

Forever After

Danielle Forrest

Copyright © 2013 Danielle Forrest
Published by Danielle Forrest
Edited by ...
Cover art by Danielle Forrest
Cover and Interior Design by Danielle Forrest

All Rights Reserved.

ISBN:

Chapter 1

A Hunt for Blood

I breathed heavily through my nose to better scent my prey. He was still here. The strong scent of pine burned my nostrils, making things more difficult, but that faint wet dog smell still lingered in the air, and the blood chill that went along with it. I'd lost him, so I sat cross-legged, my katana stuck in the ground and my eyes closed. I dragged a long deep breath in and sank down with the exhale, releasing every molecule of air I could. I focused on all the scents around me, on sounds of animals as they traipsed through the underbrush. I'd been sitting there a few minutes now, the nagging fear I'd really lost him plaguing the back of my mind, a sarcastic inner voice snarking at me saying all that remained were a few squirrels and an owl looking for a meal.

Suddenly, a wind blew his scent past. To the east. In one smooth motion, I launched my body with all the grace, strength, and speed attributed to vampires.

Within minutes of changing course, his revolting scent grew stronger. He thought I'd given up, I realized. Fool. He must have stopped too. Otherwise, he wouldn't be so close. I stopped within twenty feet of him, seeing his massive frame through the pines. He was a big one all right. My clan warned me about a powerful one in the area. Apparently, I'd found him. In my head, I knew the advantage in this situation was mine. He couldn't smell me, not when I sat downwind of him. But even without a scent, not much beat a werewolf's hearing and vision, so I'd have to be quick and careful.

I waited in the darkness, not even daring to breathe. Letting my heart slow, just about stop. There was no way he'd

hear me but, as I waited behind a tree, I was still concerned he might see me before I was prepared to attack. I wanted to observe him for a while before I ended him. Know thy enemy, after all.



An hour dragged by, but the werewolf hadn't moved. This worried me. And bored me. I've never been good at sitting still and my impatience only intensified after turning. As I sat out of sight, but still within range of my sense smell and hearing, I couldn't help but work through the facts in my head. As I frowned and puckered my face in consternation, I kept coming to the same conclusion. Werewolves simply didn't wait around for no apparent reason. It was a full moon, after all. There was fun to be had. Besides, most werewolves didn't have any self-control when fully transformed. I was starting to get the feeling I was in WAY over my head and I didn't like it. Not one bit. As I gnawed on my lower lip, I groaned inwardly, not allowed the luxury of making a noise but frustrated none-the-less. It looked like this was going to be strictly recon.



Fifteen more minutes and another werewolf showed up. Though it seemed strange from what little I knew of werewolves, I suspected they'd planned on meeting and, from the looks of things, I had not one, but two, powerful werewolves on my hands. Though they didn't talk, no fully transformed werewolf could because of the jaw structure, they seemed to communicate and when they first met, they shook paws, almost like business associates. It was kind of creepy. With their paws, they drew in the sandy dirt. I couldn't see what they drew, so I could only assume it was to make up for the lack of speech. When the meeting ended, I followed the

Forever After

one I'd tracked this far as he left the small clearing and headed to the north. I had a bad feeling about this...



It took a solid hour and a half before we reached our destination and there was just one word for it. Trouble. As the forest opened to empty fields, I saw a large stone mansion in the distance. My blood ran cold again. I knew instinctively it was a werewolf safe-haven. My best guess would be the Were I'd just followed was their leader...

Chapter 2

Home Again

As I headed to town, it was close to sunrise. I felt it, like an aching in my bones. But the clan would have to wait until tomorrow to learn of my discovery. We intended our manor to be inaccessible to humans and, because of that, nye impossible to get telephone access. In the meanwhile, I'd invite my boyfriend over. Chase worked for the local P.D. as a Detective. With any luck, he'd be getting up sometime soon and we could get together. We usually only met during the daytime, in part because I work nights at the County Morgue as a Forensic Pathologist. Strangely, I chose a profession where I'd have to cut up dead bodies all the time BEFORE I became a vamp. Almost like fate, eh?

