



Hunting Series , Elizabeth St.John

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THE DEAL

Clenching the contract in his hand, the stone-ground sizzled against the soles of his sandals as he made his way past the river Styx. Under the surface of its black waters, tormented souls cried out in agony for release from the pain of hell. Ahead of him, a cave opening in the side of the blazing mountain of Tartarus. Lava spewed from the peak. The burning echo of flames toyed with his immaculate hearing.

Large iron basins exploded into a blaze of orange fire when he stepped into the dark cave. Eerie shadows played with his sight while he made his way further inside. He had been here only one time before. The sound of crumbling stone from behind captured his attention. He spun around and watched as the cave entrance collapsed. As if the stone were alive, it formed a wall, trapping the vampire inside the mountain.

He adjusted his long robes and continued toward his destination. Once past the end of the cave, he was presented with a large room with half-dome shaped walls and ceiling. It was not elegant. The walls were rough stone and human bodies were the mortar. Arms and legs of the damned dangled out from between the tight stones. As he took his first steps, the limbs came alive. Blood-stained fingers reached in his direction. The legs kicked frantically and muffled screams could be heard inside the walls. Immense heat surrounded him and the tormented cries tickled his fancy. Random echoes of the exploding volcano radiated above him.

His plan was not with the master of this realm this time, but with his right hand. The guardian of the underworld. Cerberus, a massive three-headed hellhound with a mane made of hundreds of snakes and a serpent's tail and the claws of a lion. The beast had the ability to turn anyone who crossed his gaze, into stone. The vampire treaded lightly and risked everything to have this meeting

with the monster. Especially, when he hadn't secured a proper invitation. Cerberus was known for consuming any soul attempting to escape the realm. The vampire steadied himself and continued forward. As he knew his soul was already imprisoned within the realm.

At the end of the tunnel-like room, he came upon two large iron doors. Snakes and poison thorns adorned them. The rusted hinges shrieked in protest as he pushed against them, revealing a spectacular view. If he were human, fear would invade his entire body but there was nothing but an empty void where his soul should be. There was only one emotion which drove him. Desire. His need to control and his hunger for destruction and blood pushed him onward.

When the vampire spotted the hellhound ahead of him, he should have stopped. He should have run away. The massive size of it made his feet freeze into place as he took it all in. Cerberus was seated before the dreaded Gates of Hades. The enormous size of the beast gave him pause. Nearly too large for the room alone, the beast's heads watched him closely. Large black rot iron bars of the gate had been twisted to resemble a demon skull with large horns protruding from its head. Blue and white flames burned in the eye sockets and it seemed to snarl downward with long sharp teeth. Behind them, the burning volcanic heart of the mountain. As if it were a living being, volcanic lava crawled independently toward the top. The air surrounding the vampire was thick and deathly. Dense enough to choke any mortal.

Cerberus watched him keenly as he approached. Within feet of his goal, the vampire's path was blocked by another. Orthrus, the brother of Cerberus. Though his body was similar in size and had the exact same sinister characteristics, he only possessed two heads and large black wings. Drool dripped from the snarling teeth as it stalked slowly around where the vampire stood. One misstep and the vampire would be swallowed whole.

The vampire looked up at Cerberus and presented the deal.

Property of Elizabeth

CHAPTER 1

Peeking through the slits of my eyes, my vision was blurry for a fraction of a second. My eyes opened and deep crimson engulfed my vision. Damp cotton had been draped over me, sticking to my skin. I gripped the thin material and pulled it away quickly. It was as if I had never seen before. I inspected the vaulted ceiling above me. Stringy brown cobwebs hung in the corners loosely and I could even see the tiny imperfections in the paint. Every brushstroke stood out to me as if they were mountain peaks.

The smooth movement of the oxygen filled my lungs as I drew in an unnecessary breath. Dust particles in the air clung to the back of my throat and tongue. It was slightly bothersome. It felt like I was choking on strands of hair. The vanilla-scented candles on the mantle, only feet away, pleased my nose but there was something else in the air. A wild scent irritating the back of my throat. It wasn't off-putting but delectable in a strange way. I rubbed my tongue on the roof of my dry and sticky mouth. Old blood lingered there. Crusted in the corners of my lips. I had to peel my tongue away from the tacky surface. Swallowing was a chore. Intense thirst invaded me. A deep painful dryness I'd never experienced.

I shifted my body to the side and swung my legs over the edge of the mattress. When my toes hit the carpet, I flexed them against the twisted threads. The enhanced sensation of its softness nearly tickled my skin.

