
STAR-CROSSED DEVOTION

Moonlit Series - Book Two

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

Rain poured down in the narrow alley, nearly an inch of water gathering on the pavement. There were no awnings to hide under, no boxes, not even a dumpster to crawl into. All Gracelyn could do was shiver in her soaked clothes as she stared down at the lifeless Chinese woman slumped over against the wall, the woman with the pretty black hair that used to be her mother. Her brown eyes were still open, but focused on nothing and held no light or life in them any longer. It was just a corpse the girl stood over now.

Footsteps echoed from beyond the alley, coming from the empty sidewalk. The street beyond glowed red, then green from the traffic light hanging in the intersection nearby. A lone car whizzed past, sending a wave of dirty water shooting over the curb and onto the sidewalk. The footsteps drew closer.

Gracelyn could still see the needle in her mother's arm. Tomorrow, after the rain and the darkness of night faded away, someone would find her and the authorities would easily identify her as just another victim of the rampant drug problem in the city. But what would happen to Gracelyn? They would just throw

her right back into the system, the same one she had already floated around in twice before, once when her mother had genuinely tried to get her shit together in rehab, and then again when that had utterly failed and placed her in prison. Some kids found kind homes with good people, but not Gracelyn. She cringed as she stuffed the memories back down. She wasn't going back there.

She was so lost in her thoughts as she stared down at her mother's lifeless form, that she didn't notice the footsteps growing louder as they entered her cramped alley and halted just behind her.

A gentle, masculine voice smooth as silk tore her away from her spiraling panic. "Hello, little mouse." There was a threat hidden in the kind words that made the hairs at the back of her neck stand on end.

She barely acknowledged the stranger's presence, only nodding her head slightly. She felt a hand land heavy on her shoulder and flinched. The stranger yanked her around and she stared up into the black void of the hooded face of a tall man dressed all in black: a black hoodie under a leather jacket, black jeans, and heavy black boots with toes wrapped in decorative steel. The stranger's head dipped down as if he meant to whisper something directly in her ear, but stopped suddenly as his attention was drawn to the slumped over corpse behind her.

She heard a sigh. There was the thought to run or scream, but her body wouldn't move and she felt like she was outside of it entirely, watching this strange encounter as if a third-party observer.

The man looked back at her, his face still completely hidden in shadow in the darkness of the alley. "You're in shock," he muttered. He was silent a long moment, then asked, "Your mother?"

Grace managed to nod, but her lips felt permanently sealed and her mouth was cotton dry.

“Any other family?”

She shook her head.

He sighed again. “It must be your lucky night, little mouse, because I too am an orphan.” He stood up straight and looked over her at the still body. He shocked her as he spat on it. “She deserved this, to die like trash in the gutter. She failed you, little mouse, even long before this finale, so many times in so many different ways that led here.”

Gracelyn hated his words, but she felt their painful truth in her chest.

Another voice called out to him worriedly from the sidewalk. “Master,” a woman spoke. “Hunters were seen just three blocks over. We need to get out of here. We’ll find you another snack along the way.”

He raised a stark white hand with black painted nails to acknowledge the woman’s warning. “Do you want to come with me, sugar? I can’t make up for the injustices you’ve suffered already and so young, but I offer a roof, a family, and a divine destiny.”

Gracelyn licked the rain from her lips and started to glance back behind her, but stopped herself. If her mother were still alive, she’d probably tell her the same mantra she had repeated their whole lives, even after her father had abandoned them, even after her mother had lost her job, lost their home, lost her dignity selling her body on the streets to brutal men, “Keep moving forward.” Her mother would not grieve this moment, but tell her it was an opportunity.

Her mother was full of shit, even in death. She would have definitely said those things, but not out of an uncrushable optimism or strong spirit. More likely, it would have been spoken out of self-preservation, because it was easier to survive without a kid following her around. Her mother had always been happy to push Gracelyn off on the kindness of others, happy to be rid of her.

She felt herself slipping back into the moment and regaining command of her body. She swiped her snotty nose, still congested from all her crying earlier, and turned to the sight of the slumped over corpse. She summoned up a mouthful of saliva and spat it at the dead woman without an ounce of remorse. She turned back to the stranger and nodded.

“All for a price,” he continued, a hint of amusement in his voice from witnessing her unique burial of her mother.

Her voice cracked when she answered, hoarse from weeping. “Anything.”

