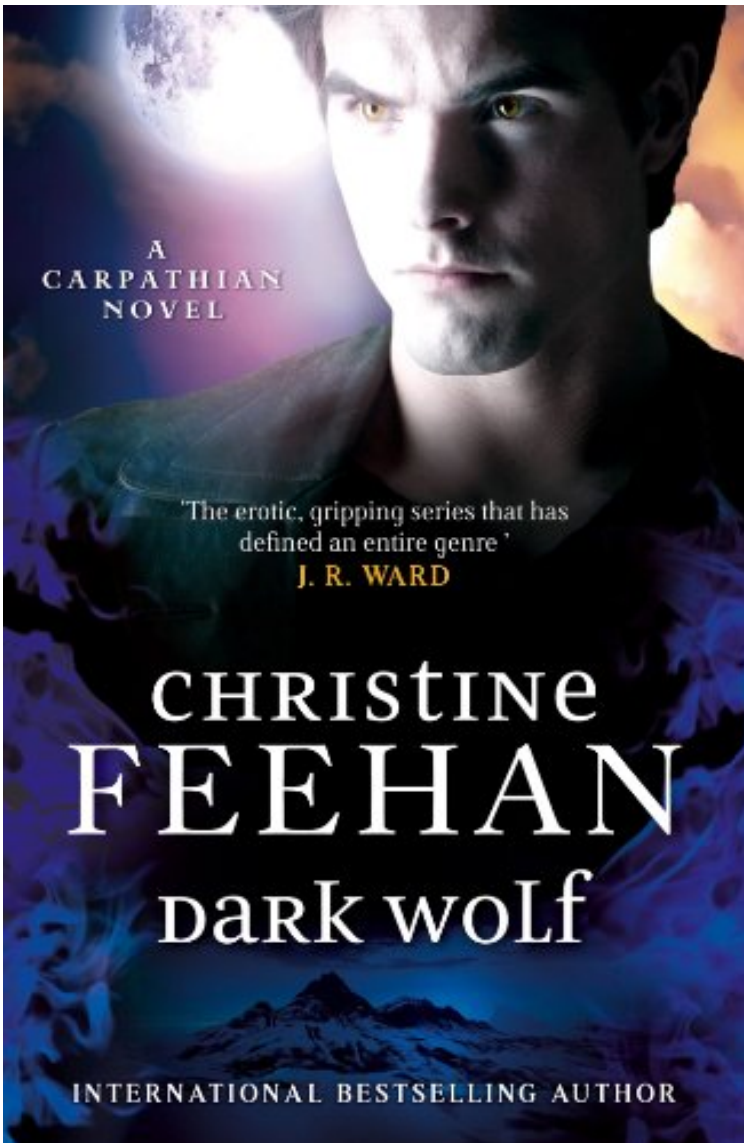


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Dark Wolf



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNo.1 New York Times bestselling author Christine Feehan now delivers her most eagerly awaited novel of all - ten years in the making.In DARK LYCAN, Christine Feehan journeyed into the heart of the Carpathians, and into the souls of two lifemates stirred by the flush of passion and the threat of annihilation. In DARK WOLF, the breathtaking story continues as the bonds of family are imperiled, and the fate of two lovers lies hidden in the seductive shadows between life and death.Skyler Daratrazanoff always recognized the miracle that was Dimitri Tirunul, a man beyond any dream that had ever engaged her nights. But she was human. Vulnerable. He was Carpathian. Nearly immortal. She was nineteen. He was an ancient. Yet she held half his soul, the light to his darkness. Without her, he would not survive. Caught

between the two warring species, Dimitri has spent centuries hunting the undead to keep his people free, and humans safe. He had survived honorably when others had chosen to give up their souls. But now, marked for extermination by the Lycans, Dimitri found himself alone, and fearing for his life. But salvation was coming. . No Lycan would ever suspect someone like Skyler to dare mount a secret rescue operation. A teenage girl. A human of untested abilities. But she had something no one else had. She was predestined for Dimitri - as he was for her. And there was nothing stronger for Skyler than her desire to see her life-dream come true.

