angel to the floor. She landed on her hands and knees, looking over at the ruined door.

* * * *

Dante had raced through the sky feeling the pain lash through Angel's heart from his denial. He could not give her the formula. It was far too special for anyone to ever have access to it. He knew he should never have made it into the ornaments, but he wanted to share the special feeling with others; even if they were just humans, they could get some happiness from holding the glass in their hands and anyone in the same room with the ornament would feel the gentle wash of peace take over their bodies. It was something he wanted to share with the people who had taken to him so easily. It was his way of giving something back to the community.

He never thought that the people after the formula would bring innocents into their little battle. He was saddened that Angelina's sister had been kidnapped because of it.

Then Dante had felt a new wave of pain wash over his body. Angel was hurting badly, and the clouds rolled with his rage at the knowledge that Raul was harming her.

Dante had raced up the flight of steps in apartment building. His fast form went unnoticed by any tenants that gathered in the hallway. He only paused at her door before using every ounce of his power and strength to break it in.

"Get away from her. Now!" His voice shook the pictures on the wall.

Dante fought back the need to rush to her side to ensure that she was unharmed, instead he reached out on their mental path, and felt her push him away. At least she was okay.

"Just the man we need." Raul crossed his arms over his wide chest. "I suppose I could just kill you now, and I wouldn't need Miss Truheart to get the formula."

Dante saw the darkness in Angel's blue eyes and felt the mental touch, gently probing the recesses of his mind. Their connection was growing, and she effortlessly wielded this power now. He was pleased by this new discovery; she was truly his mate. He let the thought wash over him, letting his passion for her fill his heart.

Their mental connection was a sexual touch across his body. Since she was his true mate, their connection and sexual awareness would grow the longer they were in each other's presence. Even now, he felt the need to lower her to the ground and claim her.

"Get out of here," she demanded, quickly extinguishing the rush of his desire. "Get out, you beast."

Beast?

Dante stopped a few feet into the living room. Angel stepped around Raul as she yelled yet again for him to leave. "*You'll ruin everything,*" she hollered in his mind.

As she took a few steps closer to him, he hoped that she would get within reach. He could grab her and escape, but Raul reached out, grabbing a hand full of her blond hair.

Winter's Blood [Hunt for the Elixir Series Book Two]
by Midnyte Dupree

Her scream pierced Dante's soul.

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Chapter Ten

Dark rage consumed Dante. His eyes went red, and his fangs dropped further as anger rolled inside him. He leapt through the air with only one thing on his mind. Killing Raul.

As he flew, Raul pulled a gun and fired. Pain shot through Dante's stomach, he dropped from flight, landing heavily on the carpet. Trying to sit up, he quickly covered the wound with his hands as blood rushed out through his fingers. He looked down, unbelieving at the gap in his stomach.

Dragging Angel by the hair, Raul approached and kicked him in the face. "You were lucky to elude us these past few years. I've wanted to do this for a long time." Raul's foot swung back again and kicked him in the area of the wound.

Dante gasped. Closing his eyes, he scanned his body for the damage. He heard Angel's scream, but white-hot pain lanced through him making him curl up into a ball on the floor.

His blood was spilling out around him, the precious fluid that made him strong. A sweet coppery scent filled his nostrils. A gunshot wound would not kill him, but the loss of blood was draining his strength.

He heard a soft thump at his side, then he felt Angel's hands on his face. "Dante, oh my God, Dante." Her warm hands ran through his hair, over his cheeks, and back into his hair pushing it away from his face.

The blood slowly left his body, and his strength faded. How could a mere bullet do this to him?

Angel's hands were gone as Raul leaned close to his ear, "You are the undead, aren't you? The bullet was laced with holy water just in case. The formula will be mine soon."

Dante managed to open one eye. "I'll kill you," he warned looking deep into Raul's soul.

Raul quickly stood up and grabbed Angel. "Let's go," he said, pulling Angel behind him.

Unable to move, Dante tried to relax on the floor. He heard Angel fighting with Raul, wanting to return to make sure he was okay. Their noise faded away down the hall, but Dante reached deep inside himself, searching for his connection with Angel.

"Dante! I'm so sorry." She spoke in his mind. He let her essence infuse him, providing a measure of strength.

"No, I'm sorry, my sweet." He pushed the connection further back into his mind so he could focus on summoning something to him. He needed to feed. Precious blood was seeping from the wound faster than his body could heal.

He could not focus too much energy, and he was almost scared of what would answer him, but he needed blood and he needed it now.

Soon, he felt the gentle rustle of air as something came into the apartment. *Yes, come,* he coaxed with his mind.

Rolling over on his side, he opened his eyes to see what had come to his calling. Two small brown eyes outlined in white curly fur looked down at him.

Damn.

He grabbed the dog and pulled it to him, casting a memorizing spell. The dog turned away exposing his neck, and Dante sank his teeth in.

* * * *

Raul pulled Angel by the arm down the now all too familiar sidewalk. Angel wondered how things had gotten so out of control so fast? Her feet slipped on the pavement as she tried to keep up with Raul's swift stride. Her body was warm from the unexpected exertion, and partly fueled by the fury that was steadily building inside her.

Was it true that Dante was the undead? A vampire? She had heard the legends, but who believed in such things? A little thrill raced through her. It would be fascinating if he truly was.

Angel felt the gentle pull from him and knew that he still lived. But for how long? Would he be able to heal himself or would the holy water really kill him? The damage the laced bullet did to him still appeared in her mind. His body lay so still on her floor, and the amount of blood he lost could not be good for him.