I chuckled, "That's fuckin' weird." Even my voice sounded clearer. Astonished, I shook my head and inspected the room. Clothing was in an entangled mess on the floor. The sweet floral essence of a woman clung to the fibers. The memory of the smell teased the end of my tongue like a word I couldn't place. The scent tantalized my desire for the female form. I turned my head to look at the bed I was seated on. What I saw startled me, causing me to stand and back away from it slightly. The creamy sheets were stained with excessive amounts of blood. The wild scent burned my nose again. Memories flooded my mind like a movie on fast forward. My head spun slightly. I looked down at myself and my body was also covered in old blood. I had taken what I wanted from Lyrah and passed out with her in my arms. Her fluids, yet dried, still clung to my flaccid cock.

Then another memory came to the surface.

Rage filled her lovely expression as she straddled my naked body. Fresh vampire blood dripped from her lips and down her chin. It left a stain trailing down the length of her bare breasts. She was the only woman I ever truly wanted and, in that second, I thought she had come to her senses. I gripped her hips and attempted to grind my pelvis against her but she was positioned higher on my stomach. I was in pure ecstasy at that moment. I had two sisters in my bed and I was already playing with visions in my mind. I didn't expect what came next.

Before I could react, she gripped my head with a firm grip and bit into my throat. The pain was excruciating as she quickly pulled away, taking my flesh with her. My throat flooded with blood and I couldn't breathe. She softly whispered my demise in my ear. Rage filled me and I tried to subdue her but I was far too weak from the blood loss. My need to breathe was too great but I couldn't draw in a single gulp of air. I was drowning in my blood. She pinned my arms down and thrust her fingers deep into my exposed throat, shooting even more pain through my body before darkness invaded me.

My hand lifted and wrapped around my now healed throat as I thought about my death. The memory of Jessica's sharp teeth still lingered there. "How am I still alive?"

A door opened. The instinct to protect myself kicked in and I spun around to face the potential danger. A hiss slipped through my teeth. A woman slunk inside and closed the door quietly. When

she saw me, she gasped deeply with her hands over her mouth. I knew her. Though I thought she was always a lovely woman, with my new vision, I noticed she didn't look right. Her eyes were crazed and she smelled of fresh vampire blood. Her skin was pale and I could see every pulsing blue vein beneath it.

"Gage?" She approached me quickly.

Confusion rushed over me, "Jade?"

"Oh my god, baby. You're alive. How?" Her chin quivered as she reached up to touch my face.

I gripped her wrist, stopping her, "I...don't know." Her skin was soft and I could feel her heightened pulse underneath it. Her knuckles were split but healing slowly. There was also a circular pink mark on her palm that seemed to be healing as well. An immense pressure developed on my teeth. I traced my tongue against the sharp tips as I savored the scent coming from her hands. She flexed her fingers slightly and everything slowed to a crawl. As her hand moved, the cuts split slightly, ripping open and blood began to seep in the shallow wounds.

"Gage...Gage? Baby, are you alright?" Her voice was but an echo but her warm breath washed over my face and I was captivated by the scent.

Without giving her an afterthought, I grabbed her violently and my muscles tensed as my fingers gripped her. Her eyes widened while pure fear washed over her expression and she attempted to pull away. My grip grew tighter while grinning down at her. The desire to sate the burning in my throat awakened. The scent permeating from her body and the pounding of her terrified heart enticed me. Darkness shielded my vision and a carnal snarl escaped me. She cried out in pain when my sharp teeth tore into the soft skin of her throat. I quickly covered her whimpering mouth with my left hand as her blood coated my tongue, sending me into a frenzy. She bit my palm but that didn't stop my attack.

Jade's blood was warm, smooth, soothing, and surprisingly sweet. While it coated my throat and calmed the burning dryness, I became more focused. She tried to punch my back but there was no use. She was too weak. To keep her from collapsing, I wrapped my arm around her slim frame. At first, her heart was hammering but now it was a slow thud. I released my bite and sighed against her neck as an exhausted lover would. Sated for the time being, I licked my lips free of her blood and released her. Her slack body bounced against the blood-stained bed. As her eyes rolled into the back of her head, reality invaded me. I had become the one thing I hated. The thing which destroyed my entire life. I was now the essence of death and darkness. A vampire.

I searched my room and dressed as quickly as I could. While tying my bootlace, my gut felt as if it were tumbling. The sensation was like falling or having an elevator come down quickly. Before I knew it, I was surrounded by black smoke. It reminded me of when my hellhound magic would take over before my body shifted. It felt nonexistent but seemed to have a life of its own while it swirled around my entire body. "What in the actual fuck?" My body was quickly snatched toward the window.

PERORDER HUNTING GAGE: REVEALING THE SHADOWS BELOW

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