Whatever the risk.ExtraitChapter OneSkyler Daratrazanoff pulled the long black shawl closer, making certain her hair was covered and there was little to see of her face. Her heart beat so hard she was afraid anyone close would hear. Everything hinged on making the official believe her. Josef had forged the papers, and he was the best. He could hack any computer, provide information or get it. She didnt doubt for a minute that the papers he created would be in order and pass close scrutiny, but she still had to make the official believe her.The tin building was rusted and looked as if it might fall apart at any moment. A man came forward to meet her, looking solemn as the casket was wheeled ahead of her into the shade of the building.

Fortunately the sun was setting and shadows fell around her, helping to make it more difficult to see her clearly. Your papers? he said. His voice was kind. The name on his badge identified him as Erno Varga.She glanced back toward the small plane shed flown to the airport and then handed her papers to the official, making certain her eyes were downcast and she looked weepy. She had taken care to use drops to make her eyes red and watery, just in case she couldnt pull off acting on her own.Varga looked over her papers and then up at her several times with sharp, disbelieving eyes. Youre young to be bringing home your brothers body alone. No one else is traveling with you?She shook her head, trying to look more tragic than ever. My father is dead, and now my brother. She choked back a sob worthy, she was certain, of an Oscar performance. There is no one else to bring him home to our mother.The official looked at her again and studied her papers closer. He died of a broken heart? There was skepticism in his voice.Skyler nearly choked. When I get my hands on you, Josef, youre going to die of more than a broken heart. She used her telepathic connection with Josef to let him know he was in huge trouble.A terrible tragedy. Josef was unrepentant as always. There was amusement in his tone. No matter how serious a situation, he didnt mind in the least being mischievous.She managed to keep a straight face and gave Varga a solemn nod. He just wasted away when his girl left him. He refused to eat. She had no choice but to go with it, even if it meant twisting her fingers together hard in order to prevent the official from seeing she was shaking. Its a terrible tragedy. Nothing could save him.Okay, even to her ears, that sounded totally lame. But a broken heart? Only Josef would come up with something so dramatic and unbelievable. How else could she explain hed died of a broken heart? There was definitely going to be another cause of death after they opened the casket.She could feel Josefs laughter. Of course youre laughing. Youre safe in the coffin, the tragically dead brother, while Im lying my ass off to this man who could put me in prison for the rest of my life.She knew Josef would never let that happen. If necessary hed give the official a push to believe her. Right now, he was having too much fun listening to her squirm and she supposed she deserved it. She was making him do something highly dangerous, and he would be blamed more than she would be if anything went wrong. Her father would probably just kill him on sight.He will, too, Josef said. Hell rip me from limb to limb.You should be worrying about me ripping you from limb to limb, she threatened.How old are you? The official stared at her passport and papers and then back up to her face. Did you pilot that plane?She lifted her chin, trying for older and much sterner. She knew she looked young, but not her eyes. If he looked her directly in the eye, he would believe what those forged papers said. And they were great forgeries. Josef had many talents, although making up stories was clearly not one of them.Im much older than I look, Skyler replied. It was partially the truth. She felt older, and that should count for something. Shed been through more than most womenokay, teens.Twenty-five? he said skeptically.Josef had insisted she be twenty-five if she was going to pilot the plane. Piloting planes had come easy to her and it was something she especially loved, so her adopted father, Gabriel, had allowed her to learn.I have to open the coffin, the official added, watching her closely.Skyler managed a little sob and covered her mouth, nodding slightly. Im sorry. Yes, of course. They said you would. I was expecting you to. She straightened her shoulders and spine courageously.He looked at her much more kindly. You dont need to watch. Stand over there. He nodded to a corner of the building just a few feet away.She felt a little sorry for him. If she knew anything at all about Josef, she knew he would put on some kind of show.Dont you dare blow this by scaring him, she warned. I mean it, Josef.Youre no fun. I can always remove his memories. Wouldnt it be so delicious to do an impression of Count Dracula? Ive watched the movie a million times. Ive got the look and accent down perfectly.He