A freaking vampire. She was attracted to a freaking vampire! She could not get the thought out of her mind. How could vampires keep themselves hidden for so long?

Uncertain until that moment, she knew that she would do whatever it took to keep him alive. Vampire or not, he had managed to break through her barriers. Now, she was about to steal the one thing that meant more to him than her, the formula for his ornaments.

It was close to midnight, and the street was empty. Newly fallen snow lightened the area making it appear almost daylight, cinnamon and peppermint drifted through the air highlighting the fact that Christmas was coming soon.

If Dante lived, she swore she would buy a Christmas tree. She would decorate it with every ornament he would allow her to take. If only he would live.

Raul pushed her, making her stumble in the snow. "Get to work, Angel." He motioned at the large glass door with a slight shake of his head as he looked over his shoulder. She hoped that someone would see him manhandling her and stop him.

She pulled out her kit and worked the pick into the lock until she heard a loud click. Turning the knob, the door slowly opened under her gentle push. The room was dark except for the string of Christmas lights that lined the trees. It left the room in a romantic state. Angel's mind instantly turned to Dante.

He was doing something. She felt his energy waver, then strengthen slightly. Whatever it was, she hoped he continued. Angel prayed that he would be okay and be able to forgive her for handing over the formula. She wanted to explore in more detail the way he made her feel. The heated passion that erupted when they touched was so potent that she found she was craving the feel of him between her legs.

"You think it's here?" Raul's hardened voice asked in a whisper, bringing her back to the moment.

"Yes. Back here." Angel closed her eyes and hoped she would find the formula.

They made their way to Dante's office. Feeling around the wall for the latch, her finger found the groove and she pushed. The hidden door slid silently back into the wall revealing a dark hallway. Raul's excited laugh made her wince.

Angel looked back, saw the glitter and hope of power that danced across his pupils. "So, why is this formula so important?" she asked.

Ignoring her question, Raul pushed her to the side. He hesitated at the doorway before he stuck one foot over the threshold. When he entered into the darkness, the hallway lit up with tiny lights. He laughed more.

"Oh my God," he said underneath his breath.

He looked back, making sure that she was still there. When he realized she wasn't directly behind him, he reached out and grabbed her wrist, twisting it until he pulled her closer to his back. She gritted her teeth against the pain.

"Come on. We've got some searching to do." She had no option but to follow him down the hallway. "Where is it?"

Unable to see what he was talking about, she responded, "Where is what?"

Raul turned and yanked her against his chest. "Where is the damn room?" he spat through clenched teeth as anger rolled in his eyes. "Get me into that goddamn room, now!"

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Chapter Eleven

Dante began pulling his body up from the floor. Looking down, he saw the dog lay at his side, its little heart working overtime to replace the blood that Dante took. He'd be okay in the morning.

Foul words drifted through Dante's mind at the thought of a poodle being the only thing that heeded his call. He hated taking blood from animals, but the small amount of blood that flew through his system was enough to heal the wound. He felt the nerve endings pulling tightly, the epidermis coming together to form his new skin. Burning pain almost made him pass out again, but he knew he needed to get to Angel.

Dante chuckled as he recalled Raul's last words. *"You are the undead, aren't you? The bullet, you'll soon realize, was laced with holy water."*

Holy water? It no more hurt him than crosses did, the bullet is what did the damage. Wouldn't Raul be in for a surprise? He leaned up on his hands, stopping to let the room quit spinning. He needed to call something larger than a poodle. Closing his eyes, he searched the other apartments for a human. He needed something with more sustenance.

Finally, down at the end of the hall, he found a man sitting in front of his television with a beer dangling in his hand. A deep snore echoed in Dante's mind. Gathering his energy, finding the man's mental link, he reached out through the connection and called him forth.

Within minutes, a dreamy eyed man stepped into the apartment. The scent of beer and sweat assaulted Dante's senses, his lips curled in distaste. Normally, he would not take blood laced with any type of stimulant, but right now, he had no choice. The man stepped slowly to him. His dark green eyes stared out into nothing, waiting for Dante to feed.

"Much better," Dante struggled to stand and got his bearings. He staggered over to the man who now had his neck angled for easier access. A large blue vein called to Dante. His teeth lengthened as his mouth began to water.

He felt a sharp pain in his mind and quickly searched out its source. He held the man by his shoulders while he found the cause of the pain. Angelina ... His head arched back and he struck down on the dark blue vein.

The sweet coppery taste of the blood flooded over his taste buds. It took everything he had not to moan with pleasure. He felt the rush of arousal gather in his body. It wasn't normal for him to feed from a man, because the feeding process was such an erotic act. It often accompanied sex, but not always. Now he would check his libido and save it for his sweet little thief.

His muscles churned, the nerve endings exploded with strength, his mind grew sharp and focused on the precious fluid. He loved it. His tongue savored the metallic taste as it slid down his throat.

Once satisfied, he laid the man down on the floor, sending him a mental compulsion to rise in an hour and return to his room. Sated, he leaped to his feet and sailed out into the darkness, a deep fury boiling inside him.

* * * *

Angel looked at the end of the passage. Normally, she would enjoy the excitement of breaking and entering, but not now. Now her throat felt tight, and her mouth was dry. Swallowing hard, she calmed her nerves and padded around the door with her fingertips, praying she would find something, anything that would open up the second hidden door.

