

Develyn's Tale

by Shannon Bailey

Develyn slapped the leather bound book closed and tossed it onto the coffee table in front of him. He rubbed his face wearily and ran his hands through his hair.

So Emily had journaled her time with David. It certainly wasn't a surprise, but it irked him. It irked him because it was only half the story. Half the truth. And when the time came for David Johnathon Blackwell-Perkins to know the truth about his father and uncle, he should be told the whole of it.

Starting with who his father really was . . .

After he had squeezed a few droplets of holy water between David's lips, Develyn strode down the hallway to the bathroom. He had meant to pull Emily back to the room and finish the deed he had planned. But when his nose caught her wet scent and his eyes caught the sight of her nude body through the frosted glass of the shower, he wanted nothing more than to taste her blood. To taste her kiss. To have her . . .

With a growl, Develyn shot to his feet. In a flash, he crossed the floor, the tails of his aged black leather trench coat snapping angrily behind him. Stopping before an expanse of nearly floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out onto a wide river, he watched the sparkling blue water rush by. The smell of mud and fish filled his nostrils and the hollow thumping sound of a moored boat housed beneath the room, filled his head as his thoughts raced.

"Take her. Mark her, if that's all you can bear to do. But whatever you decide, dear brother, do it now! Or I promise, this night I will take her and make her mine in

every possible way. She's only been Marked and should have forgotten me, you, everything by now. I'll wager you couldn't love him any more than you do at this very moment. Especially after such a night of passion. Right? Say it. Say you couldn't love David any more than you do right now. Say it! I knew it. I knew you would be the one. Because every story has a villain, Emily. I just happened to be cast that role along time ago."

It was true after all. Emily had a child. A son no less! It wasn't a lie Valaree had concocted in a futile attempt to distract him from his objective.

In the history of their Order there had been only two other women who had given birth to an Unnatural Mortal's child, but both those births were over a century ago and both babies had been girls. And although there had been other confirmed conceptions, none were able to carry through the first trimester and in the last fifty years, none reported at all. Many of their Order believed the changing world environment, the alarming amount of chemicals permitted in food production and the increasing dependency of over-the-counter and physician prescribed medications of the modern Natural Mortal woman, had destroyed any and all chances of future births. But Emily had been as exceptional as he first thought, and her son, little David, was proof of that.

"—Did you hear me, Develyn?"

Develyn turned his head toward the voice. "Come again," he demanded sharply.

"I *said*, I'm through. No more spying. No more sneaking things from her house. Emily's my friend and I won't betray her again. I'm done. Consider my debt to you paid-in-full."

At this, Develyn turned completely and faced the young man. He was tall, dark haired and good looking with

an athletic physique that was accentuated by the dark blue jeans and pumpkin orange zip down sweater he wore. He was barefoot, pacing the honey-colored hardwood floor between a retro kidney bean-shaped coffee table and a massive wall unit that housed a large flat screen TV, assorted black electronic devices and shelves loaded with hundreds of books, CDs, and DVDs.

Pinning the young man with a hard stare, Develyn said, "I never considered you indebted to me, Benny."

Dark eyebrows drew together over glittering blue eyes as Benjamin Alistair Gerardy III stopped cold and crossed his muscled arms over his wide chest. Was he mad? What did Develyn think the last fourteen months were, if not repayment for the enormous debt he owed him? Why else would he have uprooted his existence in London and move here to befriend and protect Emily Perkins? Just a favor between friends? He and Develyn had never been exactly that. "*Never indebted to you?*" he sputtered incredulously. "Even after what you had done for me when—"

"I could not prevent *that*," Develyn interrupted with a shake of his head.

"True, but you had tried."

"Yes well," he began, crossing his arms over his chest, "you were just a thirteen-year-old boy. It was depraved. Even for Valaree," he said dryly.

"*Twelve*, actually," Benny said with a morose nod. "But you took me pity on me. And you helped me adjust to my new *life*."

"Fine," he snapped, turning back toward the window. "Then consider us even and your presence here, no longer necessary. Feel free to leave anytime— with my gratitude, of course."

Benny bristled at this. Just who the hell did Develyn think he was? And how dare he show up here, now, after

all this time! After all he did, or more accurately, after all he had *not* done.

Everyone in the Order knew the role Develyn had played in his brother's death and they were stunned. Most believed it would have ended the other way around and when it became apparent that Develyn had only Marked Emily and not Turned her, their shock deepened. But it was the fact that he had ran off, went gallivanting around the world for nearly a year– Benny had heard the rumors of Develyn being spotted in Rio De Janeiro, Paris, Prague, Sidney, Johannesburg– and abandoned her, that had enraged them all.