sounded far too eager. It took a lot of discipline to keep amusement from her mind where he could read it. She didn't doubt for a moment that Josef could do a perfect Dracula impression. Resist the urge. We aren't out of the woods and we can't afford to take any chances. We're in Carpathian territory. Or at least close enough that someone might be near us to sense the use of energy. Restrain yourself, Josef. He heaved a sigh. No matter what the outcome, your father is going to kill me, a slow and painful death, too. I should be able to have a little fun. That was hitting very close to the truth. Gabriel was going to murder all of them, but if their plan worked, it would be well worth it. She gave Varga a small, grateful smile and moved away from the coffin. Standing in the open door, her arms wrapped around her middle for comfort, she stared outside into the gathering darkness, holding herself very still. Their plan had to work. Behave Josef, or else. Gabriel's in London and I'm here. She had never been on the receiving end of Gabriel's wrath, but he and her uncle Lucian were legendary vampire hunters. The Carpathian people, most extremely powerful, whispered their names in awe. You've got a point. Laughter bubbled over in Josef's voice. What a sorry waste of a good coffin. Now there was disgust in his tone. Skyler couldn't tell if he was going to behave or not. It was impossible with Josef. He marched to his own drum. She sent up a silent prayer, hoping for the best. Right now, Francesca and Gabriel were probably awake and would soon be preparing to fly to the Carpathian Mountains. They thought she was a continent away, safe with her human college friend Maria, using her vacation to help build homes and run irrigation to farmers in South America. She had never lied to them before. Not once. And it hurt her to do it now, but there was no other way. She knew her parents had been summoned to the huge meeting between Lycan and Carpathian to discuss an alliance between the two species. Most of the Carpathians had been called home. Gabriel and Francesca had been more than happy to receive a call from her from school asking to go with Maria. They didn't want her anywhere near the Carpathian Mountains. She would never think of repaying their extraordinary kindness, the love they had given her from the moment she'd been taken into their home, with lies and betrayal not for anything or anyone except Dimitri. Dimitri Tirunul was her unexpected miracle. A man beyond anything she'd ever dreamed of. She was human. He was Carpathian, nearly immortal. She was nineteen years old. He was an ancient, centuries old. She held the other half of his soul, the light to his darkness. Without her, he would not survive. She was his lifemate, his savior. Yet she knew just the opposite was true. Dimitri was the one saving her. He knew she was his lifemate when she was just a child, and he had given her time. Space. Unconditional love. He never demanded anything of her. He never told her how difficult it was for him that she was his salvation, just out of his reach. He had always been there for her, in the middle of the night, when her violent past was too close and she couldn't sleep, when nightmares haunted her to the point she couldn't breathe. He was there, in her mind, holding all those terrifying memories at bay. Dimitri. Her Dimitri. Dimitri was caught in the middle between the two species. The Lycans had taken him and planned to kill him. No one had gone after him to save him. He had spent centuries hunting the undead to keep his people as well as humans safe. He had survived honorably when others had chosen to give up their souls. Yet there was no rescue party. No hunters were rushing to save him. He was badly injured. She felt that much before he cut himself off from her to protect her from his pain or his death. Dimitri was stoic about life or death. He was a Carpathian hunter and he'd been around for centuries, protecting innocents from vampires. Her lineage was complicated, but for all intents and purposes, she was human. The Lycans would never expect a teenage, human girl to mount a rescue operation for a Carpathian. She had the element of surprise on her side. That, as well as good, trustworthy friends and her very powerful but untested abilities. Skyler had faith in herself. She knew her every strength and every weakness. Like Josef, she was extremely intelligent and most of the time underestimated. She believed the Lycans would underestimate her, she was counting on it. No one would start a war over a Carpathian hunter, it seemed, but she knew her father would come after her, and if anyone harmed one hair on her head, the Lycan world would be in for a nightmare it couldn't possibly conceive. Not only would Gabriel come after her, but so would her uncle Lucian. She was fairly certain her biological father, Razvan, and his lifemate, Ivory, would join the hunt for her. They were extremely lethal as well. There was satisfaction in knowing if she was injured or killed, she would be avenged. No one, not even Mikhail Dubrinsky, the prince of the Carpathian people, would be able to stop a war if the Lycans harmed her. She lifted her chin. Dimitri would never leave her in danger. He would rush to her side the moment he knew there was trouble; he had more than once, just to soothe bad dreams when she had too many in a row. She couldn't do less for him. Holding her breath, she turned back to watch the coffin gingerly open. The lid rose slowly and darn Josef anyway, it looked as if it was lifting all by itself. Varga stepped back, one