I hadn't told Chase I'm a vampire yet and, with luck, he wouldn't figure it out for a long time. We'd been going out a year and been taking it real slow. I told him I had intimacy issues. The truth? I was afraid. My stomach tied up in knots just thinking about it. I took a moment to calm myself, filling my lungs with deep breaths once more, only for different reasons. I really liked Chase and I didn't want to ruin it by confusing it with the cheap thrill I got with a kill. An image popped in my head of Chase on my couch, pale, not breathing, blood pooling from a wound. His eyes would stare back in that way only a dead person can affect. I had to admit, on more than one occasion, I pulled away because I was afraid I'd hurt him. So maybe I DID have intimacy issues, just not normal ones.

To explain away obvious problems that might arise, I told him I had xeroderma pigmentosum, or XP for short. I told everyone in my development that lie. Not long after I turned, I

Forever After

moved to a new community, a new city, a new everything. Better safe than sorry, right? I moved back to my childhood home of Southern New Jersey, home of the Jersey Devil if you believe in that sort of thing. Strangely, I don't. I know, I'm a bit of a devil myself, right? And it's funny, but the idea of a devil making its way through the Pine Barrens of South Jersey just didn't seem likely. Then again, neither would an organized pack of werewolves taking up residence near the Pennsylvania border or a clan of vampires in the Poconos.

I went to my office and slid out the keyboard drawer. I unplugged my laptop from the power adapter and plopped it on my lap. Chase would probably freak if he saw me with a computer but what he didn't know wouldn't bother him, right? Besides, I'd been telling him I only have a MILD case of XP to explain away the inconsistencies, since things like TVs, computer monitors, and most electric light were dangerous to someone with XP. Booting the computer by pressing the tiny round button with the circle and line through the top, I went beyond the IBM BIOS screen, to the Windows Welcome screen and finally my desktop, which was a respectful black. Black, gray, and purple set the tones of the task bar and everything else. Why Microsoft insisted on those pansy-assed pastels was beyond me. I clicked the icon on my desktop that said "Camera1" underneath it. It brought me to a web camera I'd set up. I began a ritual I started almost a year ago, not long after I turned, and, with any luck, would continue until the day I died. The camera mounted on the roof and saw clear past the development to a tree-lined field. I couldn't see a sunrise in person but, via the wonders of technology, I hadn't missed a single one since I turned. As I watched, colors crept across the sky, a ball of fire gliding inch by inch across the horizon, a burning ember gilding the field before it. As I watched, a tear followed a familiar track down my cheek as it did most every day around this time, the cool liquid leaving a stiffness along its trail. Why I'd never acknowledged the pure beauty of this, I

may never know, but I'd never forget again. Too often, people didn't see the beauty all around them until it was too late. I let out a quiet sigh in contemplation of that heavy truth.

When sunrise finished and I'd wiped away every remnant of a tear, I exited Camera1 and moved to Camera2. Camera2 gave a direct view of the street. From the comfort of my office, I watched as people went about their petty lives, going to work, running errands, or picking up the kids at the ex's. I liked to make up lives for the people I saw as I sat in my second story office. I found it fun. Like maybe that balding man in the grey pinstripe was embezzling money from his law firm and his wife was about to leave him with both kids. Maybe that woman with the blond hair, short black dress and spike heels was actually a skilled thief. Okay, so they weren't exactly realistic lives but they were fun to think up. And, sure, my fantasies trended toward the overly dramatic or tragic but was it really so surprising when that was all my life had granted me lately?

I put the computer down on the desk and dialed Chase's number. It rang twice before a husky, groggy voice came on the phone, grunting something unintelligible.

"Chase? Did I wake you?" I said, feeling bad, fretting that my call woke him up. But, honestly, when was the RIGHT time when you slept the day away?

His voice instantly perked up. "Angi? Hey, how ya' doin? I was hoping you'd call today."