“Loyalty,” he replied gravely. “I offer the world to you, little mouse, and ask only in return an unbending loyalty to me.”

“Master!” the woman called again in a panic from beyond the alley as a black limousine pulled up. The silhouette of the slender woman opened the door to the backseat. “Please, Master. We have to go *now!*”

“Deal,” Gracelyn answered in her weak voice. A home and a family? Somewhere warm to sleep? Anywhere was better than here, and what the man offered sounded like a dream come true.

The hooded stranger nodded and motioned for her to follow him to the limo. He let her climb in first, then settled in beside her before the woman slid in and closed the door behind herself and settled into the seat across from them.

“Took your happy meal to go?” the woman asked dryly. In the dim light of the limo, she could see that the woman was dressed in a chic black dress with a corset styled belt, her long brown hair streaked with a single strip of gray that wound into the complicated chignon at the base of her neck.

“No,” Gracelyn’s new guardian answered. “No, I like this one. She stays.”

The woman let out a heavy breath and pinched the bridge of her nose. “Do you really think it’s wise to start collecting strays now? We’re not even properly settled just yet. Where is it going to sleep? What is it going to eat?”

Her rescuer waved his white hand dismissively before it reached up and tugged back his hood.

Gracelyn looked up with angular cognac colored eyes widening when she saw shoulder length white hair tumble out of his hood and piercing violet eyes focus coldly on her from a face horribly disfigured. She could see the remnant of what was once a beautiful countenance, a square jaw and pleasing cheekbones with pillowy full lips like the male models in magazines, all damaged on the left side of his face as if from a severe burn.

He gave her time to take in his appearance, offering no explanation or comfort, just time to adjust and close her mouth. When she recovered and looked down at the car floor in embarrassment, he continued, “My name is Lerexus, though you won’t hear many call me by that name. Doris here refers to me most often as Master, as do many, though out on the streets among the human world, you will more than likely hear me called Rex.”

She glanced back up in confusion. “Human world?” she echoed.

He turned slightly and swung an ankle over one knee as he draped his long arm along the backside of her seat. “Yes. You see, I am a very powerful vampire and all this,” he motioned his hand dramatically toward the dark tinted window as neon signs and streetlights glowed beyond in a haze of motion, “is under my control.”

“You’d think we’d take up residence in places other than crumbling castles and abandoned mansions,” his companion snorted.

“Silence, dog,” he snapped with an animalistic hiss that showed his fangs. “Or there won’t be any scraps for you to beg for later.”

The woman he had called Doris shrank into her seat with a humble nod. “Forgive me, Master.”

Rex turned back to the young girl shivering next to him. “I’ve been away a long time. It’s been a rough few years for me. I lost

track of what is important, became obsessed with revenge,” he trailed off with a haunted look in his otherworldly eyes.

“Vampire?” Gracelyn whispered again in awe. “Really?”

He refocused on her round face and reached out to tuck back a dripping strand of her chestnut brown hair. “Really,” he answered. He looked over at Doris. “Her mother overdosed in the alley. She’s an orphan. She has nowhere else to go. She said she would be a part of our family.”

Doris pursed her lips in disapproval, but nodded. In an exasperated tone she seemed unable to control, she asked, “And what are you going to call this one?”

In a weak voice, she told them, “My name is Gracelyn,” but she was cut off.

“Change your attitude,” he snapped at Doris again. “You wouldn’t even be here if it weren’t for my generosity.” He looked back at Grace and smiled kindly. “How about Mouse. What do you think of it, child? I don’t care what anyone else used to call you. This is your new life now. I’m going to make you great. I’m going to give you power and prestige. But you must always remember to whom you owe all this. You will always be the little mouse I found shivering and starved in the gutter. You will always remember your humble beginnings and that promise you made me back there. You swore your loyalty to me. Do you understand?”

She didn’t fully comprehend why he liked her so much or why a vampire would adopt a random twelve-year-old, but she knew better than to question something good. If he truly was going to give her all that he said, then it only seemed natural to keep him happy. “Yes, Master,” she answered meekly.

A sparkle of delight lit up his eyes. “Now there is an attitude we could use more of. What a good little mouse you are.” He grinned and slid his arm off the seat to curl around her and pull her into a side embrace. “Let’s get you cleaned up and put a hot

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meal in that fragile human tummy of yours.” He paused a moment, then asked with a mischievous smirk, “By the way, how are you at fitting into confined spaces? I might have a job you could do for me.”