

BONDED BY BLOOD VAMPIRE CHRONICLES - BOOK 3



Midnight
HUNT

AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ARIAL BURNZ

EXCERPT of Midnight Hunt

Book 3 of the Bonded By Blood

Vampire Chronicles

(Full novel is approximately 85,000 words)

[Arial Burnz](#)

Driven by the desire to meet the true love she's experienced in her dreams, **Monika Konrads** uses her magickal skills to weave a love spell during the waxing of the moon. As if in response, a strangely familiar and handsome Scotsman is seeking to settle in their village. But the werewolf stalking Monika has other ideas about who her love interest should be.

Broderick MacDougal is drawn to the powerful witch by a familiar force, and makes the chestnut-haired wise woman his next pursuit to unravel the mystery of why she reminds him so much of his late wife, Davina. However, there are other supernatural forces surrounding her, exposing Rick to a darker side of this deal he made for immortality...and this enchanting nymph may be his only salvation.

Monika's quest to find a cure for the werewolf curse causes a chain of events that starts a witch hunt, dooming both her and Broderick to the fiery stake of judgment. And through these trials, they learn the Church has a new ally who is hunting down the members of the Army of Light.

Reader Advisory: This story contains some explicit love scenes, described using graphic and direct language.

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Book 3 of the Bonded By Blood

Vampire Chronicles

by

Arial Burnz

ORIGINAL EDITION

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This ebook is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons—living, magickal, dead or undead—places, events or locales, is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously. Though there are actual historical events used in this book, they are for backdrop purposes only and may contain some artistic license.

Dedication

*To all those who have fought life-threatening illnesses.
You are the real heroes and heroines of the world.*

R.I.P.

Jeanette DiCosola

April 4, 1924—October 10, 2010

I love you, Grandma.

* * * * *

Chapter One

Vollstadt Village on the Northern Coast of Germany—1636

Eighty years ago today, he killed her...

Broderick clenched his teeth as he cradled the frail body of his beloved Davina in his lap. "Blossom...when you hurt, I hurt. Please." He gashed his wrist with his fangs and offered his healing blood. She shook her head. The torn flesh gathered and closed, healing without a scar.

"We have already discussed this." Davina pushed his wrist from her face then coughed and curled in his lap like a fetus. She pressed the kerchief to her mouth as she labored through another long spell of hacking and wheezing.

The scent of her blood wafted up to his senses and he savored the sweet essence of his wife. Tears stung his eyes. "I will not lose you. Please let me heal you, just this once." He knew his plea would be useless.

Drawing shallow breaths and rubbing the blood from her mouth, she gazed at him with sorrow-filled glassy eyes. "That is what you said the last two times. Darling, I cannot bear to live like this. You know the healing is only temporary. Your blood cannot purge this disease from my body and, each time, it returns worse." His wife gasped and coughed, grunting and sputtering blood.

"Let me transform you, Davina." He clung to her gaunt figure, hoping this time she would listen. "Then we can spend eternity together."

"And spend an eternity running from—" She gritted her teeth and panted, squeezing her eyes shut. She heaved breaths and tensed in his arms. "Running from the Vamsyrian Council for fear of them destroying us. I want peace, my love." She finally sighed. "I want peace."

Broderick helped her lie back onto their bed and nestled under the covers beside her. She shivered. Her fingers feathered across his bare chest, and her unsteady hand reached for his face. He pressed his lips to her palm. Though gray streaks had dulled her hair with age and the wrinkles on her beautiful face bore testimony to her four-and-sixty

years, the light of her spirit shining from within had not diminished...until these last two weeks. Davina grew weary.

“It is too late for me, Broderick. Even immortality cannot restore my youth.” She chuckled and Rick’s heart constricted. “We would forever receive the scathing looks thrown at us now...an old woman with such a young, handsome man. Scandalous.”

“I care not what others think. I—”

She placed a finger on his lips. “Hush.” She moaned and clung to him, coughing and bleeding from her mouth onto his chest. “End this now,” she wheezed. “Feed from me one last time, my darling. Let my life give you sustenance and offer me peace.”

“Nay!” He gripped her shoulders and searched her eyes. “You cannot ask this of me!”

“I plead for mercy, Rick.” She sobbed and a wave of misery flooded him with such a force, it stole the breath from his lungs—misery his wife had been holding back all this time!

“My god! Why did you not let me—”

“Forgive me, my love, but I did not want you to worry so.” She pressed her palms to his cheeks, wet from tears. “But now you know why I beg you to let me go.”

“Nay, Davina,” he whimpered into her hair and enveloped her in his embrace. Rocking her in his arms, he wept as she wracked and convulsed, coughing and moaning. She held nothing back. Her anguish consumed him. His sobs mingled with hers. Heart breaking, but knowing he could not let her endure this torment for his sake, he surrendered. “Aye, Blossom.”

Broderick pushed the hair from her tired eyes and damp but smiling face. She nodded and released a shuddering sigh. “Thank you, my love.”

He touched his forehead to hers and clenched his jaw. “How will I live eternity without you?”

Threading her tiny fingers into his hair, she gripped him with as much strength as her weakened form would allow, but her eyes bore into his with purpose. “Hear this now. Nothing, not even death, will keep me from loving you. Though this body may wither and become a dry shell, my spirit will pursue you until the end of time. We will never be apart.”

He covered her mouth with his and tasted her blood. Trailing tender kisses across her cheek and jawline, he nestled against her neck. "Eternally yours," he whispered. She clutched his head and offered her throat. "Together forever." Broderick hesitated, her erratic pulse beating against his tongue. "Give me peace," she whispered in a tortured breath. "Do this for me." "I will love you forever, Davina." His fangs pierced her cool skin and Broderick drank the life from his wife, granting her wish...and tormenting his already damned soul.

Broderick threw the empty earthen cup across the tavern and it shattered, raining pottery shards over the patrons at the far wall.