"I'm good," I said with a smile on my face. "It's good to be wanted."

"So, you want me to get a movie or, maybe, a book from the library? Anything?"

"Well, just pick a winner at the video store and I'll make something absolutely fantastic for breakfast. How's that?"

"Sounds great. See ya' in about a half an hour?"

Forever After

“See ya’ then.” An even bigger smile came over my face. God, I was such a fool. Why did I always feel like smiling when Chase was around? Aw, who gives a shit? I’d better get started on that breakfast...

Chapter 3

A Day in the Life...

As I hung up the phone, I leapt toward the kitchen. I loved to cook. It was by far my favorite activity in the whole world. No other deed made my heart at peace quite like it. Sure, most of you are wondering why a vampire would love to cook. It's common knowledge vamps are on a liquid diet. Wrong again. In reality, I had to eat MORE to maintain my metabolism, thank God! I'd always loved to eat but I had such a slow metabolism I could barely consume a thousand Calories without gaining weight.

Eating and sleeping had always been my favorite activities, though. It's strange one of my favorite things is sleeping when I'm an insomniac but, then again, maybe not. I'd always loved eating and was well-known in family lore, for example, for my innate ability to eat inhuman amounts of bread. There was that time at Outback during my teenage years when the waitress looked at me funny and said with a mix of shock and chagrin, "Another? Haven't you had enough?" But, that's another story altogether.

As I entered the kitchen, I felt at home. I glided to the fridge and pulled out eggs, milk, sausage, bagels, the bacon you only have to microwave because I hate getting burned to hell and back by the grease but absolutely LOVED bacon, and fake biscuits because I'm lazy. Okay, so the biscuits weren't as fake as the bacon but still...

I pulled out the frying pans, started frying sausage, broke and scrambled the eggs and moved on to starting the pancakes. I always used those packets that were pre-made (sort

of) where all you needed to do was add water. I grabbed three bags and started mixing them to the proper proportions.

In no time, the biscuits were done, the sausage gravy was warming on the stove, the eggs were yellow and fluffy and the pancakes were perfectly golden with exactly three chocolate chips each, evenly spaced. Was I OCD or what? I tossed the bacon and the bagels in the microwave and waited for the doorbell to ring to signal break time. Invariably, I'd eat the vast majority of this and there wouldn't be leftovers. Chase would stare at me with a half bemused, half are you crazy look.

I started cleaning up, grabbing the spare eggs and bacon, pouring myself a glass of milk, I grabbed that too. Remarkably, I opened the door without hands. Ask me some day and I just might show you how I do it. I put the bacon and eggs away on a shelf and pushed the blood aside to put the milk away. Hey, sometimes it helped to have an emergency backup, right? I grabbed the butter and started setting the table.

In moments, I finished and started putting the food out when the bell rang. "In a minute," I yelled at the door as I made the finishing touches. I looked back at the kitchen, now emptied of food but scary in its disorder. Oh well, I'd clean it up later. "Coming!" I said to the door again. I went over, checked the monitor and there he was on the display, a little weird-looking with the downward angle of the lens but handsome as ever in his jeans and tight-fitting black tee-shirt that said: "You should see the other guy." He had long black hair that came about down to his shoulders. You couldn't see it on the monitors but he had the most beautiful blue eyes I'd ever seen. I unlocked the door. "Come on in." For obvious reasons, I never opened the door for people during the day. Chase came in, closed the door and I said, "Come on. I'm starving." He laughed. He had a good laugh. With a smile on

my face that belied my statement, I said, "I'm serious. Let's get to eating!"

One of the wonderful things about our breakfasts was they lasted forever. We spend most of the time either eating while the other person talked or vice versa. We talked about our days (yesterday for him or last night for me). Of course, I omitted a few details he wouldn't understand. As for the news, Chase got a call at the hospital about a "disturbance." Apparently, a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant for those not in the know) freaked out when she walked in a patient's room. A little flustered and maybe fearing trouble, an orderly called the cops. After they resolved the misunderstanding, the patient was discharged. Apparently, the staff felt if the patient was healthy enough to have sex, he was healthy enough to be discharged. The entire floor had laughs at that person's expense all day. I had to admit. If I'd been there, I'd have been laughing too, even if I'd been the one walking in on them.