"What the hell is taking you so damn long?" Raul's angry voice sounded behind her.

"The latch is here, somewhere, just give me a minute. What's so important about this formula?" she asked again as her hands tried the corners for something.

Raul chuckled. "Have you ever held one of his ornaments in your hand, Angel? Peace and happiness washes over the person. Do you know how rich I'd be if I had that formula. I wouldn't just limit it to stupid Christmas ornaments." He laughed again, a deep throaty sound. "People want to feel happy."

Angel kept searching. How could an ornament hold such a thing? "You really believe it works?" she questioned, trying to keep her voice light. She rubbed her fingers along the top, ever so slowly, so that she wouldn't miss anything. She could smell that sweet scent of flowers drifting up from somewhere and was a little excited at what she might find behind the door.

Slowly her fingers slid over the surface. Then she felt it, a small indentation in the wall. She found the secret lock and

giggled with triumph. Pushing it in, the hidden door slid inside the wall revealing a room bathed in candlelight.

Her eyes grew wide and for a moment, her heart stopped beating.

"Move," Raul ordered and pushed her aside.

Angel watched him carefully. His mouth hung open while he scanned the contents of the room. Enormous cauldrons lined the wall, and the vastness of them was awe inspiring. Smoke bellowed up from one, but she didn't see a fire underneath it.

Ignoring Raul, she searched around the room for a computer, a binder, or something that Dante would use to keep his information in.

Dante.

Her mind instantly turned to their connection. She could feel his fury like a rock in the pit of her stomach. Her hand instinctively covered her belly where the knot of rage burrowed inside her. An intoxicating smell drifted to her nose. Something about the fragrance made her relax, like she had all the time in the world.

"Get the damn formula, Angel." Raul's voice cut into her thoughts. "All I have to do is push one button and little sis will be history." He danced the cell phone in front of her face as reminder of what he could do.

Deep in her throat, she growled, truly growled at him. She felt a tingle at her nape, and the tiny hairs on her arms stood up. "Fine," she said through clenched teeth.

Going over to a desk, she removed a binder. She blinked in disbelief as the images began to move before her eyes. The

flowers on the pages swayed across the whiteness of the paper. Flipping another page, she gasped. An iris bloomed before her eyes, then it closed, drooping a little. Hesitantly, her fingers reached out and touched the image. She quickly jerked her hand back, surprised by the silkiness of the flower.

What the...

Reaching out again, she could not help the smile that crossed her face. The glory of being able to see the flower come to life made her happy. This was such a gift to be able to see something so special. Why had Dante not shared this knowledge? Then again, how could he? Bad people obviously wanted what he had.

"What have you found?" Raul peered over her shoulder.

She quickly shut the book and put it aside. "Nothing, just some ... invoices filed away."

His agitation was apparent as he went back to pacing beside her. She didn't have much time.

Looking back at the desk, she spotted a leather bound book, tucked behind the computer. She glanced over her shoulder to see where Raul was. He dipped something into the smoldering caldron and eyed it carefully. Angel grabbed the book and examined it, the leather appeared crinkled and old, a faint scent of musk drifted up as she turned the pages.

Her heart skipped a beat as she looked down at the elegant scroll of penmanship on the page. Deeply curved letters reminded her of something written centuries ago. Her finger gently traced over some of the words. Words written in some foreign language she had never seen before. She

flipped through the pages, feeling how hard Dante worked on each page. It must have taken him forever to fill it up.

"Well. Well. Well. What have we here?" Raul said as he plucked the leather bound book from her fingers. She tried holding on it, but she was afraid she would damage it, so she reluctantly let go.

Flipping through the pages without a care to the damage he may cause, Raul's eyes glowed with excitement. Slamming the book shut, he grabbed her arm, yanking her to the opening. "Let's go."

He then suddenly stopped, an evil glint forming in his eyes. Raul strode over to the caldron and heaved until the contents spilled across the floor. Water and bits of flowers raced across the floor, the scent overpowering the room. He moved over to Dante's desk, pushed the computer over; it landed heavily on the ground, and sparks exploded around them.

I'm so sorry, Dante. Her heart broke as she glanced back at the destroyed room. She could feel how much work he had put into building it and how much it meant to him. Angel tried to feel where he was, if he were close, but all she felt was a deep empty hole inside her.

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Chapter Twelve

The cold fell upon her again as Raul hauled her through the shop doors out into the night. A brisk wind whipped her hair around her face, temporarily blinding her. She pulled her coat up around her neck.

Raul clutched the book tightly against his chest. Angel's heart ached; she could not find a solution to keeping Dante's secret safe.

Just those few moments of being in his arms made her long for more. She wanted to spend her life with him and feel those delicious lips on her neck again. She wanted to feel them all over her body. Their lives could be so full of joy, even if they did have to be together only at night.

Angel wanted her Christmases back. She wanted to be able to share them with someone that made her feel special and loved. Okay, so he was a vampire and would have to spend his days asleep or whatever vampires did. Was that myth even true? Maybe he could walk in the sun. Did he want her to become vampire too?

At that thought, she got a chill that went deeper than the cold she was feeling. A little tingle of excitement raced through her. What would becoming a vampire require?

Warmth swept through her body. She felt phantom hands glide deliciously down the flesh of her arms, between the warm layer of clothing. Instantly, she knew it was him. She felt the warmth slide over her shoulders and down to cup her breasts, making the nipples stand erect beneath the fabric of

her shirt. The gentle rub of the material sensitized them even more.

