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THE
AWAKENING

A VAMPIRE HUNTRESS LEGEND



Excerpt from The Awakening

Synopsis: Carlos Rivera is on the hunt for the Neteru, and is stronger than Damali's Guardians ever imagined. Prayer lines notwithstanding, he's coming for his woman. This thing between them goes way back; it was there even before he'd turned. As a vampire and a man, he has a lot of decisions to make, a lot of factions after him, but there's one thing that's always been clear—he wants her.

After Carlos Enters the Compound...

“An in-your-face-breech! I don't believe it—we're history!”

Rider was standing on the weapons table raising a crossbow at the vacant doorway. J.L. was freaking out as cold-body alarms suddenly went off, like the hallway sprinklers did—after the fact—after Carlos had released his hold on them and cleared the building. Their lights had gone out and come back up. Shabazz and Big Mike were stomping on flaming maps of Hell like madmen, Marlene was walking in a circle brandishing her stick. Dan had a glock-nine frozen between both hands as he stood near the computers with his mouth open... and the only thing Damali could do was gently wipe her lips with the back of her hand, savoring the taste of Carlos as she studied the wall. Time started slowing down.



She closed her eyes and put her fingers in the deep grooves Carlos' nails had left. The tremors that ran through her were like waves of aftershocks she couldn't control. She didn't care. Unable to move, she glanced toward the Holy water sprinkler systems spraying the hall, alarms sounding very distant, the team's voices muffled, and breathed the last trace of Carlos into her—almost following it, she could feel him pull her, and his dilemma was hers, too... she could literally smell him. Yes, like her, he was torn to shreds between that rock and a hard place decision. Not just torn, it was much worse than that, this ache. It ripped. Filleted all judgment till she had to catch her balance.

What was everyone babbling about? If they would only shut up, she could hear him! She couldn't regulate her breaths. Her skin was on fire. Her hand covered her neck, and his moan that she'd swallowed sent a new coating of heat inside her belly. He was calling her, still, if they'd only shut up! He was standing across the road on the other side of the border of light, summoning the strength not to break down the door. She could feel him getting stronger. The shudder of need that ran through him quaked her from even that distance away. She closed her eyes and told him the truth that she wanted to be with him right now more than he could ever know.

His response was immediate. The fantasy carved images of him and her in her brain... she could feel each delicious detail as she stood very still. Something in her snapped, and rather than retreat from the forbidden pull, she transmitted full blast everything she had always wanted with him. *Didn't you know since way back when, how many nights I nearly lost my mind?* She couldn't help it, unvarnished truth spilled out silently, privately, and the echo in her mind was his burning reply. *If I had known... trust me, I would have never let you go. Had I known tonight, I would have carried you past the lights to my lair. Just come to me!*

Oblivious to the chaos around her, she connected beyond the compound perimeter to mentally meet him.

Instinct told her not to, cautioned her not to go there or open up a return response, but she found herself tilting her head opening herself fully to him. In her mind she bit him, and nuzzled him in reply, kissed him hard, and scored him again



with her nails. She felt his intense shudder through every cell of her body. He made her crave his entry with such force that her hand reached out to hold onto the wall once more. She felt the rough texture cinder block, and in her mind she slammed him against it, kissing him harder, wanting to take more of him deeper. *It's all yours, baby... just get me out of here, I'm guarded.*

Just as quickly as she'd hurled the thought, something powerful, razor sharp, scored her throat—it didn't hurt, but shards of light exploded behind her lids and a tremor ripped through her body, morphing into a convulsion. Frustration imploded, sent her next response to him as a dare, a challenge with the image of her room, her in it, and what she'd like him to do, then she bit him harder within the vision. *All night, her thoughts whispered, till you fear me more than the sun.*

A howl in the distance fused with his moan, welding his desire to her spinal chord, tearing through her vertebra, and leaving her breathless. In her mind she could hear her voice cry out like it had its own will, the effect of it making him take her harder, she wasn't forming words, just deep, honest, uninhibited chants of ecstasy... harmonic expression, hitting notes way outside of her range... and now he couldn't catch his breath, was begging her not to stop. She smiled, telling him the cold-blooded truth. *Yeah, I hear you, baby, been needing you like this for a very long time.* She'd been trying to explain, but he never would listen.

He put up his hand to the prison glass of invisible distance that separated them, and she met it, raising her palm, spreading her fingers—it left a pang that traveled. The sensation was so raw that she continued to brace herself so she wouldn't fall. With her eyes closed she could literally see him exactly where he was standing in the thicket, washed with moonlight, total energy, shoulders bare, her mark on him, sharing adrenaline, needing to hunt, needing her more, his chest expanding and contracting, breaths were now coming faster, he sensed her locking in to feel him again, to hunt him. His deep, intense eyes said it all, his expression pained like hers. There was only one answer she could give him—*yes*. She could dig it. They needed to stop playing with this!

He'd caught her reply like a hard blow to his jaw, and it made his head snap back. Yeah, he'd heard her response loud and clear. What? Don't play with *him*?



Who was playing right now? Then his summons became a command and transformed into an urgent request as he dropped to his knees in the tall grass outside. *Please come to me, come outside, I can't take it, baby.* Her mind wrapped around the fervent message and stroked it as she sent it back. Watching his chest expand, taunt with muscle as he battled for oxygen, sweat running down his temples, arms outstretched, the blue light of the moon making every surface of him glisten, his Adam's apple bobbing with each ragged breath that he drew, the answer became so clear. His voice was an insistent refrain for mercy, telling her what she already knew: *Damali, come to me. Now! I need you.*

"I do, too," she said out loud, then started for the door. Whatever her guardians said, she was leaving. She had to. "Turn off the lights," she heard herself say.

Suddenly she was shaken hard. Dazed, Damali looked around. Marlene's grip tightened