In their Order, Marking wasn't undertaken lightly. It was a vampire's responsibility to watch over and protect any and all Natural Mortals they Mark, for as long as the Natural Mortal lived. Otherwise, a Marked, but unprotected Natural Mortal became like forbidden fruit to other vampires. As desirable and defenseless as a stray lamb in a forest of starving wolves. It was because of this very thing, Develyn's abandonment of Emily, that Benny had to, over the course of the last year, *discourage* several vampires foolish enough to come sniffing around her.

But in spite of that, what infuriated him the most was that Develyn had apparently Broken with Emily as well. It was another form of abandonment not condoned by their Order, but Develyn had obviously done it. He had broken that mental bond with her that would have otherwise kept him informed, first hand, of her thoughts and feelings, and therefore, would not have been necessary for Benny to sneak into her house and steal her journal from its hiding place in her bedroom.

Develyn knew what the boy was thinking. Even though Benny was only six months younger in Unnatural Mortal years, he was eight Natural years younger than him

and he would always be a boy in Develyn's mind. And so it came as no surprise to him, when Benny boldly asked, "Just why have you come here, Develyn?"

Fighting the impulse to snatch the boy about the neck and toss him through the very window he was looking out, Develyn hesitated. He couldn't possibly tell Benny the real reason why he had come there; the boy was just foolish enough to try and stop him. While he thought up a reasonable answer, he watched a little silver boat and its red-capped captain glide through the water. He waited until it disappeared behind the golden leafed trees of the island in the middle of the river before he calmly answered. "Why, to meet my nephew and assume my responsibilities of him and Emily, of course."

With an angry click of his tongue, Benny dropped his arms and planted his hands on his hips. To assume his responsibilities was one thing. *That* Develyn could do without Emily ever knowing, but Benny figured Develyn meant to Re-Mark her to reconnect with her mentally. And to *meet* the child certainly meant Develyn was going to intrude into their lives and cause all kinds of pain and heartache for Emily. "Do you really think you should? I mean, for God's sake, man!" he said, slipping into his natural British accent. "She's been through enough!"

Damned impertinent pup! Develyn thought. As if he didn't know what Emily has been through. As if he hadn't *felt* her grief for David and hatred for him. As if he hadn't *heard* her anguished thoughts! Her broken hearted cries for David! Her curses of him a thousand times over before he Broke with her. As if he didn't know he should walk away and leave Emily to the peace she's seemed to have found. Let her believe what she thinks to be the truth. Develyn wanted to shout these things at the boy, but instead, he merely nodded.

No longer bothering to keep his anger in check, Benny said, "I don't think you understand, Develyn. When Emily came back from England, she was beyond distraught, grieved beyond consolation. She was so despondent. She refused to move from her bed for days on end. It came down to her mother and Robert force feeding her for God's sake! If she hadn't found out she was with child when she had, I'm not sure she—" he stopped short and with a shake of his head, crossed his arms over his chest again. "I'm not going anywhere. And I'm not going to let you harm Emily any more than you already have," he bravely announced.

So there it was. The real reason why Benny had remained in this unassuming little burg and became Emily's fierce protector. He was in love with her. Not that Develyn was surprised. He had expected it. In fact, he had counted on it.

There was something special about Emily Perkins. More than just her exquisite beauty and the incredible scent of her pure, sweet blood. She was strong-willed, intelligent and independent, like most other modern women, but it was her gentle nature that gave her an air of vulnerability and since David's demise, a sense of fragility. Two attributes which were particularly appealing to the peculiar protector/predator instincts of vampires. Not to mention the fact that she had given birth to an Unnatural Mortal's child had increased her desirability a thousandfold.

With a cold smile, Develyn turned and faced Benny again. His eyes darted to the small black leather journal, with its red ribbon marker, atop the coffee table and back to the boy's face. "Am I to understand, you regard Emily as merely a *friend*," he commented tightly.

Benny knew first hand by the things he had witnessed in their time together that Develyn wasn't a man, or vampire, to be trifled with. And as he stood there, dressed

in all black like the Angel of Death himself, and scowling murderously at him, Benny had to fight the urge to take a step backward. He opened his mouth to address the accusation he heard in Develyn's voice, but then snapped it shut. Why bother? he thought. He was in love with Emily. But it was of no consequence, for he knew she would never feel the same for him.

With a defeated shrug and shake of his head, Benny said, "My feelings for her are irrelevant. Emily doesn't have room in her heart for anyone but David."