"Damn it, woman. Pay attention." Raul cursed as she stumbled across a rough patch of ice. She ignored him and tried focusing on where the sensation was originating.

Dante felt stronger, making her wonder just where he was able to get his strength from. How was it he could heal so fast?

"One of your neighbors was very happy to oblige in my time of need." He chuckled softly.

She wanted to close her eyes and just absorb the sweet feel of his mind as it cut a hot path over her breasts, down her belly, and to warm the place that had begun to ache between her thighs.

"What are you doing to me?" Even in her mind, her voice sounded breathless and her heart raced. She had to force her feet to move to keep up with Raul, when all she wanted to do is fall to the ground and allow the heat to overtake her body. Most likely, she would melt right through the layers of snow.

"In due time, my sweet." Angel felt him smile, really felt it and knew that he had a lust filled smirk across his gorgeous lips.

"I'm sorry, he has your book." She really did feel regret that she didn't hide it once she realized what it contained. Now it was in the hands of evil men. Men who would take the credit for themselves. At least, she thought that was why they wanted Dante's formula.

Instinctively, she knew that probably was not the case. She had a fear that whatever they planned to do with it was not in the best interest of anyone but themselves.

A surge of warmth pulled her back from her thoughts. Wetness pooled between her thighs, and the ache intensified within her. Once this was over, she would make him pay.

"Oh, it will be my pleasure." His dark voice said in her mind, answering her thoughts.

"Dante, can we stay focused, please. How are we going to—"

Raul pushed her into the backseat of a dark vehicle, the connection with Dante ended, leaving her suddenly cold. "Ow! Damn Raul. Do you have to be so rough?" She yelled over the seat, gagging at the smell of stale cigarettes, beer, and old food.

Raul entered the car, placing the book carefully at his side. There was no way she could reach it.

The car ride was long, she even caught herself dozing on the way, but she fought to stay awake, memorizing the landscape, in hopes of sending her location to Dante. Distinguishing the landscape turned out to be quite difficult because of all the snow. Everything looked the same. Raul did not speak to her on the way; instead, she just got a couple of hard looks through the rearview mirror.

Unable to stand the silence any longer, Angel asked, "Are you taking me to Abby?"

She received only another mocking glare through the mirror and a wry smile that set her nerves on end.

"So, you never planned on letting her go, did you?" As she questioned him, she wondered if she should try to jump from the car, but then her sister would be left to the mercy of these monsters. No, it's better if they just take her to her sister and maybe together the two of them could figure out how to escape. Because she would not die tonight. Not now!

She had finally found someone that had shattered her barriers, and she was anxious to see just how much he could make her feel. Angel knew Dante would come. He would not have played with her earlier, if he didn't plan on finishing what he started. After all, this was over and her sister was home safe, she planned on spending hours, if not days, naked with him.

The car turned a tight corner and slowed. Angel looked out the window at a large building with multiple darkened windows, some were cracked or broken. A metal fence lined with razor wire outlined a deserted parking lot.

Hairs on the back of her neck tingled with dread as the car crept through the lot; the building grew more ominous the closer they came. God, if her sister were in there all alone, she would kill him. Plain and simple.

When they came to a stop, Raul leaped from the car and pulled her out, dragging her behind him. Dante's book was held tightly against his body, still out of her reach.

He took her to the third floor where he pushed her through the elevator door so that she could precede him into the empty room. One standing lamp in the far corner cast eerie shadows from the square columns onto the floor. Cold air from outside seeped through the damaged panes of glass.

Angel saw Abby. Her body slumped haphazardly in a chair, her chin touched her shoulder and it looked to be in an odd angle. Angel's heart stopped.

"What have you done, you evil bastard?" She flew at him, sinking her nails into the skin around his eyes. He screamed as he pushed her off him. Raul looked at her and wiped away the blood that was starting to form from the gashes she managed to inflict around his eyes.

"You bitch! She isn't dead. But for that little act, I should kill you both right now. Manuel!"

A dark haired, dark-skinned guy appeared from around a corner. A large rifle rested in the crook of his arm. He watched her, as if waiting for her to make one wrong move so that he could fill her torso with holes. One finger rubbed lovingly over the trigger, the man looked like the type who'd enjoy killing.

Pushed hard from behind, she fell on her knees onto the floor. Manuel was quickly there with the barrel of his gun pointed directly between her eyes. Angel swallowed hard.

Manuel repositioned the gun and stepped back.

"Get up. Go sit by your sister," Raul said as he hauled her body up by her elbow, shoving her in the direction of her sister.

Angel ran to her. Dropping down to her knees by the chair, she moved the dirty strands of hair out of Abby's eyes. "Baby, are you okay." Angel tried rubbing off the dirt on her sister's cheek. Abby's groan in response indicated that it was a bruise. She touched it lightly as tears gathered in her eyes.

Abby whimpered, "Angel?"

"Yes, sweetie, I'm here."

Abby slowly raised her lids revealing red-rimmed eyes. She appeared heavily drugged. "Angel. Are you really here?"

Angel heard footsteps come up from behind her. Turning, she saw a smiling Raul still wiping at his eyes. Angel tamped down the urge to claw at his face again.

"What have you done to her?" Angel asked, her voice strained.

"She'll be fine. She's just a little drugged; not that it will matter."

A lump formed in Angel's throat. "You're really going to kill us?"