When we finished breakfast and no food remained, I was still a bit hungry but I didn't tell Chase. I never seemed to fill up and most of the time, I was embarrassed by how skinny I was. Yes, it was true. I used to feel too fat. Now, I couldn't keep pounds on to save my life. Sometimes, I felt like I could float away, if it weren't for the fact I could lift a Mack truck with my thumb and index finger. I started clearing the table but Chase quickly interfered and whisked everything away. If only he knew I could balance all those dishes, pots, pans, cups and silverware on one finger to bring them to the kitchen. I'd done it before. "Fine," I said, "then what did you get me to watch?"

"It's a surprise. Wait until I finish with these dishes," he aimed the statement back at me with a grin that was part affection, part mischief.

Forever After

“Surprise? You know I don’t do surprises. Where did you put it? Is it in your jacket? Chase?” I walked back to the kitchen and right behind him at the sink.

“Yes, Angi?” he said, turning his head slightly to get a glimpse at me.

I glided my hands around him, saying, “Hurry up so I can find out what you got me.” He was wearing his lightweight jacket he loved so much and there was a rectangular bulge in the front where the inside pocket was. I slid my hand in his jacket and slipped it out, jumping back as he turned and tried to hit me with the water and soap suds that covered his hands. Thanks to cat-like reflexes, he missed and I stuck my tongue out at him, waving the box mockingly. My smile was anything but innocent. With a smile on both our faces, I slinked to the dining room and opened the bag with the box in it. He got me *Underworld: Evolution*. I loved that movie! And not a rental either, brand new. My smile broadened.

Yes, I know it would seem like a weird movie to like but let’s face it, Selene reminded me a lot of myself. Besides, who wouldn’t love to go around in skin-tight leather, leaping from building to building. Plus, I loved the way she always lands with a bounce in her step. I just can’t do that. Trust me, I’ve tried. If you put me in skin-tight leather and high heels, I’d be lucky if I landed on my feet and not my ass. Period. I could manage a quiet landing but graceful had always been a stretch. Besides, did a warrior honestly NEED a graceful landing? Not really. Just needed to not warn the enemies.

Chase finished the dishes and walked to the living room to find me beaming from ear to ear. “I guess you like it.”

“You know it.” I smiled a little brighter. I ran over to the DVD player and 42” LCD TV and started the close to impossible task of removing the safety seals from the DVD, which of course was in triplicate along with the skin-tight

wrapper. After about five minutes, I finally got the disc in the machine.

As I sat down on the couch, leaning into Chase, he said, “Can’t see why you like this movie. But I’m glad you’re happy.”

“What’s not to like? Perfect role model. Hot-ass chica in skin-tight leather, jumping off buildings and kicking ass.” I smiled again. God, if he only knew HOW perfect a role model she really was.

“I guess you’re right.” He smiled back at me.



After the movie, we played cards, drank and laughed. It was probably about three o’clock when Chase kissed me goodnight. I locked the door behind him and had already taken my shirt and bra off by the time I reached the bedroom. I grabbed the sports bra from the bed and pulled it over my head along with the tie-dyed Santana tee shirt. My jeans hit the floor last before curling up in my queen-size to sleep. Hmmm, I forgot something... Aw hell, it could wait until I got up. I rolled over and started dreaming of doing things with Chase I’d never done before...

Chapter 4

A Late Night Rendezvous

She didn't like it. Not one bit. Usually, she was at home in the darkness but now it seemed to enclose her, bind her, threaten her. She tried keeping her cool but the night seemed filled with dangers and threats. She knew it'd be no good entering this meeting in a cold sweat with her heart in her throat. That would be very bad. Good or bad, her body wouldn't listen. She tried to calm herself, get to her natural state. She imagined death and mayhem and that soothed her a bit. She ran her hand longingly over the cold steel slide of her holstered .45 and that calmed her the rest of the way.