"Acht!" The innkeeper charged to Broderick's table and stuck a rigid finger in his face. "Another outburst like that and I'll toss you out on your rump!"

Rick scoffed and leaned forward. "Don't you have anything stronger than beer?" he demanded in German. "Bring me Scotch."

The owner threw his head back and let forth a hearty guffaw. "You're drunk enough, if you ask for that." He glanced around as a few others joined him in a chuckle, but Broderick frowned. The man sobered. "Beer and wine is all I have. You want something stronger, you'll have to travel down the river to Bremen."

Perhaps he should go back to his ship where he had Scotch in the hold. "Don't you have a barber in this town? He should have what I need."

The owner frowned. "He most assuredly does not. He has just enough *aqua vitae* for the needs of our village. I'll not wake him for the likes of you." Crossing his arms, he stood firm, his posture daring Broderick to argue the matter further.

Not the least bit affected by the man's attempt at intimidation, Rick tossed a small sack of coins onto the table. He wasn't ready to return to his ship. "Then bring a cask of beer to my table. 'Tis enough there to pay for ten of them."

The stocky man snatched the bag and examined the coins. Cocking an eyebrow, he hefted the sack in his beefy hand, then narrowed his eyes at Rick. The innkeeper disappeared through the door at the rear of the tavern and returned with a cask and a lead cup. "No more smashing my wares. It's no business of mine if you want to drink yourself

into sin, but you've been peaceful until now. Let's keep it that way." With a nod, he stomped off to his post behind the wooden bar.

Broderick glared at the other patrons, who eyed him with a mixture of apprehension, anger and disgust. However, they were all wise enough to divert their attention elsewhere, leaving him to his drink. The small tavern at the edge of the village where he'd docked was dark and unassuming. He just needed a hole in which to hide and sort through his thoughts without his crew badgering him about the long, senseless journey.

What in blazes am I doing in Germany?

The decades had been lonely without Davina, but he had managed. Seeing his step-daughter Cailin and her husband James had eased some of the grief. Though he mostly left Cailin in the capable hands of her spouse, Broderick returned every few years to visit...and they grew older while he did not. They had five beautiful children, who also grew into adulthood. Broderick watched from afar as time stole them from him, one by one. None of their children or grandchildren pursued the shipping company, diverting their occupational interests elsewhere, so when Cailin and James passed, Broderick reclaimed it, long forgotten by their offspring.

Rebuilding the business kept him occupied enough to stave off the heartache of losing Davina. Though his bereavement had never disappeared, he *had* managed. And when her birthday arrived, he mourned as he always did on those special days. But this year, as he wept over her grave, grief swallowed him. The specter of his beloved Davina had penetrated his defenses and pierced through the numbness he'd forged over the near-century. His heart ached like the day he lost her and grew to a restless yearning, which encouraged him to leave Scotland. He readied the smallest ship in his fleet, requiring only a four-man crew, whom he trusted and paid well to protect his investments.

He followed this longing south—out of Scotland, along the eastern coast of England and across the Channel to Belgium. Then the compelling desire to traverse along the war-torn, northern coast yanked his soul through the Netherlands and to the final port of Vollstadt in Germania of the Holy Roman Empire. Each time he had docked along his journey, his crew would restock and he would explore the port. He would feed and find no reason for what pulled him away from home, so they would sail onward. As far as his crew was aware, he was searching for a place to expand his shipping business.

Thankfully, this tugging at his soul kept them along the coast and away from most of the conflict happening inland in Central and Southern Germany. In his grieving and frustrated condition, he would have gladly slain the countless mercenaries raping the countryside in these endless battles over religious prattle. But he wouldn't unleash his wrath for the deaths would weigh heavy upon his soul, neither would he put his crew in danger. He had enough burdens to bear without having *their* lives on his conscience as well.

And here he sat, staring at the leaden mug waiting to be filled, just as he ached for his own heart to be filled.

Due to the rapid healing of his immortal blood, alcohol had no real effect on him. At one time, he'd had a generous portion of Scotch whiskey and started to feel drunk, but it quickly passed. He gulped down six mugs of beer from the cask and closed his eyes tight against the ache in his chest. The libation did nothing to drive the images of her from his mind. *I should relive them...again and again. Savor every moment. Eight decades of silence...and then a precious, spectral encounter with her today.* He had only dreamt when Davina was near, whenever she thought of him while he slumbered during the day. But she was dead, so these new visions couldn't be her. Perhaps he had been so consumed with grief on the eightieth anniversary of her death, he had finally gone mad.

Davina had been in the woods, her ethereal form naked and waiting for him. Her cinnamon tresses spilled over her shoulders and hid the precious globes of her breasts, but blended with the thatch of curls at the juncture of her thighs. Young and breathtaking as she was when she'd entered his Gypsy tent as a voluptuous woman in 1514.

He fell to his knees before her and buried his face in her skin, growing hard as he inhaled the lavender scent of her hair. "Davina!" He covered the swell of her belly with kisses and nibbles, his hands smoothing over the lush curves of her silken legs, bottom and back, unable to get enough of her.

She cradled his head to her breasts and wept. "How I've missed you!"

Davina straddled his thighs and Broderick claimed her lips. Tearing open his breeches, he then slipped inside her wet heat. Surely he had died and gone to heaven! She clung to his back as she rode him to a swift and furious climax, taking Broderick with her.

Shuddering and panting, he pulled back to gaze at the rapture on her face and a chestnut-haired woman with creamy skin rocked in his arms. "Blossom?"

She nodded, her sapphire eyes revealing the woman he would die for. Davina pressed her lips to his and wrapped her legs around his waist. "Together forever."

Aye, he *had* gone mad. Broderick opened his eyes, reached for the cask and jerked with a start.

Malloren Rune sat across the table from him. "Well met, Broderick MacDougal," she whispered in her British accent, concern in her gaze and dressed like a German peasant woman.