"Yes, I am. You see this?" Raul stroked the leather covering of Dante's book. "Our government has paid me well to confirm that this gets delivered into their hands." His eyes lit up as he looked at the bound book, lust filling his eyes. "And now I have it, so you are no longer needed, Miss Truheart."

"How could you be my friend for so long and then do this without a care in the world?" she spat out, anger infusing every word.

Raul chuckled and rolled his eyes. "That was a mighty fine act, wasn't it? I did start to care for you in the end, Angel. That's why this year had to be the one. We watched Dante for a while, but we never could hold onto him. But, you see..." He leaned down close to her face. "He did always come back to his little store to open his precious shop for Christmas."

"Why did you need me?" Angel toyed with Abby's limp fingers. She could feel the slow pulse pounding at her tips, the sluggish flow of blood resounding faintly in her ears.

"Why did we *need* you?" Raul repeated sarcastically as he stood tall and began to pace around the room. "We didn't really need you, but Jonah and I talked..." His dark eyes turned and cut right through her. "Yes, Jonah and I talked and we figured since you didn't get murdered in the explosion with your parents—which was supposed to happen by the way—we could just off you now."

She could not contain her impulse any longer. She threw herself at Raul's chest. Her nails raked his cheeks, creating crimson streaks. She heard screaming and did not even realize it was coming from her. All she knew was that she wanted to shut him up. Shut him up and kill him.

Raul grabbed her forearms, squeezing them tightly until they tingled from the lack of circulation. She did not care; her fingers and nails flew across his face again. He finally managed to push her away before retrieving the book he had dropped.

"You are a crazy bitch!" he screamed, wiping away the blood running down his face. "Manuel!" he yelled, then noticed the man had disappeared.

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Chapter Thirteen

"Are you looking for him?" A deep voice resonated in the room, sending thick liquid down her spine and caressing that secret spot that started to ache with need. Dante's voice echoed power and authority.

Angel looked behind Raul as Dante stepped out of the shadows. In one hand, he held Manuel, his head dangling at an awkward angle. Blood dripped from a ragged wound at his neck.

"Dante," Angel whispered.

A feeling of protection washed over her and a familiar tingle tickled her own neck as she watched the Dark God slowly walk into the light. The red glow of his eyes made her gasp. At that moment, she could not deny that he was something other than human. His presence sent her body up in flames. She wanted to run to him so that he could hold her in an embrace that would keep everything bad away.

With a quick jerk, Raul turned around to face Dante. He sneered and clutched the book tighter against his chest.

"What are you...?"

"Doing here?" Dante finished for him, "I'm going to kill you for hurting what is mine."

Angel's heart soared. Dante's movement commanded every living thing inside the room, except for Raul who held the book against his chest like a child with his favorite toy. Raul's head shook with denial as he approached her. Before she had any idea what he had planned, he whirled around,

catching her arm and twisting it behind her. She let out a pain-filled squeak as the tendons in her arm stretched beyond their limit.

"What's yours?" Raul questioned with contempt. "This you mean?" He shook her. "Or this?" Raul then extended the leather bound book at his side before quickly pulling it back against his chest, clearly not taking any chances with Dante so close.

Angel's eyes closed as the pain in her shoulder burned fiercely down to her fingers. She tried pulling her arm free, but Raul only made the pain worse by yanking her arm to the back of her head.

She squeezed her eyes shut, letting out a small moan.

"You will let my Angel go." Dante's voice was barely audible. His eyes were a blaze of color, red swirling with black, as they focused on Raul.

Raul shuttered behind her as he held her tightly, not allowing her any leeway for possible escape. She was the only reason Dante didn't attack. "You better back off. I'll kill her now without a second thought and take your precious book with me."

Dante's gaze never wavered. "Afraid not, Raul. I'll reach you before you take two steps. Do you want to take that risk?"

"You would put her life in danger?" He pulled Angel's arm making her squeak with pain.

Dante started toward her, but stopped.

She reached out yet again on the line of energy to find Dante and felt his fury. Silently, she communicated that she

would drop to the floor so that he could rush Raul, she could handle a broken arm if it came to that.

Dante sent back waves of encouragement. She knew he was bidding his time, waiting for the perfect opportunity to attack, so she would create it for him.

Taking a deep breath, she dropped her body to the ground. Distantly she heard a snap and knew it was her arm, but she pushed the pain away as her body hit the cold floor and rolled away from Raul. Just as she cleared Raul's feet, she felt the wind move over her. A loud crash sounded. Rolling into a sitting position, Angel cradled her arm close to her body.

The two men rolled around on the floor in front of her sister. Crying out, she crawled with one hand until she reached the back of the chair and pulled her sister to one of the large columns so that she could work the binding free and still see the fight.

* * * *

Raul crashed against the wall sending the book flying from his hands. Dante did not let his attention waver. He knew he must kill him.

Dante grabbed Raul up off the floor and flung his battered body across the room. Raul landed across a table, sending glass and paper flying in the air before crashing to ground. Moving quickly, Dante raced back to the downed man and hauled him up by the collar of his shirt. Raul tried to swing weakly, but missed. His movements were much slower now. Dante pulled back his fist and started to strike his face, but

Raul surprised him by pulling up a pen and jabbing the end deep into his shoulder.

Dante grabbed his shoulder, screaming in outrage. Raul dropped from his grasp, and the man scrambled toward the elevator. The smell of Raul's blood and fear was thick in the room, fanning the deep hunger within. Dante was determined that it must end immediately. He was tired of this fight.