hand going up defensively. There was silence as the lid came to a stop. Nothing moved. She could hear the sound of a clock ticking loudly. Varga coughed nervously. He glanced at her. Skyler put her hand over her mouth and lowered her eyes. Josef! Behave yourself. Skyler was somewhere between laughing and crying with nervous tension. Varga stepped back to the coffin and peered in, beads of sweat visible on his forehead. He cleared his throat. He certainly looks robust for a man who starved himself to death. The least you could have done was make yourself look emaciated if you wanted him to believe your preposterous story, she scolded. Skyler pressed a handkerchief to her mouth. They did such a good job at the funeral home. I particularly asked them to make certain he looked good for our mother. Varga pressed his lips together and studied the body. He was suspicious, but she wasn't certain of what. Clearly there was a dead body in the coffin. Did he suspect her of running drugs? Guns? If so, that didn't bode well for what she had planned. She needed to look like a naive, young teenager who might be slightly ditzy. She held her breath as he reached for the lid of the coffin and slowly closed it. Is someone coming for you? Varga asked as he locked the coffin lid and glanced at his watch. I can't stay. You were the last plane coming in. My brother's friend arranged for a truck to pick us up. He'll be here any minute, Skyler assured him solemnly. Thank you so much for all your help. You can wait in here, Varga said in a kind voice. I'll come back in a couple of hours and lock up. He looked around the dilapidated building. It was nothing more than four metal walls, mostly rusted, some so badly there were holes. Not that there's much to lock up. He glanced again at his watch. I would wait with you, but I have another job to go to. She sent him a wan smile. It's all right. Really. He'll be here any minute. Varga gave her one last look and exited the rickety building, leaving her there alone with the locked coffin. Skyler waited until she saw his car drive off and the lights disappear completely down the road. She took a careful look around. She appeared to be alone. Josef, you can quit playing dead, Skyler said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. She banged on the coffin lid with her fist. Died of a broken heart? Really? You couldn't think of anything else, anything, say, more realistic? The lid of the coffin opened with the same series of ominous, horror film creaks he'd used when Varga had opened the lid. There was silence. Skyler's heart beat steadily. She leaned over the coffin and glared at the young man who lay as if dead, his arms crossed over his chest and his eyes closed. His skin was pale porcelain and his black spiky hair with the dyed blue tips stood out starkly against the white backdrop. You look amazingly robust for a man who starved himself to death, she said sarcastically, mimicking the official. You could have blown everything with your absurd story. Josef's eyes snapped open dramatically. He faked an accent as he slowly sat up. I could use a drop of blood or two, my dear. She smacked him over the head with her papers. The customs official didn't believe I was twenty-five. Josef flashed a cocky grin. You're not. You're barely nineteen, and when Gabriel and Lucian find out what we've done, we're both going to be in more trouble than either of us has ever known. He paused, the smile fading from his mouth. And I've been in a lot of trouble. We have no choice, Skyler said. Don't kid yourself, Sky, there's always a choice. And you aren't the one they're going to kill. I'm going to be their prime target. When Gabriel and Lucian come looking for you and they will, Josef said, they'll find you. They have a reputation for a reason. If we really do this, every Carpathian hunter will be out looking. Her father, Gabriel, was extremely powerful, a legendary Carpathian hunter. Her uncle Lucian, Gabriel's twin, had helped to create that legend among the Carpathian people, and when they discovered her gone, of course they would come after her. Isn't that the point? Skyler replied with a small shrug. By the time they wake and realize we're gone, we'll have a good head start. We should be able to find Dimitri. You do realize, Josef said, floating out of the coffin, this could very well cause an international incident. Or worse, war. All-out war. You agreed to help me, Skyler said. Have you changed your mind? No. You're my best friend, Sky. Dimitri probably despises me and wishes I was dead, but he's your lifemate and he's been literally thrown to the wolves. Josef sent her a little grin, pleased with his pun. Of course I'm going to help you. I helped you come up with this plan, didn't I? And it will work. Dimitri doesn't despise you; in fact, he's glad you're my friend. We've talked about it. He isn't like that. Skyler made a face at him. You know very well he knows I think of you like a brother. He'd defend you with his life. Josef grinned at her. Forgive me for despising him just a little bit. He's good-looking, intelligent, an ancient hunter, and your lifemate. He destroyed all my dreams and fantasies about you. I don't dare even think along those lines or he'd know. Skyler rolled her eyes. As if. Even I know you don't think of me that way, Josef. You can hide a lot of things, but not that. There's no fantasy and no destroyed dreams. Your lifemate is either not born or she smirked at him mischievously. She's probably one of Gregori's daughters. He groaned and slapped his forehead with his palm. A curse on you forever for uttering those words, for putting that thought out into the universe. Don't even think that, let alone say it aloud. Can you imagine Gregori Daratrazanoff as a father-in-law?