The prophetess! "I cannot recall the last time I have been taken by surprise." He scowled at her. "Exactly how much does your position as the Keeper of Secrets prolong your life?" The last time he had seen her, over a century ago, she was more than one-hundred sixty years old. What was different about her? Her skin held the subtle scent only found on... "You are a Vamsyrian?"

She nodded.

"But...you are a member of the Army of Light."

"It was necessary so I may continue my station. My transformation was the second sign in the prophecy. It appears I will be the steward of this journey to redemption for Vamsyrians."

He tipped his head back and a sardonic chuckle rumbled through him at the irony. "The one who advises mortals against the very choice you made. Have you sacrificed your soul to save us all?"

Clearing her throat, she squared her shoulders and raised her chin with regal defiance. "There are many sacrifices I have made through the years in my service to God, though none quite as important as this. The prophecy is why I am here."

"Where were you when Davina died of consumption? You claimed she was the key to this damned prophecy and, when I needed answers, you were nowhere to be found." He cursed under his breath. "How is it I did not sense you approach me? Why I could not find you?"

Malloren shifted in her chair and avoided his glare. "My talents for remaining unseen were magnified when I crossed over." She narrowed her eyes. "You will not find me if I

do not wish to be found.” Glanced at his cup, then the cask, she sighed and sadness shrouded her face. “I truly regret the sorrow you have endured over Davina’s passing, but I have—”

Broderick jumped to his feet and snatched her throat in his hand. “Lies!” he hissed. “The prophecy. Her part in it. Don’t pretend to show compassion toward either of us. If you had a care, you would have let me kill Angus and I could have made amends with the Council. She would be with me now.”

In spite of the hold Rick had on her, she only encircled his wrist with her fingers and shook her head. “You must *never* transform her, Broderick,” she whispered. “And if you had killed Angus, Davina’s soul would have been destroyed and you would have lost her forever.”

“I *did* lose her!”

“Take your hands off the maiden, son.”

Broderick glanced to his left and spied a half-dozen glowering men, ready to pounce, various sharp and blunt objects in their fists.

Malloren put her palm out to stay the crowd. “I am not in danger, kind sirs,” she rasped in German. “But *you* will be, if you take another step closer. I know this man and, in his present disposition, he will tear your beating hearts from your chests.”

Broderick shoved Malloren back into her chair and snarled. “You know nothing about me, woman.” He waved a dismissive hand at the intimidated men. “You have nothing to fear from me.” He crossed his arms and scowled at the prophetess.

The innkeeper narrowed his eyes. “Acht! Damned gentry and your sick games.” He pointed his axe at Broderick. “I’ve had enough of you and your lady friend. Get out of my tavern.”

As much as Broderick wanted to release his pent up anger and grief on everyone around him, rational thought won over his emotions. These men didn’t deserve his wrath. He’d save that for Malloren. He leveled his gaze on her. “Aye, let us take this outside, shall we?”

She rubbed her throat and nodded. Rick collected his cloak and satchel, then pivoted on his heel and stalked from the tavern.

The damp, chilled August night haunted his form, surrounding him with heavy foreboding. He slung his satchel over his shoulder, nestling it against his right hip. Out of instinct, he checked to ensure his sword cleared his scabbard at his left hip. Malloren scampered to catch up as he stomped down the road to the coastline. He donned his cloak and hugged it tight against his throat. The North Sea lay quietly hidden on his left behind an oppressive fog bank. The stillness of the late night sucked the life out of his argument. He grumbled.

“We are far enough from the town. Let us speak.”

He continued down the road at a determined pace. “So you can feed me more of your lies? I think not.”

“You dreamt of her today, didn’t you?”

He stopped and held his breath, squeezing his eyes shut against the dream and Davina’s haunting presence.

“Davina lives.”

He whirled to face the prophetess and she staggered back. “Why are you here! To torment me? Is my grief not enough to satisfy you?”

“I’m here to help you. She has been regenerated.”

“Regenerated?” A cold lump formed in his stomach and snaked over his heart. “You mean from the grave?”

“No, as in reborn.”

Broderick choked on his words. “Are you mad?”

“Have you not had a yearning to come here? Are you not drawn to this place by an unknown force?”

“Stop speaking to me in riddles! She is dead!” Broderick paced, doing his best to push down the rising tide of hope the prophetess could bring back his wife. He couldn’t believe...because to believe was insane!

“Davina’s soul resides in another body and is calling out to you now.”

“What are you...? So she is a wee bairn? A child I am to...what, *raise*?” Broderick resisted the urge to slap the woman, who had obviously lost all her faculties.

“No, of course not. She is a woman grown.”

He stood with his mouth agape. “Do you hear yourself?”

“I know this may sound—”

“Preposterous? Absolutely absurd? That it does! And you contradict your teachings. The soul lives once and is destined for heaven or hell. You must take me for an idiot! Is it not why Vamsyrians were created—to trap the soul and condemn it to an eternity in hell? A choice, I might add, you have also made.”

“Yes, as is my understanding of this *arrangement* with Satan, and yes...I am a part of those souls now. But if we can fulfill the prophecy, we will be saved. Davina is the key.”

“If *we* can fulfill the prophecy?” Broderick placed his fists on his hips. “You speak as though we have a say in the matter.”

Color mottled Malloren’s cheeks. “*If* the prophecy can be fulfilled,” she amended. “As for the soul’s journey into death, there are some who are given the choice to return to earth. Thus is the purpose of Davina’s soul, to return and fulfill the prophecy.”

Broderick’s mind twirled with confusion and he shook his head to clear it. “I have had enough of this.” He stalked away from Malloren, the sea on his left once again, his figure bent forward to his destination.

“And yet you still walk toward her instead of your ship,” Malloren confirmed. “She has long, dark-brown hair, does she not?”

Broderick slowed his steps. He *was* walking away from Vollstadt instead of toward his ship.

“But she still has the dark-blue eyes of Davina, no?”