He looked over and saw Angel hugging Abby close against her chest and whispering words of encouragement. Her sister's head bobbed back and forth over her shoulder. Satisfied they were okay, he returned his attention to Raul; he allowed him to get within inches of the elevator before he flashed before him.

Raul lifted his hand in a staying motion and Dante held back.

"This won't die with me. Just remember that. This will not die with me. They want the formula and they'll do whatever it takes to get it. I was just a pawn, just like Angel." In one last bid to escape, he attacked Dante, wrapping his legs and arms around his body.

Dante stumbled into the wall before he decided to take full advantage of the position. He pulled Raul's hair back exposing his neck, and he sank his teeth deep, letting the blood flow out the puncture wounds. He was not using him to feed, but to bleed him dry, and he did not mind that he was being careless.

He drained him until he felt the last flicker of his energy fade away. One final beat of Raul's heart signaled the end.

Rising his head, Dante dropped the lifeless body to the ground.

"Dante!" Angel called.

He rushed to her side and noticed the tears flowing freely down her face as she held her sister close. She looked up, and the pain in her eyes struck him.

Pushing her hair away from her face, he said, "What is it? Is your sister okay?" He looked down and noticed the paleness of Abby's skin. He tuned his hearing to her heartbeat and noted the slowing of its pace. The blood in her veins sounded thick, indicating that whatever Raul had used on her was meant to kill.

He grabbed Abby from Angel's grasp. "Hurry, we must get to a hospital," he said.

"She needs help Dante, please."

He searched her eyes and she reached up and cupped his cheek. He found that he would do anything she asked of him to make the pain in her eyes go away.

"Meet me at the hospital, Angelina, and stay out of trouble. The building is secure; I made sure. Use the car Raul brought you in and get there as fast as you can. I'll assure that your sister is safe." He bent his head and captured her lips in a searing kiss. He tasted the salt of her tears and, more importantly, he tasted what was uniquely her. Unable to control himself, he grew hard as she ran her tongue over his lips before she pulled away.

"Go," she said.

Leaving her behind was the hardest thing he had ever done, but he knew that her sister was the last of her family, and he would make sure she remained alive.

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Chapter Fourteen

The sky was ablaze with oranges and pinks as the sun broke the horizon. She was making her way to the hospital to check on her sister, and hoped she would also see Dante. If what she knew of vampires was true, which wasn't much, she he probably wouldn't be there, but gone somewhere to sleep. It had taken her a little longer than she anticipated because she had to find something to bind her arm with. She didn't think it was broken, but she feared that it was out of socket.

When she finally made her way into her sister's room, all thoughts fled from her mind as relief flooded through her at seeing her sister alive. Tubes and wires connected her small body to a machine at her side and different beeps and clicks echoed in the room.

Taking Abby's slender hand in her own, Angel squeezed in a gentle manner.

Pale eyes looked up from gaunt features. "Angel, I was so worried that something happened to you, but Dante told me you were fine." Angel felt the desperation in the way Abby's fingers tightened around hers.

She patted her sister's hand to reassure her that she was there. "Don't worry, Abby. I'm fine, you're fine. We'll be out of here and back on the sofa watching old movies soon. Although I think it's time we started celebrating Christmas again. What do you think? I feel so blessed to have you." Bending down Angel placed a kiss on Abby's forehead, before too long she heard the even breathing of sleep.

Letting her sister rest, she pulled a chair closer to the bed. There propped against a vase of flowers she saw the note. Elegantly written on the front was her name, and she knew instantly whom it was from. Her heart leapt as she eagerly flipped it over and tore out the missive stored inside.

Dearest Angelina,

The sun is rising faster than I had hoped. I wanted to drink in your beauty to last me until we meet again. Your sister is a tough woman with a lot of spirit. She should be out of the hospital in a day or two. I will be honored if you would meet me at my shop after the sun goes down.

Until the sun sets,

D.

Angel closed the letter and moved to stand at the window. Orange, pink, and purple streaked the sky. What would it be like never to see those brilliant colors again? Then again, what would it be like to live without Dante?

The sun slowly rose over the treetops.

* * * *

When her sister woke, they chatted about their ordeal and Angel tried to make her sister feel safe and secure in the hospital. She even told her about Dante, and after much contemplation, revealed that he was a vampire to her sister's shocked dismay.

Alarm in Abby's eyes soon turned into curiosity. "So is he going to turn you into one?"

Angel just shrugged her shoulders, "I don't know, but when I am not with him I feel this emptiness inside me. It's like a hole that only he can fill."

Abby's eyes turned dreamy, and Angel tried not to laugh. "You're in love with him, Angel. I'm so glad to see you happy." She gazed out the window. "It's almost dark."

Angel's stomach tightened with nerves, and she gave her sister a peck on the cheek. "I will be back shortly. Will you be okay while I'm gone?"

"I will. Just go, sis. The guard Dante posted will keep me company."

Angel turned and noticed a tall, imposing figure standing at attention by the door. He was quite handsome with his blonde hair cut close to his scalp and a lean face. His eyes never wavered to acknowledge her, but she knew he was more than aware.

Feeling satisfied that Abby was safe, she left the hospital with one thing on her mind. How was she going to get a vampire to make a commitment to her?

Fluttering butterflies in her stomach grew more frantic the closer she got to the shop, and the heavy cold in the air made her lungs labor. People walked wildly down the sidewalk in hopes of getting those last minute Christmas gifts since tomorrow was Christmas Eve. The bustling crowd formed an obstacle for her to weave in and out of, almost as if they were purposefully moving in front of her to slow her progress.