She dragged her fingers through her long, curly hair. Not quite nervous, impatience certainly possessed her as she looked at her watch. Her client was late. She hated tardiness. A slight scowl came over her face that did nothing for her features. Good, mad was good, annoyed was better. She was accustomed to being annoyed when encountering these things. Though, if she was going to be honest, nowadays, emotionless was more common. She checked her watch again. Fifteen minutes late. She rested her hand on the stakes shoved in her belt, reassuring herself with their solid weight. One wrong move, just one, and the demon would be history. She almost wished it'd try something. Actually, if she was being honest with herself, she did wish it. Then she'd get both ends of the stick, no pun intended. She sighed and was once again at ease. Except, of course, for the fact the monster was late. Her mood sank again.

She leaned against the old brick wall when a snide little wisp of what passed for a man with a wicked grin on its

face darted into sight. "You're late, Nickolaus." She didn't even bother to disguise the venom in her voice as she hissed out the name.

It jumped on a post easily eight feet from the ground and said, "You're early," with a slight accent and a hint of the gentile under many layers of superiority. Of course, an insecure jackass would NEED the reassurance of attaining the higher ground.

"Do you really want me to smack that look off your face?" she snarled at it, positioning her body slightly forward in that way only women can do right but gay men sometimes achieve. She bet she could kill it from here, if she tried. The thought brought a grin to her face that would have sent chills down the spine of a normal person; that and the urge to run.

Holding up its hands, it said, "Hey, hey! Aren't we here to do business, vampire hunter?" Diplomatic asshole. She resisted the urge to finger her weapons again.

She glared at the monster before her, "We are. Just hand over the money and the information and I'll be on my merry way." And know someday your ass would be grass, asshole.

It smiled. "Now that's a little more to your reputation, vampire hunter." The vampire slipped its hand under its coat and pulled out an envelope. "Here you go, sweetie. All there, as we agreed. Just know, if you fail, I will kill you." Yeah, win or lose. Ditto, dumbass. "I think I'd rather enjoy it. From the smell of you, your blood would be sweet." It smiled and disappeared as quickly as it'd arrived.

Without further ado, she leaned against the wall and opened the large, flimsy, white envelope. She was curious, if nothing else, why a vampire would contract a vampire hunter to kill one of his own. All the better for her. After all, the money wasn't that great in her chosen field. She pulled out a picture

Forever After

of a skinny but pretty girl with black hair. She had an almost mischievous smile on her face. She pulled out the bio sheet and stopped dead when she read the vampire was only a year old. What the hell?? Why would it bother with such a young vampire? Young vampires didn't last long anyway, from her experience. The new ones were always easy to kill. She figured, between people like her and internal squabbles, most didn't survive. After all, how many young vampires did she actually encounter? She was certain it could have easily taken care of this issue on its own, so why enlist her and spend all this money?

On the other hand, who cared? She was getting paid for something she loved to do. What'd it matter why she was getting paid? And it wasn't like the vampire was going to survive long enough to reap the rewards of the contract kill, whatever they might be. She pulled the last thing from the envelope, a wad of bills, 100s, ten grand worth. It was time to start surveillance on this bitch.



When I woke up, my alarm clock read 10:30. I rolled out of bed and eased my legs off until I was in a kneeling position. Yawning and stretching a bit, I took my time standing and heading to the bathroom. With the flick of a wrist, I shocked myself with the worst hairdo on the face of the planet, exposed by the flickering fluorescent bulb. Groaning, I turned on the shower and sluggishly got ready to leave for the evening.

