

*Dark Hunger* excerpt

EXCERPT FROM

# DARK HUNGER

by Sara Reinke

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*Tessa Noble-Davenant is a vampire who will do anything to protect her brother, Brandon -- even if that means traveling across the country with Rene Morin. A cynical, brooding, yet startling sexy vampire, Rene seems to take pleasure in finding fault with Tessa's every move. Despite this, a sensual attraction begins to develop between the two, one to which neither can*

*afford to succumb. Rene and Tessa are being followed -- and a single misstep will put them at the mercy of forces more dark and powerful than even they can fight. If they are caught, the ecstasy of their newfound love will be matched only by the agony of its loss...*

## CHAPTER ONE

Rene Morin pressed the barrel of the Sig Sauer P228 nine-millimeter pistol against his right temple and looked down at the cell phone in his hand. He'd set it to speaker mode, and listened as the number he'd dialed only moments earlier began to ring. Part of him hoped the woman on the other end of the line wouldn't answer. *But oh, mon Dieu, another part of me hopes like hell that she does.*

He glanced at the digital clock on the small end table beside the couch. It was just after two o'clock in the morning. Considering he was in a motel room just outside of San Antonio, Texas, that made it...

*What? Midnight in San Francisco? Eleven o'clock?*

He never could keep track of changes in time zones. *That's what happens when you live three times the lifespan of a human. Little things like time become irrelevant.*

Rene's mother had been human, but his father had been what horror movies would have called a vampire. Only recently, Rene had discovered that there were others like him, creatures who called themselves the Brethren living tucked away and in secret in Kentucky. Secluded and relatively self-sufficient, the Brethren weren't allowed to leave the compounds that masqueraded to the

outside world as champion Thoroughbred horse farms. How Rene's part of the Brethren family tree had managed to escape remained a mystery to him. He'd only just learned of such things from two other recent Brethren escapees—a set of twins who'd brought more questions with them than answers.

*Brandon Noble*, Rene thought, as the phone he'd dialed rang for the fifth time. *And his stubborn connasse of a sister, Tessa Davenant.*

Tessa. If ever a woman had been designed to drive a man to plugging a bullet in his head, Rene figured it was her. Just thinking about what she'd done that afternoon in Thibodaux, Louisiana was enough to piss him off all over again.

But he didn't want to think about Tessa right now. He wanted to think about the pistol in one hand, the phone in the other, and the terrible, leaden loneliness in his heart that had led him to seek comfort from each.

"Hello?" A woman's voice came through the speaker on his cell phone, hoarse and sleepy, startling him from his thoughts. The barrel of the pistol wavered, then lowered from his face, and Rene let it dangle in his hand, resting against his lap as he blinked at the phone.

*Irene.*

"Hello?"

*Christ, she sounds exactly the same.*

He'd kept tabs on her surreptitiously over the years, and knew that she'd called California home for more than two decades. Even so, time and distance hadn't been able to fully strip the lilting Southern drawl from her voice, just as they hadn't from Rene's.

"Hello? Is somebody there?"

His throat had constricted; he couldn't speak, even if he'd wanted to. He stared at the phone, even as the illuminated display went dark, the woman on the line—*Irene*—hanging up on him. He

was surprised by sudden warmth in his eyes; they had flooded involuntarily with tears at the sound of her voice.

Viens m'enculer, *I miss you.*

The phone slipped from his hand, falling to the floor between his feet. He left it there, reaching instead for a bottle of Bloodhorse Reserve on the coffee table in front of him. It was practically empty; over the course of the last couple of hours, Rene had downed all but a meager swig. *Liquid courage*, he'd told himself, and he'd needed it. *A man can't just up and call his wife almost forty years after she left him without a little bit of something distilled beneath his belt.*

He swallowed what remained of the bourbon and smacked his lips appreciatively at the bittersweet flavor. That was how the Brethren clans had been able to amass a sizable fortune over the years: bourbon distilling and horse breeding. *Paris Hilton rich*, was how Lina Jones, his former partner on the police force, had described Tessa and her fraternal twin, Brandon. Rene thought that was a pretty accurate assessment. In his estimation, Tessa was as spoiled as Paris Hilton. *And every bit as fucking annoying, too.*

As he set the bottle back on the table, he cut his eyes deliberately away from the faded, creased photograph beside it. Tessa had found it in Thibodaux earlier that day; it had fallen out from among the pages of that damn enormous book she seemed hell-bent on lugging around. *A Tome*, she'd called it, with particular emphasis on the pronunciation of the word to indicate she thought it needed an initial capital letter.

