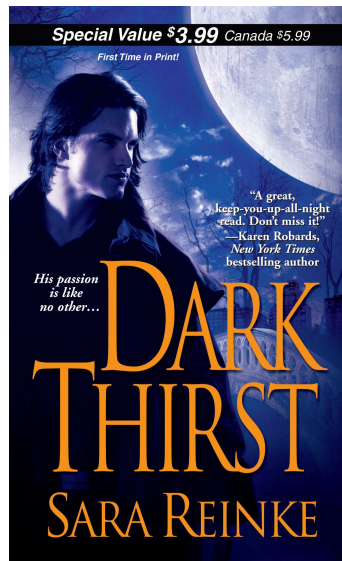


Enjoy the following excerpt from

Dark Thirst

By Sara Reinke



In mass-market paperback for only \$3.99
from Kensington Books/Zebra

Available July 3, 2007

I have to go, Brandon signed at her. He reached into his pocket, fishing out his wallet. He thumbed through the bills folded together inside—three hundred and sixty-three dollars, every dime he could scrape together before he'd left Kentucky—and tossed a ten spot down onto the

table. *I'm sorry*, he signed, because she looked flabbergasted and confused, and he needed to say something, some kind of explanation. *I'm sorry, Lina, but I just...*

His hands faltered. What could he tell her? *I'm a vampire, Lina—you know, like in those piece-of-shit horror movies—only I take drugs so I won't want to rip your throat out. I've forgotten my pills, and right now, it's not a good idea for you to be around me, because I could damn well kill you.* She would think he was nuts.

He walked toward the door, shoving his hands down inside his coat pockets and hunching his shoulders against the cold that greeted him. He turned to his right, following the crowded sidewalk, heading back toward Jackson's flat. He would collect his things, leave some money to repay Jackson for the food and beer he'd used while there, and go. He didn't know where, but figured he would decide once underway. *It doesn't matter—anywhere*, he thought. *Just as long as I'm moving. Maybe they won't find me then.*

He felt a hand fall firmly against his sleeve, and he whirled, startled. Lina stood behind him, her brows narrowed, her mouth already in motion.

"...but I promised Jackie I'd look out for you until he gets back in town," she snapped. "I don't know what's going on with you as far as your family goes, but if you're in some kind of trouble, you need to tell me. I'm a police officer and I can help you." She gave his arm a little shake for emphasis. "I can help you."

He shook his head. *No, you can't.*

He turned to walk away again, because he was all-too aware of the scent of her blood; she was excited and aggravated, and it had heightened the rate at which her heart sent blood pounding through her slender form. The awareness of it left a startling pain searing through his mouth, where his gums were swollen and tender and his canine teeth wanted to descend, dropping to their full, distended lengths. He had to get away from her. He needed his medicine.

She didn't understand, didn't recognize his torment, or her own risk because of it. She caught his arm again and he turned, taking her by surprise as he closed his hands firmly, suddenly against her elbows. He had a fleeting second of rationale, and then his mind felt murky, submerged in sudden, vivid heat. *The bloodlust.*

Her eyes widened and she gasped as he jerked her forward, pulling her against him. He kissed her deeply, fiercely, pressing his mouth against hers and tasting her. He didn't mean to. His body didn't understand the difference between sexual arousal and the excitement of the

bloodlust. His mind couldn't yet distinguish one overwhelming need from another and without the drugs to contain them both, he yielded. All Brandon knew was that he was seized with an absolute and urgent hunger brought on by this woman's proximity to him, the intoxicating scent of her body, her blood and he needed release desperately. He kissed her, pressing his tongue against hers, tangling his fingers in her hair. He let his left hand slide down to cup against her breast, touching her through her sweatshirt, and he moved his hips against hers, grinding his sudden, straining arousal against her apex in firm, insistent promise. In that moment, he meant to rip her clothes from her and bury himself inside of her, taking her right there on the street corner in broad daylight.

Lina didn't give him the chance. She caught his hand against her breast, folding her fingers about his, and then bright, excruciating pain seared up toward his shoulder and neck as she craned his wrist at a sudden, unnatural angle. He gasped sharply for breath as she hyperextended his arm, and he crumpled to his knees, helpless and immobilized.

"What the hell was that?" she demanded, hooking her free hand beneath his chin and jerking his face up to look at her. She looked wide-eyed and stricken, as stunned by his impulsive advance as he was. "What's wrong with you? Why the hell did you do that?"

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! he signed, drawing his fist in quick, frantic circles above his heart. He grimaced as she momentarily flexed her grasp against him all the more, and then she stepped back, letting him go. Brandon drew his aching wrist against his belly and stumbled to his feet, trying to catch his breath.

Don't you ever do that again! Lina signed at him furiously. *Who do you think you are? If you do that again, I'll break your goddamn arm! Do you understand?*

Brandon nodded, hanging his head, aghast and horrified. *Jesus Christ, I could have killed her*, he thought. He had completely lost control when he'd kissed her. His reason had abandoned him and there had been nothing but the hunger, that overwhelming, excruciating need for release. That his body had reacted to it sexually—and not by tearing her throat open—was due to his unfamiliarity with the bloodlust, his inexperience as a hunter, and not through any conscientious restraint on his part. *Caine's right—I can't control what I am.*

He pressed the heel of his hand against his brow, shaking. *God help me, I could have killed her.*