Sheesh, Skyler, you really do want me dead. She laughed. It would serve you right, Josef. Especially after putting you died of a broken heart on those papers! It could happen. I'm a romantic, you know. Dimitri thinks

I'm a little kid, just like they all do, which is probably just as well, because otherwise he'd see me as a rival. You take great pains to keep them all thinking you're a kid, Skyler pointed out with a small smile. You like them to underestimate you. You're a genius, Josef, and you don't let any of them see the real you. You

deliberately provoke them. His grin widened until he looked positively mischievous. He blew on his fingertips. That is very true. I don't deny it. His smile faded. But this is very different than the pranks I pull on them. This is big, Skyler. I just want you to understand what's at stake. Of course I know what's at stake. Your family is one of the most powerful families of our people. He frowned. Which reminds me, why don't you ever refer to Gregori as your uncle? He's a brother to Lucian and Gabriel, so technically, he is your

uncle. I guess I never thought about it. I don't know him. We're in London, and he's here in the Carpathian Mountains and he's never shown a tremendous amount of interest in me. He's a Daratrazanoff, believe me,

Sky, he's interested in you. If you disappear, your family is going to come looking and they'll be on the warpath. All of your family, especially Gabriel. Are you afraid of my father? Skyler asked. I've got news for you, honey, everyone is afraid of your father, and if they aren't they should be, especially when it comes to you. Haven't you noticed how protective he is of you? Your uncle Lucian is just as bad if not worse, and if

anyone messes with one of those men or anyone they love, they answer to both of them. Skyler bit her lip. I'm sorry, Josef, for putting you in this position. I can't turn back. I have to find Dimitri. I know I can do this.

This plan is flawless. And we both knew and counted on Gabriel and Lucian coming after me. I can go from here by myself, I really can. Josef burst out laughing. Now you really have lost your mind. If I let you do this

alone, they'd really kill me. No, we're here and we have to see it through. I think you're the only one who could really pull this off. But Skyler, if you get into trouble, this really will start a war. Lucian and Gabriel are not going to back off if someone hurts you, or if you're captured. They won't care what the prince says.

