

Tainted Blood

by chivalric

Gabriel and Dr. Tennant meet under unusual circumstances.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: This is about half of the first chapter of my novel "Tainted Blood"(Click here to view info and cover) published in May 2010 by Dreamspinnerpress. I thought I'd post it here because TPP gave me a home nearly three years ago and because the wonderful notsosaintly had a big part in editing the manuscript. And of course for getting some feedback ;-)

Chapter 1

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"DAMN this shit," Gabriel Jordan murmured, trying to get some life back into his frozen feet by stamping them repeatedly on the pavement. "I need to get another job. And better shoes. And while I'm at it, a decent place to sleep. Food would be good too. Oh, and a coat. A warm one."

Grumbling, Gabriel shoved his hands under his armpits and hunched his shoulders. He was tall, too thin for his height, and far too hungry to give up just yet. His leather jacket allowed the wind to blow right down his neck despite the length of his hair, and he swore under his breath because he hadn't even managed to get himself a better sweater. It was December, and the air smelled of snow. Not only did he have to remain here for at least another hour, but he was dressed as though it were a warm summer evening. The only piece of winter clothing he had was a cap, thin and moth-eaten...a most necessary disguise, however, as his hair was flaming red and far too recognizable.

If he weren't so hungry, he'd quit for the day. Images of a huge, steaming cup of tea plagued him, which was a clear sign that his body required some warmth. His boss, though, heartless bastard that he was, had told him not to come back to the office without at least half a dozen pictures. "Pictures I can see his face in," the boss had clarified. "Wright's face and the face of the bitch he's screwing. His wife's paying good money for proof he's betraying her, so get out there, wait in front of her flat, and don't forget to put a new battery into your fucking camera this time."

Naturally, Gabriel had done as ordered. He needed the money...needed it badly enough to take on even the lousiest jobs. He hadn't eaten in two days. His fingers were white from the cold, and he had a strong feeling he would lose a fingertip or two if he didn't manage to get warm soon. But finding warmth was as unlikely as getting some food. Or a picture of that stupid idiot he was supposed to catch in flagrante.

Gabriel had been standing at this windy corner since before noon. He had probably seen three people all day, one of them a toddler riding home in its mother's arms. No surprise there...it was Christmas Eve, and Gabriel very much doubted that his target was daft enough to be with his lover on a night like this. The man...a fat bloke with thinning hair and ridiculous eyebrows...was probably at home right now, telling his children stories about Santa Claus.

For a moment, Gabriel wondered if there were stories told about Santa in the hidden worlds too. Surely they had more pressing problems...like keeping the portals closed and guarded so no humans would invade their worlds and attempt to kill them. Ever since the portals had been discovered, humans had tried to ignore that there were

aces and worlds other than their own. They closed their eyes to the fact that mermaids, vampires, fae, and werewolves actually existed and sometimes even lived amongst them. And if humans couldn't ignore it any longer, they would attack. Somehow, Gabriel doubted that people on the other side of the portals cared about an old man in a red coat.

"And I'm here, turning into an icicle." Shivering, he made sure his camera was ready for the umpteenth time. Stolen from a shabby little shop a few months ago, it was the only thing he owned apart from the clothes on his back and the knapsack at his feet. It also guaranteed a somewhat regular income. His boss, a quite lazy and wealthy private investigator, used him for the more complicated spying jobs...the ones where it was required to actually leave the office...so Gabriel was out on the street day and night, taking pictures of errant men and women cheating on their spouses, employees stealing from their employers, and children buying drugs from teenagers barely older than themselves. It was a most depressing way to earn money, but at least Gabriel was able to buy himself an occasional warm meal.

Right now, he couldn't see being able to afford anything to eat in the foreseeable future. He'd probably end up going to the mission so he wouldn't starve. A glum prospect indeed. Even more depressing, his stomach ached at the thought of mission food. It wasn't very picky at this point.