His grandmother had obviously hidden the book. He'd never even seen it before that afternoon. Within its brittle, musty pages, Odette LaCroix had tucked the photo of him and Irene standing side by side in their Sunday bests, Irene with a little pill box hat on her head, her brow covered by a thin, netted veil, a bouquet of inexpensive flowers clasped between her gloved hands.

*Our wedding day*, he thought, and he didn't need to see Odette's small, prim handwriting on the back to know the date it had been taken. *May 19, 1970.*

His gaze traveled from the picture to the pistol that he still held in hand. *You were too good for me, Irene*, he thought. *I never deserved you. Or our baby.*

Still blinking against the dim fog of tears her voice had brought to his eyes, Rene raised the gun again. Once more, he pressed the barrel against his forehead, and closed his eyes, resting his index finger lightly against the trigger.

"I miss you," he whispered aloud, and that was when the door to the adjoining bedroom flew open with a clatter. His eyes flew open in start, and he had about a half-second to realize Tessa Davenant was rushing across the room, her mouth open as she yelled at him.

"What are you doing?" She plowed into him, knocking him backwards against the sofa, and he felt her paw at the pistol, tearing it away from his grasp. She uttered a sharp, disgusted sound as if she'd just grabbed hold of a live rat, and threw the gun across the room, sending it clattering against the TV stand.

"Have you lost your mind?" she cried, and then she reared back and swung her hand, slapping him across the face. "What the hell is the matter with you?"

When he didn't immediately answer her, she moved to slap him again and he frowned, catching her wrist in his hand. She struggled against him, and he caught her other arm in his free hand. After a momentary tussle—she was a skinny little thing, but surprisingly strong—Rene shoved her onto her back against the couch cushions. He leaned over, using his weight to pin her down and hold her still, despite her best efforts at struggling beneath him.

"Get off of me!" she yelled.

“Stop trying to hit me, then,” he replied.

At this, twin patches of bright, angry color bloomed in her cheeks and her brows furrowed. “I wasn’t trying to hit you. I was trying to keep you from shooting yourself in the head!”

“Well, who the hell asked you to?” he asked, his frown deepening.

Tessa blinked, falling abruptly still. He had to admit that as annoying and infuriating as she could be, she was a damn beautiful girl. Not his type, granted—he preferred his women blond, big-breasted and *quiet*—but striking nonetheless. She had a heart-shaped face with large, dark eyes framed in heavy lashes; a small, delicate nose and lips just curved enough and full enough to make him curious as to what it might be like to kiss them. Her dark hair was cropped at chin length in a sleek, simple bob, with a fringe of thick bangs that fell just above her brow line. Her brother Brandon had told Rene that Tessa was a dancer, trained in classical ballet, and her legs were long like a ballerina’s, firm and shapely with muscles.

“You’re crazy,” she said.

*I must be, if I’m sitting here starting to sport wood thinking about you, pischouette*, he thought, shifting his weight to resettle the suddenly strained crotch of his jeans.

“And you’re drunk,” Tessa said, with a glance at the table and the bottle of bourbon. “Get off of me.”

“And if I don’t?” he asked, raising his brow. She was close enough and he was drunk enough to feel reckless and bold, so he leaned toward her. Tessa squirmed, turning her face away as he drew the tip of his nose against her cheek. “What are you going to do, *pischouette*?” he murmured against her ear, feeling the satiny softness of her hair against his face, the sudden, hammering cadence of her heartbeat through the thin fabric of her nightgown. He could also feel the hardened points of her nipples through this

same silken gown, and the realization of this made his growing erection become even more uncomfortable.

“Get off of me, Rene,” she said again. “I..I mean it.”