They'll go after you and no one will stand in their way. You'd better go into this knowing that. You have to know the consequences and be willing to face them. Skyler pressed her lips together. She'd thought about

little else since she and Josef had come up with the plan. Dimitri is a good man. He could have claimed me, taken me away from my home and the only stability I'd ever known. I wouldn't have been able to resist him, the pull of lifemates is just too strong. But he didn't, Josef, no matter the terrible cost to him. He didn't insist

on claiming me or binding us together. He wasn't afraid of Gabriel. He was never afraid of Gabriel. Josef waved his hand at the coffin and the lid creaked closed. I know, he admitted softly. He knew I wasn't ready, that I needed time to find myself and overcome . . . everything in my past. Skyler ducked her head, so that her wealth of silky hair covered her expression. Don't, Sky, Josef said. We're best friends. What happened to

you wasn't your fault, and you should never feel ashamed. I'm not ashamed, well, not like you think. I believe Dimitri is a great man and he deserves a lifemate who can match him in everything. I'm not that woman yet. I

want to be with him, I feel that need nearly as strongly as he does. It grows in me every single day. Do you think he would hold your past against you? Josef asked. Skyler shook her head. No, he often is close enough

to talk to me at night when I can't sleep. We talk a lot at night. I love his voice. He's very gentle with me, never demanding. I know it's difficult for him. I can feel his struggle, although he hid it from me at first. You

can't be in someone else's head without eventually seeing everything. Darkness threatened to swallow him all

the time, yet he never said anything to me, he never tried to hurry me. He certainly didn't condemn me because I was too young and afraid. Dimitri doesn't judge me. No one does, hon, Josef pointed out. You're the

one so hard on yourself. I especially loved the stage when you dyed your hair constantly. It took a little

while to find yourself and be comfortable with whom you really are. Skyler's eyebrow shot up. She stared pointedly at Josef's black, spiked hair tipped with blue. His grin was contagious, revealing twin dents near his

mouth. This is who I am. I found that out a long time ago. I like my hair with blue tips. Because no one will ever guess just how smart you are. They're too busy looking at your hair and the piercings you occasionally

put in just to bug them all, she accused, laughing softly. I love you, Josef, you know that, don't you? Yep. That's why I'm here, Sky. I don't have all that many people who care about me. If you say you need me, I'll

come. He looked away from her. Skyler put her hand on his arm. There are many people who care about you, Josef, you just don't let them get close. If you gave Dimitri a chance, he would be a good friend to you. I

know he would. I've talked to him many times about you. I thought you hadn't seen him since you'd been to the Carpathian Mountains. He thought it best if we stayed away from one another. I knew it would be too

difficult for him with me being physically close to him, but he came to London on and off when he needed to hear my voice. Did Gabriel know? Josef asked. Probably. He didn't ask me, but I noticed when Dimitri was

close, Gabriel stayed closer and when he wasn't with me, Francesca was close by. There were times when Uncle Lucian and Auntie Jaxon hung around. They're busy, so I knew it was because they were afraid Dimitri would come and claim me. But he didn't. Of course not. He's a man of honor. I'm not old enough in the Carpathian culture, which is funny, because in the human culture I could marry easily. No one would think twice about it. Did you want him to claim you? Josef asked curiously. Skyler shrugged. Sometimes. I dream about him. I don't ever think about other men, or even look at them. It's always Dimitri. He calls to me and isn't even aware of it. When we're talking, mind to mind, I see things. How alone he is. How dark his world is. How hard it is to struggle against the constant pull of the darkness. He endures so much for me. So much for all of us. When he hunts, it has become harder for him. Every time he has to kill. I see all that, and the terrible sacrifices he makes for me. He wouldn't want you to see those things, Sky, Josef said gently. You know that, don't you? Carpathian males, especially the hunters, they're like stone, total warriors, and if he thought he wasn't protecting you from that creeping shadow, he'd be very upset. Skyler smiled at Josef. I can't help what I see, Josef. I'm not exactly like everyone else. What kind of a concoction am I? Psychic. Mage.