All of a sudden large, wet flakes started drifting down from the graying sky. Soon it would be too dark to see anything at all, never mind take pictures of cheating husbands, and he wasn't keen on getting the lens of his camera wet, either. Getting the face shot his boss wanted was looking rather bleak.

"I should call it a day," Gabriel murmured, wishing he'd stolen a scarf and gloves along with the camera. And some boots...the soles of his sneakers had more holes than Swiss cheese. His socks were wet and his toes frozen into numbness; he'd catch a cold if he didn't get out of the wind soon. Anyway, if he hung around here much longer, someone would finally call the police. He was extremely good at hiding, but a long-haired, poorly dressed young man loitering in the corner of a closed shop would become suspicious eventually, especially on Christmas Eve.

Just when Gabriel was about to give up, he saw movement out of the corner of his eye. Not in the street, but somewhere higher up, somewhere outside one of the apartments. *Probably a pigeon*, he thought, shrugging his shoulders. Or someone shaking out a blanket. Maybe even a runaway child, clutching a teddy bear in its arms. The latter part he'd seen too often; as a child, he'd run away from adults who didn't care whether he stayed home or not. Running away from foster parents had been one of his main pastimes, at least until he'd finally managed to run away for good at the age of fifteen.

There. There it was again, that faint, nearly invisible movement. The light was dimmer now as more snow blurred his vision, but something had caught his attention. It was not a bird or a blanket, and there was no ladder in sight; a child would have chosen an easier exit than the plain wall. No, this was something else, and although it was highly unlikely that his suspect would enter his lover's apartment through the window, it was at least possible that he had caught a burglar at work. In that case, he'd try to get a picture. Either his boss would pay him or he could blackmail the burglar. In either case, a warm dinner was looking more and more like a reality.

Gabriel picked up his worn, old knapsack and edged closer to the building where he'd spied the motion, sheltering himself in a doorway where the wind and snow couldn't reach him. The house was old, not in the best condition, and it looked as though it had been neglected somewhat. The windows were mostly dark, and he could hear someone arguing just slightly louder than the faint music in the background. The smell of roasting potatoes in the cold winter air made his stomach grumble. As he looked upward, he noticed that on the top floor, the last window to the right was ajar. It hadn't been earlier, he knew that with certainty, for he had been staring at that particular window for most of the day. In fact, it hadn't just been closed. The curtains had been drawn as well.

Every so often, he could see the beam of a flashlight glance off the walls and darkened windows where the intruder had entered; someone was searching the rooms, and this someone was almost certainly neither the young lady who lived there nor her fat lover.

"Whoever it is, I'll get his picture," Gabriel told the streetlamp as he ducked out of its light. He didn't have to wait long. Whoever had climbed up there only needed moments to find what he was looking for. One long leg slipped over the windowsill, then a second. For a moment, the burglar sat on the sill, looking out into the city's darkness. Gabriel couldn't see him clearly...he was too far up, the light from the streetlamp didn't reach that far, and the snowflakes insisted on landing right in his eyes whenever he looked upward and strained to focus on the man's face.

However, he had seen enough. The man sat on the windowsill as if it were a lawn chair. In Gabriel's opinion, he radiated arrogance, if only because he wore no coat, no cap, and no mask. Not even gloves. "Not afraid of leaving fingerprints," Gabriel murmured, fishing for his camera. The man was bound to climb down at any moment now...there had to be a rope somewhere...and he didn't want to miss a single shot.

Just when Gabriel was taking the camera out of its case, the man jumped.

Gabriel nearly had a heart attack, and he barely managed to keep hold of his camera. He saw the man fall, tumbling in mid-air; he saw him smash to the pavement, bones crunching as they broke. He saw blood splatter on the ground, tainting the innocent, white snow. He heard the sickening sound of skull hitting stone. He wondered how it was possible that a human being could look so ugly with his insides turned out. And then he realized that none of what he'd just seen had actually happened.

