

An Excerpt From: BLOODLINE: THE LEGACY

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A subtle ache crept up her wrists and forearms. She hadn't counted on the pain of holding the gun. She couldn't have anticipated needing this much time.

"Get out of here!"

"As soon as I get what I want," he said.

"Who are you?"

"You know," he said.

It just couldn't be. The voice matched, but the creature who'd attacked her in Croatia and whose leering face she'd tried to forget held no resemblance to this man. This man was young, with fine cheekbones and midnight-black hair hanging to his shoulders. His child-like fascination with the book, from which he yet had to avert his gaze, was an illusion. Everything about him seemed poised in stealth mode. Katarina shivered.

The pain in her wrists worsened. She should fire, or lower her arms. To fire, she'd have to get closer for better aim, but the present thirty feet between them was as close as she'd ever want to get.

Still grasping the gun with both hands, she lowered her arms and welcomed the immediate relief. The intruder sat as still as a statue. He moved only to turn a page and did so with such a delicately precise motion that the stroke of his fingers across the page

christened the silence with mesmerizing force. He handled the book like a priceless possession. He didn't even blink. Not once.

And then he looked at her.

A cold stream slithered down her back. Even from thirty paces, the man's unblinking stare convinced her of two things—that she couldn't bring up the gun again and that those were the eyes she'd seen in Croatia, and in her nightmares, and in her day dreams.

"The coins are mine. I found them," she said.

He laughed. "You found me too. Are you implying that I am yours as well?"

The mocking suggestion gave her new determination. She retrained the revolver.

"Leave! Now! They aren't here." Thank God she'd left the coins in the bank.

"You will go to that stage-coach building tomorrow and bring them here tomorrow night," he said.

He'd picked the thought right out of her head as if she'd spoken aloud. Another wave of cold dread passed through her. If he could read her thoughts, she had nowhere to hide.

He returned his attention to the book. "I will wait while you think about it."

He flipped the page and resumed the marble stillness. Looking at him filled her with a scream she had to suppress. She'd never seen anyone sit so motionless and so commanding at the same time.

"Aha! Here it is."

He began to read aloud in a voice so refined it could weave lace. The voice drew her closer so she could hear, but as she watched his mouth move and heard the sound come out of it, she realized he wasn't speaking English.

Then she recognized the language, and her jaw dropped. He followed the lines written in English, but he spoke the words in Latin as if he knew the whole thing by heart. In Latin. And it was like no Latin she'd ever heard. She had two years of Latin in high school, and two years in college, and she'd never heard anyone recite with such crisp pronunciation and flawless rhythm.

Something stirred in her chest. The sound, spoken with that smooth and gentle baritone, spoke to a lost part of her that she immediately recognized and could barely keep from crying out to claim it. With every phrase, the intruder freed the words of Marcus Aurelius from the confines of a book and made them as alive as they might have ever been. One would have to be a serious scholar to even bother acquiring the text in Latin, let alone learn the whole thing by heart. To be able to perform it the way this man was doing required so much more. He spoke Latin like he'd been born to it.

In that moment, more than at any other time, Katarina knew she should be afraid. She should be very afraid, but she could only stare at the movement of his lips and let the words wash over her while tears gathered in the corners of her eyes.

When he fell silent, the pistol weighed in her hand like it didn't belong there. Then he faced her again with a cold, determined glare. Her hand began to shake. If she believed, for one second, that he meant her no harm, she deserved whatever was coming to her.

Retreating a step, she raised the gun. An intruder broke into her apartment. She should act accordingly. Running seemed like a good idea all over again.

“There is nowhere to run, Katarina. I will find you wherever you go.”