After a nice, hot, half hour shower, I dressed for a run to the mansion, where many of my clan lived, unlike me. Most vampires found it too hard to keep things up in the outside world. I found it quite easy but, then again, I was young. Maybe it'd be harder in another hundred years. Actually, scratch that, with the way technology was going, I'd guarantee it'd be

harder. I grabbed my bag and headed out the door, locking it behind me. I was still half asleep but my stomach rumbled away like a lawnmower. I'd catch Mickey D's, McDonald's, on the way out. I could see it now - four of those teeny little hamburgers with the small cooked onions, three medium fries because the super sizes weren't worth it for the money and the largest Dr Pepper I could get, no ice of course. My mouth was already watering. I'd drive. It would arouse suspicion if I ran at top speed around town. I'd let it wait until I was where nobody could see me.

I sat in the car in the parking lot as I finished my meal and sighed. The fries were perfect, soggy and salty at the same time. I loved those extra long ones that are invariably flimsy. When I finished my food, I went on to licking my fingers to get all the salt off them. One of the many blessings of vampirism, I didn't have to worry about heart disease. The thought made me smile because my family had a history of it, along with diabetes. Considering fast food was pretty much heart disease and Type II diabetes in a bag, the thought made me very happy now. Tossing the garbage back in the bag, I turned the key in the ignition and pushed the manual transmission in reverse while releasing the parking brake. It took me an hour to get to the mansion, most of which spent waiting at lights that never seemed to turn green because it was just that late. And to think, if I RAN, I wouldn't NEED to wait for lights...

The place was as I'd left it. After trekking through dense pines, I finally made it to a clearing filled with tall weeds and dense undergrowth. Pines surrounded the clearing and my destination, an old stone building, sat perched in the center of a near impossible to cross meadow. It was massive but dilapidated with twin towers at either end of the building, each having several stones missing and having long since lost a roof. The roof of the main part of the building was kept in good repair but the building in general was kept in ill repair on the outside to affect a façade of dilapidation and discourage busy

bodies. Leaping through the underbrush instead of walking, I made it to the entrance in under a minute. I pushed my way through the large, heavy wooden doors. "Where's Nicki?" I asked a startled vampire who'd been reading on the main stairs.

His entire body seemed to tremble as he rose to his feet. He opened his mouth to say something but closed it again and merely lifted his trembling arm toward my right. "Thank you," I said. Hmm, maybe I should spend more time here. I had no idea who that kid was. I clonked boldly into the room where Nicki stood by a bar, pouring himself a drink. "Nicki," my voice echoed off the walls, making him jump and spill his drink. I smiled. "I need to talk to you about matters of grave importance."

"Not now," he moaned before turning to me. "What is it, Angelina? What is it that's SOOOO pressing THIS time?" He walked around the bar to pour another drink without letting his guard down, without taking his condescending eyes from me.

"I've discovered the whereabouts of a werewolf pack. Close. Very close. It could mean trouble for us. I don't quite know the size of the den but from the look of it, it might be quite large. If you wish, I may investigate it further." I bowed my head just slightly. I hated to do so but it was required. Nicki was the steward of our clan. Meaning, while our true leader slept, Nicki was in control. It also meant he was responsible for every clan in the country, in effect Steward-King of the US. Stewards were the only males allowed positions of status in vampire culture. All other positions were given to women. There was the leader of each clan, the Chatelaine, which attended meetings that were held once a year to discuss policies and current events and any ongoing problems any specific clan was enduring. The clans were overseen by the Queen, who would pick a Princess-Chatelaine sometime during

her reign. The Princess-Chatelaine would oversee her Queen's clan and help with the duties that would one day be hers if she ever got to see the day her Queen stepped down from the throne. It didn't always happen. Unless, of course, someone makes it happen, a time-honored tradition in vampire society.

The most fascinating thing to me was how the Princess-Chatelaine was picked. Absurb, but fascinating. The Queen didn't pick from her own clan but slept, reaching out with her consciousness, searching for her, drawing her to the clan. It was said she would wake instantly when the Princess-Chatelaine walked through the doors. Bullshit, I thought to myself sarcastically. Our Queen rested, in waiting, in a room on the upper floor. I'd never met her. One person said she was nice. I just didn't know or care. If she was any better than Nicki, I'd smack her for putting him in charge.