The man had jumped, yes, but hadn't fallen. Instead, he was floating slowly toward the ground like a giant moth. His arms were spread wide, and Gabriel realized that he had been wrong...the man was at least wearing a long scarf, and it was whipping through the air, its color gleaming surprisingly green against the dirty gray of the wall.

"What the hell?" Gabriel murmured, lifting his camera quickly, hitting the record button. A little video of this impossible event would help him believe it, if nothing else.

As slowly as the snowflakes falling around him, the man sailed softly to the ground. Gracefully, his feet touched the pavement not more than ten feet away from where Gabriel stood. He wore dark trousers, a gray shirt, black shoes, and that horrendously green scarf. With a bored gesture, he brushed a single snowflake off the sleeve of his shirt.

*Impossible*, thought Gabriel. *People don't jump off buildings and float down to earth like feathers. They drop like stones!*

The stranger looked completely normal: slightly taller than average and of a slender build; no more than thirty; short, straight, mouse-brown hair; no mustache, no glasses...there was nothing interesting about him at all, really. All right, maybe his eyes were worth a second look. At first, Gabriel had believed them to be brown, but after a second look, he saw that, even in the dim evening light, they were quite clearly very blue. *Ice-blue*, Gabriel thought, and he shivered.

Then he saw the long, thin scar running down the man's left cheek and frowned. He looked to be upper-class despite the fact that he wasn't wearing a coat. On further inspection, he also looked older than thirty...maybe around thirty-five or even forty...for his black hair was streaked with gray.

*But... wasn't his hair brown only a moment ago?* Gabriel blinked hard. How could he have missed that, and why had he thought the man's hair was short and straight when in reality it was curly and long enough to touch the collar?

Anyway. The light must have tricked his eyes. The man would have fit perfectly in a posh office, a lawyer's chair, or on a yacht, hairstyle notwithstanding. A scar, though, was definitely unexpected. It gave the strong impression that this man knew how to fight, and hell, was he really staring at the stranger, camera still filming?

Perhaps he had started a little at the realization and drew the man's attention, for the man turned and addressed him. "Good evening," the stranger said. His voice had a lovely mellow timbre, which reminded Gabriel of hot chocolate with just the right amount of whipped cream.

"Hi," Gabriel said, dropping the hand that held the camera. Filming the man suddenly seemed unimportant. Seeing him was what counted, talking to him, listening to that wonderful voice.

"I see you've got me on film," the stranger said, stepping a little closer. "How inconvenient. And I suppose you saw me jump from the windowsill as well?"

"Yep." Short answers were the only thing he could manage, Gabriel discovered.

"That is not good," the man said calmly. "First, I nearly get caught by a nosy neighbor, and now I'm talking to someone who shouldn't even be able to see me. I suggest you

forget what just happened. If you would hand me your camera, please."

As if in a dream, Gabriel handed the camera...his life's bread... over to a complete stranger, as unconcerned about it as though it were a useless piece of junk. He was a puppet on strings, and was there an edge of coldness in the otherwise warm, friendly voice? Those eyes... they were so blue... so incredibly, icy blue. Unnaturally blue...he'd never seen the like before. Piercing. Demanding. They made it impossible to disobey the owner's orders.

"Look here," Gabriel began, but the thought fled his mind quicker than he could speak it when the man took the camera out of his hand and brushed his warm, slender fingers over Gabriel's cold and clammy skin.

*He'll take the camera, Gabriel's mind screamed. Without it, I'll starve!*

As if his inner scream had been heard, the man said, "I will not steal what is yours. I will merely erase any proof of what happened here. In addition, you will not remember anything after your nap."

*What nap?* Gabriel had just enough time to think before the man drew a complicated pattern in the air with his fingers. He vaguely remembered seeing something like this before, but he felt suddenly sleepy, and catching that memory was no longer important. Warmth infused his frozen bones, and he had the strange sensation of being in a bed, covered by a fluffy duvet... so different from standing on a windy corner on an icy night.