Partly Carpathian. Daughter of the earth. Dragonseeker. I see things I'm not meant to see. I feel things I shouldn't. I know he was nearly taken from me. I felt him. I called to him. Sang the healing chants I've heard Francesca sing. I lit candles, and I cried for days when he was so far away I couldn't reach him. She looked into his eyes, letting him see her grief. Josef was definitely underestimated by most people, but she saw his genius, and she valued their close friendship. She could talk to him, tell him anything, and he never betrayed her confidence. I need him, she admitted simply. And I have to find him. Josef slung his arm around her shoulders. Well, little sister, that's exactly what we're going to do. Paul should be here any minute. He texted me and said he had everything ready. Did he cover his tracks? Didn't he tell you once that Nicolas took his blood? If he did, he can track Paul. Baby, any of them can track us, and they'll be hot on our trail the moment they realize you're missing. I know that. I'm just saying it can't happen until we're ready. Skyler glanced again at her watch. He's late. His cover is perfect, Josef assured. He flew over with the De La Cruz families, and he told them we were going to go exploring the mountains on the Ukraine side. We're camping for a couple of weeks. Of course they were happy to get rid of us, and no one is going to question that we'd want to do something together. We talked about it endlessly for the last couple of years. This would be the perfect opportunity for us to get together so they bought our story easily. Skyler gave a little sniff. Of course they don't mind if you two go off camping in the wilds together. Remember when I wanted to go on one of your camping trips? The world almost came to an end. Josef laughed and leaned one hip lazily against the coffin.

Gabriel turned into the big bad wolf and nearly ate Paul and me for dinner just at the suggestion. I was surprised he allowed you to go off to college. You were so far ahead of your age group in school. Skyler shrugged. I went home at night the first year. I needed to. That had nothing to do with Gabriel and Francesca. I don't know what I would have done without them. I needed them so much in the early days. And they really came through for me. Tears shimmered in her eyes. I hate to repay their love and kindness with lies, but they left me no choice. You tried talking to them about Dimitri? Josef asked. Skyler nodded. I knew something was wrong, that Dimitri was troubled the last time we talked. He left abruptly for the Carpathian Mountains a few weeks ago and then he was in a terrible battle. I felt him slipping away from me. He was so far away, and I almost couldn't reach him. By the time I did, he was nearly gone. I could feel his life force fading. She looked up at him. You remember that night? I called you to come and help me. You were in the college library and fortunately I'd come to visit you, so I wasn't far away, Josef said, but you didn't tell me what happened. Only that Dimitri needed you. You were wiped out. The memory of that night shook her. Dimitri had been badly wounded. Mortally wounded. She was far from him, studying in the college library so mundanely the distance dimming their connection. She'd reached for him, knowing he was in trouble, and it was his brother she found. When she touched Dimitri, he had grown so cold, ice-cold. She shivered, the coldness still in her bones. Sometimes she didn't think she'd ever get it out. His brother was there, fighting for him, following after his fading light and trying to bring him back. I called to Dimitri and begged him not to leave me. I did my best, even across such a great distance, to help his brother bring him back to the land of the living. I just couldn't let him go. She caught her lower lip between her teeth, biting down hard. Even now her heart ached. She pressed her palm tightly over the pain. I can't lose him, Josef. He has always been there for me, as long as I've needed him, any way that I've needed him. It's my turn now. I won't let him down. I'm going to find him, and I'm going to help him escape. Before, when he was dying, you could reach him, Josef ventured carefully, knowing full well he was walking through a minefield. Why do you think you can't now? I know what you're getting at, Josef, she snapped, and it isn't true. Dimitri is alive. I know he's

alive. Josef nodded. I hear you, Sky, but that doesn't answer my question. Maybe we'd better figure out why you can't reach him when the two of you have always been able to communicate telepathically. You're extraordinarily powerful. More so than some Carpathians. Many of us can't cover the kinds of distances you've been able to. So what's different now? She frowned at him. Josef was incredibly brilliant and even if she didn't want to hear it, she needed to listen to him. He had a point. She'd been able to cross great distances to connect with Dimitri and him with her. She had known when he was in trouble, when he had fought in a battle with a rogue pack and took the brunt of the attack in order to give his brother the opportunity to destroy a very dangerous vampire/wolf cross. She had felt Dimitri's pain, so terrible she could barely breathe. Right there, in the college library she had nearly fallen to the floor, with that flash of pain that wasn't hers.