Reaching the front door to *A Christmas Night*, Angel looked through the window and noticed the old woman smiling happily as she helped a customer. Many others stood around

the decorated trees in awe of the fabulous decorations with expressions of happiness on their faces as many held the ornaments in their hands with care.

Her heart began to swell at the remembrance of her family being together at Christmas. They had such fun together, maybe it was time to let her family go and start making some new memories.

As she stood there, looking into the foggy window, her heart felt lighter, and the ghosts of her family were finally put to rest.

Dante walked into view and her breath caught in her throat. She pushed through the door and walked to where he was at the back of the store, inhaling the familiar scents of cinnamon and peppermint that filled the room. Taking in a deep breath, she savored the smell of Christmas on the back of her tongue, finally allowing herself to feel the Christmas spirit—or maybe it was the effect of the ornaments. It did not matter, because she was happier than she has ever felt.

When he turned around, their eyes locked and she thought she might be falling into the depths of the darkened orbs. She stood motionless in front of him, not sure if she should make the first move or if he would.

He quickly took her option away by striding up to her and pulling her close, tucking her head under his chin.

"Dante," she whispered, burrowing close to his chest, inhaling the scent of irises and lilies that smelled heavily on his clothes and she knew he had been working on putting his lab back together. Her belly ached at the thought of his loss.

Quickly pulling away to look in his face, she said, "The book—"

He covered her lips with a finger. "I recovered it, Angelina. No worries." He pulled her close again, and she sank into him, wanting to feel more of him, to show him how much he meant to her.

They stood like that for a moment before he gently guided her to the back. When they entered his office, he shut the door behind them and pushed her up against it. He crowded his body close to hers and she felt his overpowering masculinity. She had to remember to breathe as he stood looking deep into her eyes. His right hand came up, and a finger slid down her cheek, slowly tracing the outline of her jaw.

Closing her eyes, she savored his gentle touch as it seared a path across her skin. She felt the breath on her lips a second before he covered them with his own. His tongue played with the seam of her lips before pushing its way inside. Her knees buckled at the erotic sensation. He wrapped his arm around her waist, holding her close to his body and she felt the object of her desire hard against her belly.

Feeling brave, she reached down and caressed his erection lightly with her fingertips. He growled as his cock jerked in response to her touch. Nudging him away, Angel shrugged out of her coat, then drew him closer. He bent down so that he could rub his lips over her neck. He let his fangs lightly nip her, sending chills down her back.

"Dante. Please, make me like you," she whispered.

He pulled back with a start.

"Like me? Are you sure, Angelina?"

The way he asked, she felt that he wanted to jump on the offer, but needed to make sure she was certain of her request. Although she had no idea what it required, she knew she did not want to live without this man, even if it meant no more sunrises. He would be her sun, and their love would glow as brightly as one.

Her finger played along the seam at his shoulder as she looked up into his eyes. "I love you, Dante. I want to be with you."

He moved her hands until they wrapped around his waist. Her head lay against his chest, and she felt the strong muscle inside his chest. "Ah, Angelina. My Angel. I love you too. I knew you were mine the first moment I fed from you."

She lifted her head. "You fed from me?" She wanted to be mad, but instead she found it quite arousing.

"Yes, my love. And I'll do it again." He nipped her jaw as he moved the hair back from her face. His finger brushed her chin, angling it up so he could press his lips against hers. Their kiss was passionate, heated; with it they released all their fears. His energy reached out on their shared connection and searched for her energy.

She shivered as she felt the sweet invasion in her mind. As their tongues danced wickedly together, their energies swirled behind her eyes in vibrant pink and purple colors. At this moment, they were separate, winding around each other in an exotic dance. Angel's head fell back against the wall as the ghostly apparitions of their energy slammed into each other in an explosion of color, creating one energy.

She felt their combined energies humming inside her, deep to her core. Dante pulled her deeper into his embrace until she thought she might dissolve into him. Opening her eyes, she saw that the room was dark with just the soft glow of their bodies.

"Are you ready, Angelina?"

"Will the change hurt?"

Shaking his head, he rubbed his thumb across her lips creating a gentle pull between her thighs. She wanted to physically feel him inside her now, wanted their bodies joined as one like the energy that was now dancing around them.

Dante lowered her to a small couch in the corner. He unfastened the buttons of her shirt open, then moved to the waist of her pants, pulling them down her legs. Making quick work of it, he laid her clothes on the floor as one hand rubbed her abdomen. Her stomach twitched in response as he lightly touched her. His free hand cupped her breast through her bra, gently kneading it. Her body arched into his palms, coaxing the playful fingers to continue. Shards of pleasure exploded inside her and unable to stand it, she pulled his shirt open, sending buttons flying. She splayed her hands wide across his smooth chest, wanting to explore every inch of him.

He pulled away, making her reach out for him. She saw that he was taking off his pants. Angel squirmed on the couch as she took in the full impact of his gorgeous body. Every well-defined muscle begged for her touch. His dark skin was not what she expected, considering he was not able to go out

in the sun, but it made him appear more the Dark God she named him.

When he covered her body with his own, easing between her spread thighs, she moaned her pleasure.

"Angelina, my Angel. You have made me complete." He took her in one thrust, burying his shaft to the hilt inside her.

The pain this new intrusion heightened her arousal and she began to move underneath him, coaxing him to join her. He worked his cock deep inside her, massaging the walls, and reaching deep to touch her core, simply stroking her body to life.