"No," he whispered, struggling against being sent to sleep against his will, but his eyes dropped closed, and from a great distance, he heard the stranger say, "Here's your camera back," before walking away. The man's steps sounded hollow, surreal, on the snow-covered pavement.

*I'm dreaming this.* The thought was crystal clear in Gabriel's mind. *I'm dreaming I'm asleep. How strange.*

Slowly, his knees gave way, and he slid to the ground. The wall behind him caught his fall, ripping holes in his already pretty sorry-looking jacket. The pavement was cold; the snow on the ground soaked through the bottom of his jeans. His head sunk toward his breast, and the last thing he was aware of was his camera slipping out of his numb fingers. It's going to break... the snow... it'll damage it. His camera would be useless.

*No! Wake... wake up!*

Confused and groggy, Gabriel managed to open one heavy-lidded eye. He was sitting half on his folded-under calves and half on the wet, cold ground. His camera was just hitting the ground with a nasty little breaking sound. He could feel his mouth was ajar as if he'd spent the day getting pissed.

"S goin' on 'ere?" he mumbled, reaching out blindly. His fingers found a spout, and he managed to get to his feet, swaying like a sapling in a storm. "I just had... did... I saw.... Hey, you! Wait!"

Was that his voice? Since when did he sound like an old man, all hoarse and weak?

Shaking his head, Gabriel leaned heavily against the wall, his foot kicking the camera, sending it slithering into a puddle. It was as if he were watching a tragic accident on the news, and he felt physically sick as he observed his one worthy possession expire along with all hope of a warm meal and bed. "Shit," he murmured weakly, rubbing one hand across his dirty, tired face. "Not my fucking day. Where the hell is that guy?"

"You are surprisingly awake, my friend," a familiar, warm voice said, and Gabriel's worn-out body jerked in shock. He hadn't heard the man come back, hadn't seen any movement, although he'd been staring after the dark figure before his eyes had closed. He could have sworn the man had left, vanished into thin air, at least ten minutes ago, but here he was, standing only an arm's length away under the steady, golden glow of a streetlight that had not too long ago been flickering weakly.

Warm fingers searched for the pulse in his neck. Gabriel flinched back, or rather, tried; he was unable to move. The warm, happy feeling returned, his eyes became heavy as lead once again, and if he hadn't managed to catch the man around the wrist, he would have ended up on the ground again, most likely asleep for longer than a few seconds.

"Stop it," Gabriel hissed around his heavy tongue. "Whatever you are doing, stop it right now!"

"Hmmm," the stranger said, moving back a step. "You are not entirely human, are you? What else is in your blood? Elf? Vampire? Fae? No, not fae blood. Fae don't produce redheads, not even after several generations. And the riverghosts tend to keep halflings under water. That would leave...?" Questioningly, the man raised an eyebrow, expecting and encouraging an answer.

"Shapeshifter."

One word, just one small word, but Gabriel felt the small hairs on the back of his neck rise. He had never, ever told anyone about his heritage.

"Ah. Wolf, if I am correct. Or lynx, maybe? Your eyes give you away. Wonderful eyes, don't take me wrong, but hunter's eyes nevertheless."

"Wolf," Gabriel confirmed. Until now, no one apart from his mother and grandmother had known what he really was, and he preferred to keep it that way. His various foster parents had taken him in solely because he had looked so very cute, absolutely human, and they had believed he would be easy to raise. It was impossible to detect nonhuman genes in a child. Most people would trust their eyes rather than listen to the small voice whispering that their new family member might be part vampire...after all, very few vampires lived in the human world, and anyway, if a child looked human, naturally it must be human.

