



The Hunted

Book Three of the Vampire Huntress Legend



Excerpt from The Hunted

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Synopsis: Carlos Rivera has descended another level, drawing more power from the dark side. The battle in Hell was nothing compared to the ongoing battle he's fought against his desire for The Neteru. And this fantastically frustrating woman is going after the were-demon realms, too? Not on his watch. He's more than a Master Vampire, he's Council Level now... and still, for all his power, there's one objective that has consistently eluded him—Damali Richards. But not tonight.

At A Chaperoned Summit Meeting of Both Forces... After the Battle in Hell

“They’re right, baby,” a deep, familiar male voice said as a figure stepped out from behind Father Patrick, as if materializing from thin air. “You never picked me up, never saw me coming, and if I was any other Master, you’d be dinner by now.” Reflex had brought Damali’s hand to her blade, Madame Isis was drawn, but her mind was having difficulty accepting the image. Her breath caught in her throat. She stared at this predator that had on a black soft-structured linen suit, black t-shirt, dressed to the nines...Dear God it was Carlos. A thousand emotions ran through



her at once. Then as she stared at this being, rage began to fill her, heating her insides, causing her blood to pump hard and fast. Carlos was dead, and something had inhabited his form. Stolen him. Polluted his body. Her arm trembled as she gripped the Isis tighter, and she knew within her heart that a spilt second of hesitation would have cost her a jugular. The arrogant creature before her had been right.

Damali stood speechless, her eyes never leaving this entity claiming to be Carlos as he rounded the clerics and walked toward Dan. She poised herself to take a clear swing, but had to wait to get into position so she wouldn't hurt her teammate. Her mind screamed at the others to take aim, to get into the correct stance. Even Marlene seemed deaf to her silent battle stations commands. What was wrong with them! Slack-jawed, she watched in horror as the two men exchange a careful hug. She kept panic at bay, however, knowing that this entity had come for her—so be it. She'd lay in the cut, wouldn't make a false move to make it snap the neck of one of her brothers... oh, but when she got in range—it would be on.

Rider nervously backed up a little to give the Carlos look-alike room. Had her entire team been seduced? It couldn't be Carlos... could it? And that was just the problem. She wasn't sure. But one thing she did know for sure, Master vamps moved like lightening, could kill a man with his bare hands within seconds and this thing was messing with her, staying out of range. She shuddered with rage. It smiled. *Oh no, motherfucker, not in my house.*

“Yo, dog, how's it hanging?” Carlos grinned, and pounded Dan's fist.

“I'm... uh, I'm cool,” Dan stammered.

“You lived through Hell, guess you all right.”

Dan nodded. “Thanks, man. I owe you.”

Carlos laughed. “Never tell a Master vamp you owe him. Not even me.” Carlos shook his head and looked at Shabazz with a half-smile. “You need to school the newbie, *hombre*. Don't want him ass out when it counts.”

“I feel you,” Shabazz said with a slow, sly grin. “We got his back. He don't go out alone yet.”

“Good. It's all good,” Carlos said, pounding Shabazz's fist. “You cool, Big Mike?”



“Yeah. I’m cool. Sounds crazy, but part of me’s glad to see you, brotherman.” Again, Carlos nodded, understanding. “Thanks for chillin’ with the lights till I got in, J.L.” He looked at Jose and smiled. “*Ese*... whassup? Know it took a lot of self discipline not to freak at the last minute.”

J.L. and Jose just nodded as Carlos scanned the room. Rider was still jumpy, though. He gripped the pump shotgun Carlos knew was loaded with hallowed earth shells. He could smell it. “Yo, dude. You all right?”

“No fist pounds, definitely no close hugs, Rivera. I appreciate what you did for us down in the tunnels, and even kinda like your style... However, you will excuse me if I give in to a nervous twitch.” Rider, lowered his weapon, but didn’t break the barrel back.

“Sho’ you right,” Big Mike said. “We being real in here. You cool and all, but we just being real.”

“No problem,” Carlos replied, letting his breath out slowly. He’d tried to keep Damali only in his peripheral vision. Looking at her directly would mess him up for sure. Her pulse was already making his ears ring.

Marlene’s studied him for the slightest incorrect movement, and he could feel every sensor in the room locked on him. “Marlene, thanks for allowing this ten minutes. The point was made, and you all know what you’ve gotta do. Keep her safe. I’m out.”

Marlene nodded. “Thank you.”

“We cool, Mar. You’re good people. Always were.”

“I’ll catch you, later, baby.” He briefly looked at Damali, wresting himself from her, and keeping near the clerics. “I wanna talk you, honest I do, but now is not a good time. Aw’ight? We’ll pick it up later.”

He had to get out of there. The look of shock, relief, disappointment and rage on Damali’s face was working every cell in his body. Plus it had only been a month since her first ripening and the mild, but wondrous, scent of Neteru still lingered. She hadn’t said a word, just circled him, staring, her blade held low, moving counter-clockwise to him like she’d lunge at any moment. Her team was not his greatest danger. Nor was The Covenant team. She was. He needed to roll.



“J.L., hit the exteriors, all right?”