"You will do no such thing," Nicki said between drinks in response to my request to investigate the werewolves further. "I am the head of this clan and we will NOT risk a war over your whims." Whims, my ass. He was just a fucking coward. I held my tongue.

My face started to turn beet red from controlled rage. I controlled my breathing and tried not to talk through my teeth. "Sir, if I may say so," I held up a finger and let out a barely audible grunt as Nicki tried to object, "having a decent sized werewolf clan will draw unneeded attention to us. There were two POWERFUL werewolves there. For two to congregate like that, there must a sizable population of werewolves in the vicinity. People will notice the quantity of deaths that would bring. We have to take out these beasts for our own safety."

"I said we'll do no such thing. Angelina, you seem to not understand there's more at stake than your obsession with werewolves. I have a great deal on my plate right now. I do not need to add a war with a werewolf pack to it. That is all. You

Forever After

are dismissed.” The smugness rolled off him in waves, smacking me in the face.

Storming out in a stiff limbed manner, I grunted, “Asshole,” as I cleared the doors. The boy jumped at my passing and dropped the book on the floor. I looked over at him. He was scrawny. He definitely didn’t eat enough and didn’t exercise enough to maintain decent musculature. “How old are you, kid?”

“Twenty-three,” he said, clutching the book defensively against his chest after having kneeled to retrieve it.

“In vampire years, moron.”

His mouth quivered, “Six months, ma’am.”

I rolled my eyes before looking him straight in his, “All right. Listen up, kid. First, if you want to live past today, I’d suggest you not call me ma’am. Second, if you want to last another six months, I suggest you get your nose out of that book and start eating more and using what you’ve got. Vampires that don’t train get killed. They don’t last long.” I walked into the other room and pulled a sword off a rack. Heading back, I tossed the weapon at the boy and said, “Here. You’re gonna need this.” He handled the sheathed weapon almost as if he didn’t know which end was which. “Well, put the belt on, kid, and let’s get moving.”

He looked at me petrified as he held the sword by the ends of the belt, “W-w-w-what?”

I rubbed my forehead, impatience oozing from my pores. “Come on, kid. This is your lucky day. I’m going to teach you the ropes.”

“What if I don’t need to be shown the ropes?” he asked, a tremor in his voice as he fastened the belt around him, fumbling with the buckle.

Danielle Forrest

“You do. Trust me.” After a few seconds, I pushed the main doors open. He must have realized the virtue of my proposal because he started running for the door. “What’s your name, kid?”

“Ben. It’s Ben. And yours?” His voice had finally calmed down and he seemed at peace again. As he’d been when he’d been reading the book. Good, he adapted well. Vampires NEEDED to adapt to survive.

I couldn't help but wonder why he just sat there, biding his time in the manor. He was young enough. He could spend the next decade or two living in the real world, making a living. He wasn't confined there, stuck without the ever-needed ID of today's society. So why was he sitting on the steps, reading a book?

“Angelina.” I extended my hand and he took it. “Nice to meet you.”

“So how long you been a vampire?”

“Only a year, but it hasn’t been easy. I was turned by somebody that didn’t much give a shit about showing me the ropes. I had to figure out everything for myself, which nearly got me killed a couple of times.” I laughed. It was funny how easy it was to laugh at things that were damn scary at the time. “Anyway, being a vamp isn’t easy. It takes a lot of work, creativity and quite the criminal mind. On a regular basis, we have to figure out ways of doing things so we don’t arouse suspicions. I can teach you. But tonight, I’m going to be staking out a possible wolf den. While we’re waiting, I’ll show you a few things.”

“Thanks, Angelina. Say, why doesn’t Nicki like you?”

I chuckled, “Hell, I don’t know. The truth is, I don’t mind. I enjoy annoying him. There’s always assholes in your life that just want to get in the way. That’s just God testing you.”

Forever After

“You still believe in God?” he asked, shocked. Believe it or not, it wasn't impossible to be a vampire and religious. Sometimes, it was the only thread I have holding me to my sanity.