The smell of their lovemaking filled the room as their orgasms built within them. Dante began to pump faster, building the height of their ecstasy. Her body stiffened just as her muscles tightened around him sending them both over the edge.

"Dante!" She screamed her climax as he struck her neck with his teeth.

He found his release following her, while taking in her sweet juice. Her body relaxed beneath his hard form. Each pull of his lips sucking greedily against her neck sent her into another orgasm, before she drifted into darkness.

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Epilogue

Chilling wind howled outside the window of Angel's apartment as the fallen snow made light tapping noises on the glass. Abby left the hospital after convincing her doctor that she was fine. Dante's guard had offered his protection there as well, but Angel suspected it was because he was smitten with Abby.

A warm smell of cinnamon lingered heavily in the air of her apartment and feminine laughter echoed from the kitchen.

"I told you that was too much, Angel," Abby said, leaning over the stove to stir the pot of potpourri. A large smile spread across her face, and the signs of her ordeal were slowly fading from her face.

Angel walked up to peer over her shoulder. Shaking her head, she pushed her sister aside, picked up the wooden spoon and began to stir. "When Dante gets here with the tree, he'll be able to tell us what we did wrong. He should be here soon. I can feel him close."

She felt his phantom arms wrap around her and she could not stop the blush that stole through her cheeks. Being a vampire had many interesting little tricks. She found they could touch each other just by thinking about an area of the body. It had gotten to be a game with them.

"My God, Angel. Tell him to stop," Abby said, rolling her eyes. She leaned over the counter as Mitchell, the guard from the hospital, came to her side, wrapping an arm around her waist.

Angel watched her sister's eyes light up. Happiness did not seem like something they would have again after her parents died, but now looking at the glow on her sister's face, and thinking about the way Dante filled her heart, she knew her life finally had meaning.

The vampire conversion did not turn out as she expected. When she finally woke up after she passed out, Dante opened a vein and coaxed her to take his blood. She thought she would throw up, but once the fluid touched her tongue, she had never experienced anything so full of taste. Human food could not compare to the delicacy of the tiny droplets that exploded across her taste buds. She drank from him heartily, filling her veins with the precious fluid of his life.

When she had regained her strength, Dante informed her that he was an ancient Vampire, vowed to keep one-half of a powerful formula safe until the birth of a new Vampire Queen. Right now, the vampires were scattered throughout the world to keep their kind safe. Therefore, he had tried to hide, only emerging during Christmas, hoping he would not draw attention to himself. Unfortunately, he had, and now they knew that Raul was just a minor player in greater scheme that needed to be uncovered.

The sound of the door slamming brought Angel from her thoughts. She turned off the stove where she had absently been stirring the potpourri and went into to the living room with Abby and Mitchell close behind. She was shocked at the huge pine making its way into her apartment.

"Dante! My goodness, where did you get such a huge tree?"

Winter's Blood [Hunt for the Elixir Series Book Two]
by Midnyte Dupree

"It's your first Christmas with me, my sweet. I had to get you a decent tree." Dante moved the tree to the corner then stood back and looked at it. "It's perfect. Come, love. Let us decorate. I have the perfect ornaments."

The End

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About the Author

K.L. Bjork, also writing as Midnyte Dupree, is a full time telecommunications analyst, a wife and a mother of two small children. She started reading romance in 2003 and when all her favorite authors were in between books she decided to do some writing on her own. That is when she discovered the joy of creating characters and building worlds full of magic. Christine Feehan was the first author in romance that she read and instantly fell in love with the Carpathians, soon following Feehan she discovered Sherrilyn Kenyon and the Dark Hunters. She anticipates each book coming out, but now understands why it takes so long between stories.

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Melanie Rose Darling is a very unhappy florist.

Hailed by the bridal flower world as an artistic genius, Meli works long nights making bouquets for women lucky enough to find love, while she herself lives a life of solitude. She yearns to share her heart and body with someone other than Bob, her *Battery Operated Boyfriend*, but acute shyness keeps her from engaging the "living" world.

However, Meli's quiet and predictable existence takes an unexpected turn when she is pulled over and ticketed by the most gorgeous cop she has ever encountered ... Officer Michael Johnson. Though he does not seem to notice her as anything more than a traffic violation, Meli makes plans to overcome her timid nature and seize the police officer's attention ... using any speed necessary.

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* * * *

To Rub, Honor and Obey by Melinda Barron

Moreen McGee is a perfect example of how poor decisions made in youthful rebellion can haunt someone for life. Now on probation for ten years, she serves her court-ordered community service at a center for troubled teens, in the hopes of stopping other kids from taking the wrong path.

But when one of her young charges pickpockets a wallet from her high school nemesis, Aliya Baban, Moreen decides to put the illicit skills she learned as a teenager to good use ...

by breaking into Aliya's apartment to return the stolen wallet, thus keeping the kid who stole it out of trouble and out of jail.

However, once she's in the opulent Manhattan flat, Moreen can't resist the urge to take one small token from the woman she still blames for her own downfall—an old, neglected oil lamp that she's sure Aliya will never miss.

Moreen accidentally summons a gorgeous demon-turned-pleasure djinni named Paran ... and he's not too thrilled with the theft of his property. Moreen has rubbed his lamp, the contract is sealed. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. And Paran intends to use this time to help his little felon learn some important lessons, including the true meaning of the words honor and obey.

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