He stopped and, again, closed his eyes to resist becoming lost in the dream of her. “How do you know this?”

“I have seen her in visions and this is why I am here. Tell me the dream.”

He breathed deep. “She’s in the woods. We have a tearful reunion and speak of our love.” Broderick turned to Malloren. “When I pull back from our embrace, I see the dark-haired woman of whom you speak, yet she has the eyes of Davina.”

The prophetess treaded carefully to Broderick’s side. “In my visions, she holds a wooden tome in her arms, a large tree with intertwining branches and roots. Within the roots is hidden a pentacle.”

“A pentacle?”

She nodded and knelt, drawing in the dirt with her finger a five-pointed star inside a circle with a continuous stroke of her hand, ending where she began.

Broderick's brows rose. "Aye, I saw this book on the ground by her feet. A thick volume, bound with leather laces crisscrossed along the spine?"

"Yes, the very one."

"The pentacle. I haven't seen it often, but hasn't it been used against the accused, which are facing the endless inquisitions that rape these lands? I saw many such trials on my journey here."

She frowned. "Yes but, unfortunately, the Church has taken this symbol of life and protection against evil and turned it into a tool of hatred. Hypocrites." She tapped on each point of the star. "Water, fire, earth, air and spirit enclosed within the circle. All of the elements in a never-ending knot. Harmony and unity of life." Malloren snatched Broderick's hand, using him to help her rise, and she gasped, holding tight. He tried to free from her grasp, but she refused to release him until she opened her eyes and grinned. "I see you have made a nuisance of yourself to the Inquisitors."

Broderick crossed his arms and stepped away from her. "I couldn't just let those innocent people burn. I heard their thoughts. The church is wrong...as usual." He glared down his nose at her. "What does all this have to do with Davina?"

"This book holds the next sign in the prophecy. And she seeks a cure for Satan's weapon against the Vamsyrians."

"Now you're talking in circles, Prophetess. If Satan created the Vamsyrians, why would he need a weapon against them?" He cocked his eyebrow, skeptical of the forthcoming explanation.

"That is the deception of the Prince of Darkness. He lures God's children to willingly turn their back against their Father, and then slays them with the venom of another creature to ensure their souls belong to him. Satan's sure way to bypass the redemption of the prophecy."

"You speak of werewolves." Broderick rubbed his left shoulder, scarred over thirty years ago during his first encounter with the claws of *Satan's weapon*.

"Yes, and you are treading into their territory. There are many sightings and encounters in Germania. Some of those burned at the stake are afflicted with the curse of

the werewolf, so the frenzy of witch trials in Germany are not without cause. If you are bitten by one of these creatures, your death will be long and torturous. You cannot let that happen.”

He pursed his lips. “You have a talent for stating the obvious. I assure you, that is not my chosen path to the grave.”

“Werewolves are not harmed by the sun. I suggest you find aconite to guard your ship during the day. And have your crew carry it in sachets.”

He frowned. “Aconite? I’ve never heard of it.”

“It is also known as monkshood, wolfsbane.” She jerked her head in the direction of the road. “You will find Davina in the Village of Kostbar ahead. You are here to reunite with her and protect her.”

Broderick turned his back on the prophetess for fear he might strangle her again. As usual, her ability to know so much about him made him uneasy. *In fact...* “Tell me prophetess, do your abilities as a Vamsyrian extend to giving me dreams of my dead wife to serve your purpose?”

The gentle waves lapping against the beach was his answer. Rick whirled to find the prophetess gone. “Curse you, woman!”

He wiped his face and paced a few steps before sighing and studying the empty road to the village. The fog from the North Sea crept onto the land and wove through the trees bordering the path, obscuring his view.

His wandering had led him here. He would see this through. If Davina wasn’t there and if these were more lies, then he would put this damned prophecy and his grief behind him and head back to Scotland. But if the prophetess was right...

Broderick’s heart hammered in his chest with a hope he’d not felt in almost a century. *Could it be? Will she know me? Will she remember our love?* He shook his head. “I am mad.”

Nothing, not even death, will keep me from loving you...my spirit will pursue you until the end of time. Together forever.

“Eternally yours,” he responded to his heart’s desire, and stomped down the path toward Kostbar.

Not a mile down the road, Broderick winced at the howling and staggering man on the road before him. The fumes from the libations in which he'd indulged drifted on the wind and soured the air as badly as his slurred singing, but did not disguise the unmistakable and sweet scent of blood. Though *The Hunger* surged through Broderick, it no longer lorded over him as it once had decades ago. He was now the master of his immortal urges and continued at his leisurely pace, eventually catching up to the stranger.

"*Guten Abend!*" The man swept his floppy hat from his head and executed an unstable bow toward Broderick, who grasped the man's shoulders before he fell face-first into the dirt.

"Good evening," Broderick repeated in German with a chuckle and righted the man.

"Oh, thank ye, kind sir." He hiccupped and nodded. His face was smeared with crusted blood and his fat lip protruded as he tried to smile. A few missing teeth, the ones he had yellow and brown with stains, and the lines framing his eyes allowed Broderick to estimate this man around his mid-fifties. His scraped jaw was covered with gray stubble from the day.

"'Tis a rough night you've had, eh?" Broderick pointed to his own face as reference to where his drunken friend was marred. "Brawl at the tavern?"

The man licked his bloodied lip self-consciously and waved Broderick's comment away with a sloppy gesture. "Bah! Nothin' I couldn't handle. I suppose I deserved it. I became somewhat belligerent." He shrugged and chuckled before continuing down the road.

"You live close by?" Broderick strolled casually alongside him.

"Just over that hill there."

"Well, I'm headed in the same direction. I'll be sure you make it home safe to your woman."

The man barked a mirthless laugh. "No woman in my life, boy." He sobered, his eyes softening with deep sadness mixed with regret. *No, God took her from me. Too soon. Much too soon.* His emotions and thoughts swirled around Broderick, as thick as the fog coming off the sea.

