



EVELYN
LEDERMAN

— NIGHTSHADE SAGA —
BOOK 4

DEADLY
NIGHTSHADE

Here is the beginning of Chapter 1 to wet your appetite:

Chapter 1

The Nightshade universe was in turmoil. In a realm ruled by vampires, deadly to vampires and humans alike, would-be masters battled for the remnants of an assassinated master vampire's empire.

Jace looked out from the top of his blood brother, Lorenz's keep. The small fortress was a haven in a world gone mad. Vampires and humans lived and worked side-by-side in harmony under Lorenz's strict rules. Any deviation resulted in a vampire's expulsion or death. Nightshade's piece of paradise would soon be under siege.

It was windy on top of the castle's battlements. Jace's long, wavy hair blew in his face, causing him to continually tuck it behind his ears. Perhaps it was time to cut his locks. Generally, the mass of hair was more trouble than it was worth.

Numerous fires burned to the north and west. Ash covered Jace's tunic and the stink of burned wood permeated the air. There was a glow on the horizon to the south where Yorik's former hive was located. Rubble was all that remained of the deceased master vampire's stronghold. His daughter, Afton, made sure of it. Jace had no idea why the ruin was ablaze.

"What are you doing up here?" Afton asked. The statuesque, raven haired beauty was mistress of his blood brother's settlement. Once a weak half-ling, she had transformed into a powerful fire elemental.

The improper fracturing of worlds at the beginning of time had altered The Creator's destiny and he became a monstrous being...an atrocity. Three of Jace's four blood brothers had mated with their soul mates and were converted into beings destined for their kind—elementals. The universe, in its wisdom, enabled the abomination The Creator became to survive until he found his soul mate and could evolve. Until that point, he had remained what Jace was. A vampire.

To be fair, he and his blood brothers were not the rotting corpses that threatened to attack the keep. They had been converted when they were alive, while the others were reanimated corpses. Those monsters created others like themselves. Blood thirsty creatures with little capacity to think beyond their need to feed.

He forced himself to look away from the destruction around him and turned to Afton. "More villages are burning," Jace said. "They are corralling humans. They want their blood to be strong enough to launch an attack."

"The fools," Afton commented under her breath. "They are killing off their food

supply for little gain. We have already liberated the human farm my father maintained. There are not enough humans left in the area to sustain a small group of vampires, let alone an army.”

Jace normally shied away from conflicts between master vampires’ armies trying to gain territory. So few were able to maintain control after a victory. Yorik had been the exception. His brothers’ involvement left him little choice but to support their efforts. Their soul mates believed they could change the face of the Nightshade universe.

“These vampires are no more than drones and do not think,” Jace commented. “They follow the orders of whatever master-hopeful is strong enough to control them. The mere promise of blood will rally the starving blood-lusting creatures to fight. This settlement had Yorik’s protection for several decades. That agreement became null and void with his death.”

“I know,” Afton said, “you are looking at the former bargaining chip. For whatever reason, my father entered into a treaty with Lorenz. All your brother had to do was mate with me. Yorik didn’t have a clue what would occur when Lorenz and I finally made love. If he had, I doubt he would have allowed our union to occur. He didn’t like anyone being more powerful than he was.”

“Yet, I understand Yorik was fascinated by your transformation,” Jace replied. “The problem was he could not control you.”

“Do you blame me for ordering his death?” Afton asked.

The beauty shifted her gaze, no longer making eye contact with him. Jace knew Afton suffered over the decision to end Yorik’s life and prevent her father from creating another half-ling. Jace found it ironic ... another blood brother’s soul mate was the object of the devious master vampire’s plan. Regardless, Sammuell’s mating with Miranda destroyed Yorik’s scheme since Miranda was no longer human.

“Yorik’s time had run out,” Jace informed her. “Drake was looking for any opportunity to destroy him. I am surprised my blood brother allowed Yorik to become so powerful. In the early days, Drake took great pleasure in destroying vampires who had any ambition. Now, look what has occurred in the vacuum created by Yorik’s death. Lorenz should have left this dimension with you when he had the opportunity.”

Drake, the oldest of his blood brothers, had traveled with The Creator for countless years destroying any vampires presenting a threat. When The Creator found his soul mate and left the Nightshade universe, Drake lost his zeal to destroy powerful vampires. He seemed more interested in satisfying his own carnal desires.

“Maybe I was naïve to believe humans and vampires could co-exist in peace in this dimension,” Afton admitted, sounding defeated. “I couldn’t leave the humans here defenseless, regardless of the utopia The Creator promised. If the growing army attacks tonight, we will be ready. Once the danger is behind us, we can travel to Samuel’s mountain settlement where you and Portia can be reunited. We all deserve a chance to rest before we ultimately decide what should become of this world.”

Portia. His soul mate. Jace had never seen her in her human form. The unusual affinity he felt for the beautiful black panther had been more than the strong bond he possessed with animals. It turned out his soul mate was a shape shifter. She understood what they were to each other, but chose to keep him in the dark.