“Course I do. I need Him now more than ever. I sin more now than I ever did before. That's the damn truth. So, every night, or afternoon, basically whenever you're going to sleep, you lie in your bed and you look up at the ceiling and you think, 'Please God forgive me. Just give me another path and I'll take it.' So yeah, I do believe in God. I think we all should. Gives us perspective. Let's face it, some of the older ones practically think they ARE gods.”

He laughed. Yeah, I thought it was kinda funny too. It didn't take us but a couple of hours to get back to the wolf den. We watched as wolf after wolf left or entered the den and we tried our best to make sure we didn't double count any. When everything was quiet, I told Ben tips for getting victims and disposing of the bodies in ingenious fashions. I started to teach him how to use a sword. He was quite the quick study but all the while, I couldn't shake this feeling of being watched.



Later that night, Ben headed back to the manor, waving and thanking me and generally making a spectacle of himself that made my inner hunter cringe. I went back to my hunting solemnly and, damn it, quietly. I ran through battle tactics in my head to kill the time, reviewing scenarios for taking out werewolves individually, what to do when confronted with a group, things like that. It was too late to catch many of them near the den and surprise them with a katana through his or her neck so I just sat and waited. That nagging feeling continued to plague me, though.

My nose wasn't near as good as a werewolf's but I scented nothing of significance anyway. I could detect no

werewolf, vampire or human. If anyone was out there, he was downwind. The night was relatively quiet as well. No sounds betrayed something large enough to be an enemy, not even a normal wolf. An owl hooted in the distance and it struck me as sounding uncharacteristically eerie. I shook my head, chiding myself for getting psyched out by, well, nothing.

After an hour or so, the groundless anxiety started to drain my energy and my nerve. I was twitchy and irritable, bordering on paranoid and itching for a fight. At that point, I'd have fought anything to release the energy stored in my muscles, werewolf or not.

Finally, I decided to get gone. I wasn't doing anyone any good sitting here, fidgeting in a tree. In the hopes of relieving the tension, I floored it to the car, letting my muscles ease and burn with the exertion. When I reached the car, I didn't want to stop. The nagging feeling was back, the feeling like I was being watched. It was driving me nuts, like a twitch between my shoulder blades that couldn't be relieved.

Could someone have followed me? At that speed? There weren't a lot of creatures capable of it. Werewolves weren't that fast and, because of my physical training, I was faster than most vampires as well, so I didn't think it was likely. I was pretty good at what I did. Even with Ben slowing me down, it'd be hard to follow me undetected. Nearly impossible, in fact. Anxiety humming through me once more, I scanned the black forest. The boughs of the Pine Barrens skeleton-like with their needle laden branches. I smacked myself on the forehead for coming up with yet another Halloween worthy bit of imagery. What was with me tonight?

I looked to the trees once more, daring them to inspire more demented poetic thoughts but, to my relief, none came. The trees were simply trees. The branches were scaled with green pine needles. The forest faded into black in almost all directions. A strange draining feeling bordering on sorrow,

Forever After

or maybe dread, filled me, emptying my body of what remnants of strength I laid claim to. Exhausted, I clicked the key fob and collapsed into the little convertible, letting my head fall back and bounce off the headrest. A groan escaped my throat before I sat up straight and started the car. Sleep. Sleep would do me a world of good.



When I drove into the spot in front of my townhouse, I noticed a blue sedan across the street I'd never seen before. My blood ran cold and my paranoia got away from me before I managed to grab it by the throat and yank it back down where it belonged. The car seemed to be an early 90's Honda Civic, I noted to assure myself I was still in control of myself. It might behoove me to keep an eye out for that little car. The anxiety was still there as I got out of the car, closed the door and hit the button on the key fob until the car gave me a reassuring beep. I jogged to the door, for some reason uneasy about being out in the open. After unlocking the front door, I dropped the keys next to the monitor and locked up again, double checking the deadbolt and chain. Now, time for that sleep I promised myself...