Broderick fought the sting of tears, empathizing with the man. “Well, that’s a relief. I thought I might have to help you fight off an angry pot-wielding handful when you crossed the threshold.”

Their laughter mingled across the field as they turned up the road toward a modest dairy farm, judging by the smell and the stalls. “I thank ye kindly for keepin’ me company on the road. A good night to ye, sir.”

“Night.” He waved and stared after the man as he trudged to the small cottage at the edge of the farm. Rick called forth *The Hunger* and the familiar pain sliced over his gums as his fangs extended. Just as the man opened the door, Broderick rushed forward at the unnatural speed of immortality and spirited the man inside. “I wish I could rob the grief from you as easily as your blood,” he whispered, then bit his victim’s throat and drank deep.

Chapter Two

The dairy farmer slumped in Broderick's arms as he fed from him. Josef was his name and his wife Annika was killed by a wild animal in the woods ten years ago. Or rather a wild animal was Josef's conviction, for he didn't believe in werewolves. They'd had one child—a grown man now with a wife and a child of their own on the way. Josef lived alone at the dairy farm, but his son and daughter-in-law visited often, filling the void of losing Annika.

Once *The Hunger* was satisfied, Broderick wiped the experience of the feeding from Josef's mind. The only thing he would remember would be saying good night to Broderick before walking into his house. Broderick laid him in his bed, took off his boots and tossed a woolen blanket over his peaceful form. Piercing his thumb with his fang, Broderick smeared his immortal blood over the neck wounds, which healed without scar or blemish, then wiped Josef's neck clean of the blood. The man would awaken thinking he'd passed out as soon as he hit the bed.

“Good night, Josef.” Broderick righted the chair he'd apparently knocked over in the initial scuffle and let himself out. He stomped down the path, back to the road and continued toward Kostbar. Though Josef grieved for his wife, his life was good and his memories much more pleasant than those Broderick had seen those many years feeding on the slugs of society. Initially, he had kept to preying on criminals—rapists, molesters, thieves and murderers. Doing a good deed, he'd believed, by giving them nightmares and hoping to scare them into changing their ways. When he learned such a method only drove them mad, he settled for wiping their minds clean of the encounter, just like he'd done with Josef. But afterward, Broderick was the one plagued with the memories of their unfortunate lives. Eventually, he fed more and more from good-natured people, who at least seemed responsible for themselves and their actions. Though not many lived today without some struggle to survive, at least their life experiences were less tumultuous...easier to stomach.

Sometimes, though, Broderick still dined on those black souls who relished in victimizing others. He would sacrifice some peace of mind on occasion to rid the world of their evil intentions and he had no regrets.

He ran southeast along the coast for less than a mile before he stumbled upon the sleeping village of Kostbar. It was smaller and poorer than Vollstadt, but held a country charm that reminded him of Stewart Glen, Davina's home village back in Scotland. The tiny thatched-roof cottages of wattle and daub at the edge of town were fenced with narrow, rugged planks no higher than his knee. White and yellow flowers spilled over the worn wood, their petals tucked and closed for the evening in the misty air. As he ventured farther down the dirt path curving toward the center of the village, the structures heightened to contain second floors, white façades crisscrossed with dark-brown and red beams, typical of the more public structures he'd encountered on his explorations through the Kingdom of Germany. A river-stone well with a peaked roof and a bucket sat in the middle of the cobbled *platz*. A modest wooden bench, leaning against the well, provided the perfect place for someone hauling water to and from their home to sit and rest. It was surrounded by the baker, blacksmith and, what Broderick guessed, were the other shops of necessity for the villagers. Some of the signs were too aged and worn to read. He smiled at the subtle snores and sighs his immortal hearing perceived, fluttering through the various windows of the cozy dwellings nestled around the village center.

The tiny settlement was surrounded by dense trees in many directions. He surveyed the *platz* and spied a warm glow flickering through the half-shuttered window of a corner cottage. Ambling forward, he spotted a hunched figure of an old woman shuffling around the modest abode. Her mannerisms were so much like his dear Gypsy friend Amice, his throat closed with grief. Broderick blinked away the tears stinging his eyes. Finding Davina needed to be his main focus, not grieving for loved ones lost so long ago. But it seemed he had come to Kostbar too late in the evening. He would have to return on the morrow when the villagers were awake. While here, he headed out of the south path from the *platz* and into the forest to explore the surrounding area.

Scanning the trees and flat terrain, he fumed about his recent encounter with Malloren Rune. "I should have driven my sword through her heart," he grumbled and gripped the said weapon nestled securely at his hip. *But what if she's right about Davina?* He clenched his jaw. He wanted to hope. *Ached* for the prophetess' insane words to be true. But how could it be possible? "The woman is full of contradictions and—"

Snap!

Broderick stalled, drawing his silver-plated Damascus steel, his eyes darting around the shadows. A breeze rustled through the trees, blowing a faintly familiar, acrid and musty odor over his face. He narrowed his eyes. A low growl rumbled behind him and Rick had just enough time to whirl around, swinging his blade in a wide arc. A yelp, very much like a dog's, echoed through the air. The giant wolfman's yellow eyes gleamed. Its hulking shadow, standing on its hind legs, rose at least a foot taller than Broderick. Those yellow eyes dipped and bobbed in the darkness as the beast came bounding toward him. Broderick side-stepped the snarling animal, slashing deep along its side. Half-growling, half-whining, the werewolf limped backward, blood flowing from its brown pelt, salted with gray. Broderick took one step forward, to pounce on the animal for the final kill, but thought better of it. The poor, dumb creature was acting on instinct. What little information he'd learned of werewolves from his Vamsyrian friend Laurent said they never remembered the bloody deeds they enacted in animal form. Though they had longer lives than a mortal and healed almost as quickly as a Vamsyrian, they weren't immortal and they didn't choose this life. Once bitten, they were cursed.