She had followed that trail back to him unerringly despite his fading light. Over the years of talking telepathically, the connection between them had grown strong, and she found him even as his life force was fading away, traveling to another realm. If she could do that, Josef was right, why couldn't she find him now?

It didn't make sense and she should have figured that out on her own. You're too close to the problem, Josef said, proving he was so tuned to her he could practically read her thoughts. I don't like it when I'm not thinking straight, Skyler said. He needs me to be one hundred percent on this. I think it's called love, Sky, as much as I don't want to admit you could love anyone but me. Josef winked at her. Something's really wrong, Josef. I know it is. How could I find him when he was already technically dead, but I can't do it now? Perhaps he's unconscious, he ventured. She shook her head. I thought of that. I could still find him. I know I could.

There's something about our connection. It's so strong, I can follow him anywhere. I could touch him when he was underground, rejuvenating in the soil. Josef's eyes widened. No way, Sky. No one can do that. We stop our hearts and lungs and we can't move. That's our most vulnerable time. How could he be aware? I don't know, but whenever I reach for him, day or night, he's always been there for me. Always. I can't remember a single time that I couldn't find him. Mother Earth always sang to me, a vibration I could feel, and I would know where he was. Did you tell Gabriel and Francesca you could do that? Could you do it with them? With me? Skyler paced across the floor, looking once more at her watch a little impatiently. I never thought to tell anyone, not even Dimitri, the how of it. But no, I never tried to wake anyone else. Francesca and Gabriel get very little time alone together these days, so I never considered waking them. It seemed natural to turn to

Dimitri. I knew that he needed me as much as I needed him. All this time I thought you were afraid of a relationship with him, Josef said. Skyler's smile held little humor. I was never afraid of a relationship with him. How could I be? We have a wonderful relationship. He treats me like I'm the greatest, most desirable woman in the world. He's intelligent, we can talk about anything together for hours. He's kind and gentle. He's everything a woman could want in a partner. I'm hearing a but in there. I am not certain I can be the lifemate he truly deserves. I'm great at the emotional relationship and the intellectual relationship, but I have no idea if I can ever be what he needs physically. That's an entirely different matter. Josef shook his head. Skyler, don't get all psycho about that. It will happen when it's supposed to. Dimitri will never want another woman. Not ever. He'll give you all the time you need. I know. I do. Dimitri would never push me and he never has. It isn't him that's worried. I just get anxious thinking about it. I want to be the best lifemate possible to him, but my mind just can't go to a physical relationship yet. She glanced again at her watch. Paul had better get here soon.

Are you certain he got away without anyone being suspicious? Yeah, he's on his way. Only a few minutes out. You said Dimitri was alive. If he is, we'll find him. Skyler let her breath out slowly. I don't like any of this. I detest the fact that the prince, along with everyone else, has abandoned him. Josef slung his arm around her and hugged her tight. The smile faded. We'll find him. We will. Skyler clung to him for a moment and then nodded, straightening her shoulders and stepping away from him. I don't like the only explanation I can think of for not being able to connect with him. What is it? Josef asked. He's blocking me. There was hurt in her voice. He has to be. There's no other explanation that makes sense. *Revue de presse Praise for Christine Feehan and her Carpathian novels* The queen of paranormal romance! The one who started it all! The erotic, gripping series that has defined an entire genre. I love everything she does. J. R. Ward, #1 New York Times bestselling author After Bram Stoker, Anne Rice and Joss Whedon (who created the venerated Buffy the

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