His great-grandfather had been a pure-blood shapeshifter, but Gabriel had always looked absolutely human. He had been beautiful as a little boy, with his dark red locks and sweet smile. Therefore, he never had to stay for longer than a month or two in the orphanage before someone decided that he was just the child they wanted. The people who took him in had all been nice, for a while at least. Until they realized that he was different...too silent, too shy, and far too much in love with his freedom. Very soon, they began to look at him with eyes that spoke clearly of their second thoughts about taking him in. In no time at all, they would begin treating him like a stranger...that is, if they remembered that he was even there at all. Usually, he ran away after a few weeks at the most, and usually, he ended up back in the orphanage after three months tops, the foster parents all too willingly bringing him back themselves most of the time.

With a jolt of guilt, Gabriel realized that he had allowed his thoughts to drift...something that rarely happened, and never around company. However, this man, this stranger, seemed to have unusual powers, as though he was willing Gabriel's thoughts to wander so he could pluck them right out of his head. Right now, the man was staring at him with his head slightly tilted, as if Gabriel were a particularly fascinating insect.

"Shapeshifter, or werewolf, as it's more commonly called, although that's nonsense, given the fact that only about one-third of shapeshifters turn into a wolf. Do you have to transform?" Curiously, the man pulled at a strand of red hair that had escaped from Gabriel's cap and was waving in the winter wind, obviously trying to get a better look at his face.

"Keep your fucking hands off me," Gabriel growled, and he stumbled backward only to find the wall blocking his way. The doorway was too small for both of them; all he wanted was to get away from this man, this someone who acted so strangely, who knew too much, who....

"Hang on. Didn't you just float to the ground?" Gabriel craned his neck to look up at the window he had been staring at for the better part of the day. How could he have forgotten that rather significant piece of information? "You broke into that apartment...I saw you! Even took pictures. And I filmed you when you jumped off the windowsill like a bloody falcon or something. I thought you were falling, but you weren't. You landed right in front of me."

With a sudden push, Gabriel shoved the man and made him stagger backward. "You did something to me. You made me sleepy. Hell, you are one lousy bastard!" he finished lamely, unable to think of anything else to say.

Obviously unimpressed by Gabriel's anger, the man reached out his hand in what looked like a friendly gesture. "Tennant. Dr. Tennant," he replied coolly. "You should not be able to remember any of this, you know. You should be fast asleep on the ground, as I used a Forgetting rune and a Sleeping rune. Actually, you should not have been able to see me in the first place, neither when I entered the apartment nor when I left. Hmmm. Well, it is quite obvious you are neither oblivious to what has happened nor are you asleep. Both facts pique my interest."

Tennant paused, hand still extended. "Are you able to perform such a basic social behavior as shaking my hand, or would you respond better if I forced you?" Impatiently, he thrust his hand forward a bit, urging Gabriel to take and shake it. "And your name would be?"

Gabriel stared at the hand and then the man who had introduced himself as Tennant, tentatively took the offered hand, and finally said, "Gabriel. Gabe, that is. I mean, my name is Gabriel Jordan. Shit, man, how do you do that...make me feel like a five-year-old?"

"One of my various talents," Tennant answered lightly, then bent down and picked up the shattered camera. "Come along. You look like a scarecrow. How old are you? Eighteen? Twenty, maybe?" Wrapping the green scarf around his neck, he turned and walked away, obviously expecting Gabriel to follow.

Gabriel glanced back at the house he was supposed to be watching but figured there wasn't any sense waiting to get a picture any longer, as it was now completely dark and snowing heavily. Pulling his cap lower to protect his face from the snow, he thought, *Could be worse, getting picked up by an arrogant asshole*, and followed Tennant. "I'm twenty-seven," he clarified belatedly and in a slightly threatening voice. Shouldering his knapsack, he continued, "Just so you know, I work out, and you wouldn't stand a chance against me in a fight, so don't get any funny ideas. Where are we going, anyway?"

"Home," Tennant answered, sounding surprised. "Where else would we go on Christmas Eve?"