"Go on," Broderick snapped.

The werewolf retreated into the forest and Broderick cleaned his blade before sheathing it and shaking his head.

He traversed deeper into the woods continuing to survey the area—in the opposite direction the werewolf had vanished—and wished he'd had the chance to ask Malloren what wolfsbane looked like. He was definitely going to need it. The werewolf may not recover from the silver blade as quickly as regular steel, so that bought him some time, but he would still be vulnerable while he slept. Luckily werewolves couldn't change form during the day.

Peering through the trees above, he tried to view the moon but the sky was overcast. The night was indeed coming to a close. The pinkening sky on the horizon confirmed his estimations. Rick picked up his pace to beat the coming dawn and headed back toward the dock in Vollstadt.

* * * * *

Monika feathered her fingers over the deliciously perfect contours of his abdomen, her index finger tracing the soft trail of hair that disappeared into the waistline of his breeches. Easing her fingertips just under the material, she slid them along his waistband, touching the head of his erect cock.

He groaned and his lips brushed her temple. "Blossom." His husky whisper sent tremors through her breasts and down to flutter in her stomach.

With eager hands, she stripped him of his pants, nibbling back up his body, along the corded muscles of his thigh, brushing her peaked nipples over his rock-hard staff. She smiled when he shivered and grunted.

"Och, woman!" he complained. "Ye'll be the death of me."

Giggling, she continued her torturous ascent, grazing her lips over his stomach but diverting her path to his side. As she licked and teased the succulent cut of muscle just above his hip, she straddled his thigh and pressed her mons against his searing flesh.

A rumbling moan vibrated from his chest under her palm resting over his heart. "You're so wet," he whispered.

She gasped when he grabbed her wrist and pulled her up to seize her mouth with his, muffling her laughter. He rolled her beneath him, his thick shaft stroking along her cleft as their tongues danced. The taste of this man, the scent of his skin and his breath, was a tonic to her soul. Musky. Spicy lavender. Heavenly.

She seized his erection and guided him to her swollen entrance, where he glided inside, both of them moaning a chorus of mutual satisfaction.

"Eternally yours," he whispered, his sentiment thick with passion.

"Together forever," she responded.

"Little treasure."

Monika Konrads squeezed her eyes against the invasion. She waved away whatever incessantly pinched her shoulder, but to no avail. She had been roused from her decadent dreams and could not ignore the intrusion.

"Come, Monika," her grandmother Wilhelmina coaxed, pinching the flesh of her thigh. "I must make haste, child."

Monika rubbed her eyes and reluctantly pushed herself into a seated position. “Yes, *Oma*. I’m awake.”

Her grandmother rustled around their tiny cottage bedroom, gathering her basket of herbs and medicinal items. Someone must have sent for her. “Who is it?”

“A farming accident in Nordenham.” Mina glanced at her, and snapped her gaze to the shelves where they stored tinctures.

Monika narrowed her eyes. “You look very tired, *Oma*. I thought I heard you up in the middle of the night.”

Mina she rifled through some sachets. “I was restless. I could not sleep.”

Monika nodded. Being a *Luft Hexe*—an Air Witch—her grandmother had *the knowing* about such things and, based on her agitation, something was wrong closer to home. This was about family. “It’s Papa, isn’t it? I want to go with you.”

Mina shook her head vigorously. “No. You are needed here. Herr Fischer’s wife will birth her babe any day now.”

Monika nodded, and fought the tears stinging her eyes. “Why can’t I see him?”

Mina sat beside Monika on the bed and held her hand. “You know he doesn’t want you to see him like this.”

She nodded and bowed her head. “Tell him I love him.”

“He knows, child. But I will tell him. He’ll return after the cycle as he always does.” She patted her granddaughter’s knee and rose to finish gathering her supplies.

*Well, with *Oma* and *Papa* gone, at least I can finally do my ritual.*

Mina whirled and raised a silver eyebrow. “You will be fine, eh?”

Monika rubbed her face, praying her grandmother wouldn’t—just this once—be so observant. Yawning, she stretched and tugged at her bed gown’s neckline falling off her shoulder. “Yes, I will be fine.”

Her grandmother looked askance, suspicion in her youthful-looking eyes amongst her wrinkles. “Behave, child. I know that glimmer in your sapphire eyes. Stay out of mischief.”

Monika grinned and her cheeks warmed. “Now why would I do a thing like that?”

A raspy chuckle flittered from Mina and she patted her granddaughter's cheek. "Sprite." Donning her shawl, she kissed Monika on the brow. "I should return within the week, but I am not certain how badly he is injured. I may be longer."

"I understand." She hugged her grandmother. "Be well, Oma. Love and light be with you."

"And you, my child." Bustling out of the room, Mina whisked through the cottage and Monika escorted her out the door. Her grandmother's hunched figure scuffled across the courtyard, past the well and little bench, a rustling breeze following in her wake. Still in her bed gown, Monika peered around the door for modesty sake as Mina approached Helmut's shop on the opposite side of the platz. The blacksmith nodded and hung his apron on a peg, then waved to Monika. She waved back. Their old friend never failed to accompany her or her grandmother to any of the surrounding towns when someone needed the aid of a healer. Mina was, after all, the one who delivered him from his mother's womb...as she did almost everyone in this town.

Easing the door closed, Monika paused with her palms against the wood and sighed. She clasped her hands under her chin and fought to contain her excitement. For months, her nights were filled with sensuous dreams of a dark lover. His deep Scottish brogue whispered words of endearment that moved her soul. *Ah, to find a love like that...so passionate, so fierce, so complete and consuming.* "A love worth dying for," she breathed.