J.L. nodded, but Damali held up her hand. Everyone stood still, waiting. The room crackled electric with quiet. No one even dared to breathe. The hum of air conditioner compressors created a low sump-pump sound in the background. A stereo was on somewhere in the compound. The humans had enough adrenaline oozing from their bodies to give him a contact. He could see their eyes blink in slow motion as they stared at him and Damali while they continued to circle each other. The pores on their faces enlarged within his peripheral vision. He could detect the moment a bead of sweat slipped down their skin. His tongue glided over his lips and he tasted salt. The tension in their muscles increased, joints locked so tight that with the slightest movement, they threatened to pop. He felt the air, sensing for a weapon release. He smelled their blood, twelve nervous humans with hearts beating a rhythm out of their chests.

“I have to go,” Carlos said, his gaze steady on Damali.

She shook her head slowly no. It was a millimeter of movement. Her locks swayed ever so much. The adornments in her hair and her earrings chimed. Lion’s teeth, a tiny silver charm... Ankh fertility symbols created natural music at a nearly imperceptible timbre. Her pupils had eclipsed her irises. Shea butter, almond oil, the scent of her was an intoxicating blend with something else she emitted... something different than Neteru. He’d smelled it on her before, but couldn’t place it. Her face and arms glistened. The muscles beneath her smooth skin were a network of taut, steel-like cable. He could hear the blood pumping through her veins as she stalked him. She was gorgeous, poetry in motion. The crocheted white dress had holes that showed skin. As she moved, the dress moved with her body, barely concealing it. The fluorescent lights glinted off of the Isis and sent shards of illumination against patches of warm, damp flesh.

He allowed his gaze to rove over her in a slow undressing. “I have to go,” he repeated more firmly, his voice dropping an octave. He had meant it as a statement, but even to his own ears, it had come out as a plea.

“You talk to me,” she whispered through her teeth and stopped circling.

“Oh, shit...” Rider backed up a few paces and leveled his shotgun.



“Shut up, Rider,” Marlene snapped.

Damali’s eyes never left Carlos’. All she did was hold up her hand and her team went still once more.

“We should leave,” the eldest cleric said quietly. “Before somebody gets hurt.”

“Oh, what the fuck,” Rider threw Big Mike a crossbow, and he caught it, nodding. Rider glanced at the clerics. “I thought you had an understanding with dude?”

“We do, and it’s time to leave,” Father Patrick insisted. “If it’s not too late.”

The Covenant team backed up, cautiously rounded Damali and Carlos, standing the line on the side of the Guardians with weapons raised. J.L. had armed himself with a battleaxe, even Dan and Jose now had silver tipped stakes in their hands. Shabazz had pulled Sleeping Beauty out of her holster.

Marlene folded her arms and leaned against the weapons table. “Steady, gentlemen. Nobody get an itchy trigger finger. Stay cool. Have faith.”

“Have faith? Mar—”

“Shabazz, we know how this has to go down.”

Damali tuned out the other voices, her goal singular, her mind focused. There was no shred of trust in her, as she looked at the Master vampire that had made her taste fear. She had to remember what he was, not allow the illusion to take her. This liar had fooled trusting clerics. Carlos was dead. This was something else. And this entity possessing a familiar body, had shape-shifted to trick her team, had rolled up on her in a battle-station ready compound, and dissected her while she was blind. The worst part of it all was, he’d been right. If it had been Fallon Nuit, she would have been dead... or worse. What did this thing want?

“Speak to me!”

“It’s me, Damali—Carlos. Use your third eye!”

“You’re a liar! Carlos is dead!”

She circled, she moving with him. She was indeed more dangerous to him than sunlight at present.

“I can’t get a mind-lock,” Carlos told Marlene and Father Patrick. “She’s in a mental black box.”

“Don’t screw with my team! They don’t have telepathic capacity that can break



my will, I don't care what illusions you throw at them—”

“No, Damali,” Marlene said, her voice urgent and strained. “Listen—”

“No! They sent this one as a decoy. I heard Carlos die—I saw it! Vamps are the masters of deception.” Damali narrowed her gaze on the entity before her. “How dare you assume his shape... I will kill you.” She seethed, her grip tightening on the Isis.

“Then plant the Isis,” Carlos said, his voice escalating with emotion. “If that’s what you need to do so you can see, then plant it right in the brand.” In one deft motion he tore his black T-shirt from his chest, exposing his scar. Hot tears of frustration stood in his eyes. “Remember this, huh, Damali? Ask the damned men who pulled me out of a cave in the desert! Ask them how they found me. I suffered for three days in a cave in the fucking Mexican desert before they could get me stateside.”

Carlos slapped the center of his chest. “I got this carrying you, baby,” he said, his voice low and strained. “You’re the only one that can smoke me in this room.”

He closed his eyes, stretched out his arms, and leaned his head back. Her legs moved beneath her, hurling her toward the thing claiming to be Carlos, sword raised. She heard Marlene scream, “No!” She heard Rider cry out her name; she heard The Covenant gasp; could feel her team move forward as though to stop her, and the tip of Madame Isis came to a sudden rest against bare skin. Her blade arm trembled; her intended target didn’t open his eyes or flinch. The tip of Madame Isis never even smoldered.



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