Using the tip of his tongue, he drew the bottom of her ear lobe lightly between his lips, and heard her gasp, a sharp, fluttering intake of breath. He slid his hand up her thigh, trailing from her knee to her hip, pushing her robe and gown up and out of his way. He’d started the game just to mess with her; he was indeed drunk, and feeling lonely and vindictive to boot, but now, as his hand moved against her, his fingertips reaching the lace-trimmed edge of her panties, he found himself no longer necessarily playing. His arousal had suddenly grown large enough to press painfully against the seam of his fly.

He raised his head and looked down at her. She was wide-eyed and nearly hiccupping for breath, trembling and tense beneath him, her face filled with simultaneous anticipation and fright.

*She looks like a virgin on her wedding night*, Rene thought—an impossibility, considering Tessa was four months pregnant. That little physiological technicality was probably the only thing that had kept him from wringing her neck earlier that day, or at least had prevented him from leaving her ass behind in Thibodaux.

“Do you know, *chere*...” he whispered, lowering his face to kiss her, letting his lips brush against her mouth as he spoke.

“...the things I could do to you right now?”

“You can start...” Tessa’s brows narrowed as she locked gazes with him. “...by getting off of me.”

She grabbed him by the hand and hyper-extended his thumb and wrist with a single, sudden twist. Shocking pain ripped up his arm, clear through his entire body, like he’d just grabbed hold of a high-voltage power line. The maneuver paralyzed him instantly; he sucked in a sharp breath through gritted teeth, unable

to move or pull free without sending more spears of molten agony wracking through him. “*Viens m’enculer...!*” he gasped. *Fuck me...!*

He gasped again as she turned him loose. “Jesus Christ,” he growled, wincing as he rubbed his aching wrist and stumbled clumsily upright. *Mental note*, he told himself. *Never fuck with a woman whose brother is a black belt in aikido.* “That hurt, goddamn it.”

“Good!” She punted him in the ass. “You want to get wasted and kill yourself? Fine by me. I don’t know what I was thinking to have tried to stop you.”

“You were thinking you’d be stranded here because you can’t drive a stick shift,” he offered, which only made her scowl even more. He managed a hoarse laugh, even though his wrist was still sore. “Oh, come on, *pischouette*. I was just joking. My car’s an automatic.”

His bleary gaze had wandered from her face to the creamy margin of flesh visible above the V of her fuschia-trimmed robe. Here, he could just make out the side-swells of her admittedly lovely breasts as they came together in a semblance of cleavage, one made all the more apparent as she crossed her arms. When she followed his eyes, she leapt to her feet, snatching the robe in her hands to close it more fully. “You are such an ass,” she said as she turned on her heel and marched back toward her bedroom. “And stop calling me *pischouette!*”

She slammed the door behind her, leaving him alone. Rene forked his fingers through his hair, shoving the shaggy mess back from his face. Tessa Davenant was a piece of work like no other he’d ever seen. And he had miles to go before he would be rid of her—clear to Lake Tahoe, California, in fact.

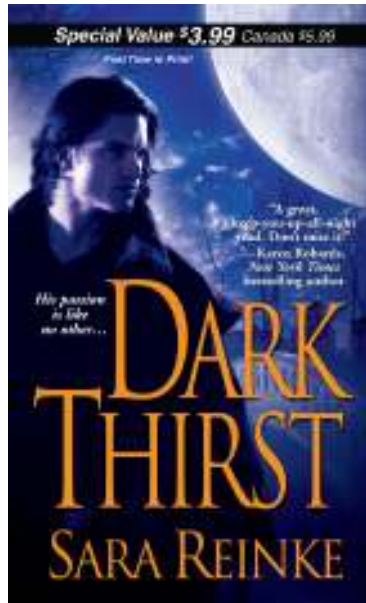
He sighed. “It might be easier to just fucking shoot myself,” he muttered.

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# DARK THIRST

by Sara Reinke

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*Brandon Noble is one of the Brethren, an ancient sect of ruthless vampires. Horrified by his birthright, Brandon shuns the ritual of the first kills, earning his family's wrath. When he runs away and falls in love with a human named Angelina – forbidden among the Brethren – his fate is sealed. Can he protect Angelina from his enemies and his own dark thirst?*