She stripped her night clothes over her head and scurried to the bedroom to complete her ablutions. Donning her chemise, skirt and bodice, she laced her bust tight, then braided her long, brown hair and tied a kerchief over her head. She hurried through breakfast, warming some bread by the hearth, eating it with smoked fish and washing it down with some small beer. Once the table was cleared, she bustled around the cottage, performing her morning chores and duties—gathering herbs from the small rear garden they cultivated in the fenced space of their meager property; replacing the rushes on the floor; dusting the jars of tinctures, herbs and remedies on the many shelves in the front common area where the table, chairs and hearth dominated the space. Monika hauled a few jugs of water from the well and dumped them into the barrel by the hearth. Then she visited her pregnant friend, Irma Fischer, to help her with the chores at her father-in-law's

dairy. Once finished, she returned home, with fresh cream, milk and a small portion of the butter she helped Irma churn. She grinned, finally done with her daily responsibilities, and set about to perform her exciting errand.

Monika gathered the supplies she needed for her ritual and, basket heavy with her wares, grabbed three woolen blankets and slung them over her shoulder. She placed a quivering hand upon the latch at the door and paused. *Sex magick* was a powerful force, but what scared her more than anything was performing it in the open. *I can do this. Think of him.* Breathing deep, she imagined his large hands cupping her breasts, his thumbs brushing her nipples until they peaked. A delightful shiver rippled up her arms and shoulders to cascade over her breasts. *A love worth dying for.*

She left her cottage and trekked down the south road leading out of the village and into the forest. Trees towered overhead and a waving breeze rustled through the branches, raining a shower of brown leaves, tumbling, turning and spinning through the air. The nights were growing cooler. The days more overcast. Monika smiled. *Autumn is coming.* Her favorite season.

Hiking through the woods, she stayed away from any trails and roads, navigating deep into the forest where the trees were dense and difficult to see through. The kind of ritual she would perform needed privacy, so she traversed a great deal of ground to find the perfect spot. After what seemed like an hour of crunching through the brush, Monika approached and assessed a small clearing, no more than six or eight feet wide, a copse of thin-trunk trees so close, one couldn't walk between them except through a small parting. It had to be an old faery ring, as no signs indicated the fae were still using it. *This will do nicely and might even give me a little magickal boost.* She grinned, fear and excitement bubbling within her belly.

Quickly, she gathered a bundle of long twigs and brushed the dried leaves to the edge of the clearing, exposing the bare dirt. She left one blanket near the center on the ground, and draped the other two spare blankets across the break in the trees—one where she'd entered at the north of the small clearing; the other to the southwest. She placed four candles around the clearing, one at each directional point—north, south, east and west. Collecting and arranged a few stones in a circle at the center, she then tossed within it the twigs and some dried leaves and knelt on the blanket. With a single strike of flint

against steel, the kindling caught. As her grandmother was an Air Witch, Monika was born a *Feuer Hexe*—a Fire Witch. She started a modest fire, holding her shaky hands toward the tiny flames and coaxing them higher.

Concentration was crucial for her task. The mood and state of mind were important when using a sexual climax to focus intent. Her heart thundered in her chest as she glanced around the forest, certain strange eyes were upon her. *I can't very well do this so jittery!* She inhaled deep and closed her eyes. *Think of him.*

He nuzzled her hair away from her ear, his hot breath sending waves of desire across her neck. She shuddered when his tongue drew her lobe between his teeth for a sensuous nibble. Monika pressed her breasts against his chest and sighed when he moaned, loving his response to her.

Yes. Her stomach fluttered with anticipation. Raising her hands above her head, palms to the sky, she imagined the light and love of the divine Father through the sun and sky pouring into her, winding down her spine and into Mother Earth below, grounding her to nature in this union. Sex was a natural act of all species, so tied directly to the energy of the earth. A peace settled over her heart and the corner of her mouth turned up in appreciation.

She grabbed a long twig, held the end over the fire until it caught and carried the flame to the north candle. Lighting it with her left hand, she concentrated her intentions and love into the wick and said, “I invoke the north and the element of earth to my purpose, asking for your love, light and protection.” The flames surged a few inches higher in response. With her right hand, she drew a pentacle in the air, the five-pointed star enclosed within a circle, in one continuous line. Walking *deosil*—clockwise—around the circle to the next point, she lit the candle and repeated the phrase and pentacle, addressing the east and the element of air. To south, she invoked the element of fire and the flame flared much higher in response to her own natural elemental state. Then to the west she invoked the element of water. Completing the circle back at the north, she continued *deosil* to stand before the center fire pit once more.

After spreading her blanket beside the warmth of the flames, Monika stripped her clothes from her body with trembling hands, folding them neatly and setting them aside. She glanced around the clearing self-consciously, her heart pounding within her ribcage.

A subtle breeze moved through the trees, caressing her bare bottom and swirling around her waist and breasts, stressing her nakedness and giving her great pause. *Oma can read the wind, but will this breeze reach her in Nordenham?* She swallowed her apprehension, forcing herself to continue. *When will I ever get another chance to do this?* The sun was continuing its descent, the forest around her growing darker with shadows. Time was slipping from her.

She grabbed her basket and sat on the blanket where she laid her ingredients around her. Pouring a small portion of the rose water into her hand, she rubbed it into her skin. “Father God, Mother Earth, I come before you this day, asking for your blessing to find my soul mate, the one you intend especially for me.” She inhaled the heady rose fragrance. Corking the bottle, she set it aside and assembled the herbs, mortar and pestle. Into the mortar, she sprinkled the herbs, swirled and crushed the ingredients with the pestle. As she stirred and blended, she focused her intentions into the herbs based on their properties—bay leaves and elfwort to attract her soul mate; caraway seeds to increase lust in her and her intended; basil for love; lavender for *undying* love and devotion; yarrow *everlasting* love; and thyme for affection. She set the mortar down and cupped her hands over the bowl, using the heat of her body and the desires of her soul to infuse the herbs with her heart and her hopes. *His lips claimed hers in a hungry kiss and she melted against his solid frame.*

Scattering the blend of herbs over the small fire, she whispered, “As the fire burns and purifies these herbs, so my soul and heart are purified toward my goal. As the smoke rises to the heavens, so do my wishes and intentions. Bring to me, Mother and Father, the perfect man of my heart, the one you intend for me as my soul mate. So mote it be.”

After placing her mortar, pestle and herbs back into the basket, she set the basket aside and lay on her back. The fire flickered orange light against the trees framing the darkening sky. Her heart beat a rapid staccato in her breast and Monika inhaled deep, closing her eyes.

His tongue darted out to taste her lips and she opened her mouth, eager to feast on him. She swooned as his fingers laced through her hair to cradle the back of her head. His other hand slid, strong and possessive, to the small of her back, pulling her body against him, his tongue delving deep into her mouth.

Monika smoothed her hands over her belly, then feathered them over her ribs. She caressed her breasts, pinching her nipples until they peaked.

His mouth kissed a fiery path to her throat and down to her breasts where he sucked her nipple into his mouth and flicked one bud, and then the other, until they ached with need. Nibbling a wet and hungry trail down her belly, his erection brushing against her thigh as he moved lower, and he positioned his head between her legs. Nipping her hip, his teeth grazed the tender flesh, then his mouth hovered over her dark curls. Hot, moist breath wafted against her mons and she whimpered. With a groan, he parted her nether lips with his thumbs, exposing her to him.

She slipped her fingers between her legs, parting her lips and swirling the slick wetness over her clitoris, and moaned.

Her dark lover fluttered his tongue over her sensitive bud, stroked along the length of her cleft, then returned to flick and suckle her clitoris. Long, sweet, sensuous strokes, then fast, torturous flicks over her nub.

Monika mimicked her dream lover's tongue with her fingers, imagining his stubbled cheeks grazing her thighs, his mouth making love to her and her sex clenching in response. Stroking, fluttering, and thrusting, she crested and her thighs trembling as she continued to stroke her wet, hot folds, drawing out her climax...envisioning her release surging from between her legs, through her heart and pouring out into the universe, directly toward her soul mate.

Panting, Monika lay on her blanket and opened her eyes, gazing at the pink and purple streaks painted across the sky by the sunset. She smiled and drew her bottom lip between her teeth. Considering her purpose, even though she was a bit nervous about performing the sexual ritual due to its potency, it seemed the perfect approach to her desires.

She sat up and hugged herself, then glanced around her space in the woods, illuminated by the dying embers of the fire. Kneeling, she raised her hands to the sky. "Thank you, Mother and Father, for your blessings." Taking the small jar of cream, she uncorked it and poured the white fluid into the earth, which greedily soaked up her offering. "Please accept this gift as my thanks." She replaced the jar in her basket, stood and dressed, then pointed an open palm to the north, twirling *widdershins*—

anticlockwise—and wiping her hand around the circle as she imagined the protective barrier around her space coming down. When she finished at the north, she held her arms up and whispered, “This circle is now broken and my intentions are sent forth with love and light. So mote it be.”

The crickets chirped around her. A breeze sighed through the trees, bringing the sweet apple-like scent of chamomile to greet her face with a loving caress. Peace warmed her heart and soul and she grinned. She had faith she would be blessed.

Monika knelt beside the fire pit. Being a *Feuer Hexe*, she was born with a direct connection to the element of fire. In a spiritual and *magickal* sense, fire ran through her veins and was present in the flesh and bone of her body. She was not only impervious to its heat, but commanded the element. She could absorb fire and summon it, as long as it was near. All she needed was a spark to wield it and have it do her bidding. Thrusting her hands into the embers, she drew the flames into her body. The heat spread through her limbs and radiated from her skin, leeching out through her pores. With questing fingers, she checked to be sure the fire was out and the ground was cool.

Assembling her supplies, she set them outside the space and did her best to return the clearing to the natural state in which she had found it. She brushed the leaves from the edge of the clearing, with a branch she used like a broom, and covered the ground once more. Satisfied with the results, she nodded and collected her belongings to head home.

As she rounded the bend in the road and her cottage came into view, a gangly young man, around fifteen years of age, stood waiting at her door. He looked vaguely familiar. “A message for you, *Fräulein* Konrads.” He thrust a fine piece of folded parchment at her. The missive was closed with a wax seal.

“Bode?”

His cheeks turned crimson. “Aye, *Fräulein*—”

“Oh, do stop with the formalities.” She waved him inside, but he remained on her doorstep. “Call me Monika, if you please. I’ve known you since you were this high.” She swiped the edge of her hand at mid-thigh. “You’re all grown up, Bode. I haven’t seen you since your parents moved to Vollstadt, what...five years ago? I hardly recognized you! What brings you here today?”

“I’m running errands for the Innkeeper in Vollstadt.”

“The tavern at the edge of the town?”

He shook his head. “Oh no, the larger one in the center of town—The Red Stag.”

Monika raised her brows. “Impressive.” She eyed the expensive paper and nodded. “Very impressive.” She glanced around the room and it was her turn to blush. “I’m afraid I haven’t a coin for you, Bode. Did you want me to warm you some soup? We have—”

“No, no. The gentleman who sent me was very generous. Thank you, though.” He bowed his sandy-haired head and dashed off.

Monika harrumphed and closed the door. Breaking the seal, she opened the note.

[Click here](#) to buy *Midnight Hunt (Book 3)* and read the rest of the story.

Other Books by Ariel Burnz

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ariel Burnz has been an avid reader of both paranormal and fantasy fiction for over thirty years. With bedtime stories filled with vampires, unicorns, hobbits, dragons and elves, she had no choice but to craft her own tales, penning to life the many magical creatures roaming her mind and dreams. And with a romantic husband who’s taught her the meaning of true love, she’s helpless to weave romance into her tales. Ariel lives in Southern California, with her husband DeWayne (a.k.a. her romance novel hero)—who also happens to be a descendant of Clan MacDougal. Visit [Ariel’s website](#) for the full story on *that* coincidence.