

Heart's Stain - The Sceleri Chronicles

Prologue

Alexei wiped the blood on his lips and hands with his handkerchief, folding it back into his pants pocket afterwards. Manners became more precious when one feasted on the vile doings of mortals. He threw the miscreant's body into the river, watching with not a drop of guilt as water forced its way into the gaping hole in its chest. The body disappeared from view, dragged down by its recently gained weight. It was his fifth kill for the night, ridding thankless humans of yet another conscienceless aberration in their midst. Yet it did nothing to quench inside him the restless urge to consume.

Ennui was upon him, devouring his soul at an alarming pace. It had been so ever since that woman had betrayed him. Even from the fires of hell, she did not fail to torment Alexei with the memories of her stunning face and her cruel laugh. But none of them ever hurt as much as her words. Despicable and inhumane, those words were the ultimate proof that she had not been able to stop ennui from ravaging her soul.

Even though she had been burned to the ground months before, still her memories haunted him like whiplashes to his brain.

Somewhere in the dark, he heard the beat of wings. Angels were the only creatures in this world that could rival his kind for their beauty. Yet they were different as night and day. Angels existed in the warmth of the sun, while the Sceleri – or what mortals with rare knowledge of the netherworlds referred meticulously as *sin eaters* - did not even deserve the embrace of the moonlight. Even that was not theirs for wolves had always been the beloved offspring of the Lady Moon.

Sin eaters were the most despised race in the world as his kind preyed on humans, the most precious of God's flock. They could only exist in the shadows – or at least Sceleri of the old days did until he, Prince Alexei Romanov, once the toast of Europe's royalty, reshaped the future of his kind. Alexei Romanov did *not* bow to such senseless traditions. He was his own man, and since his very first sunrise as a sin eater he had shaken off the shackles of beliefs from the Old World.

Everyone had adored him.

So wickedly bold, so outrageously charming...

The Sceleri had not run out of superlatives to describe him as he reigned over them by the right of skill *and* blood, since he was also the only named successor of

Nikolai, one of the rare First Turned who still lived to this day. But then Calista came, with her flashing blue eyes and fiery red hair, and everything had changed. Calista had turned his head around, and he had slayed countless of his kind in her name. He would have gone on destroying his race singlehandedly, blinded by love, pride, and stupidity, if Erik had not made him see the light.

It was unfortunate that Erik had to pay for Alexei's mistakes with his life.

The sound of beating wings still had not left, a sign that angels continued to hover nearby. Alexei's smile flashed in the darkness. Were the angels shadowing him now? Had they sensed the ennui which rode closer and closer to his heels, waiting for the perfect time to snatch his soul away for good?

Not yet, my lovely cherubs, he thought with a humorless smirk, knowing how the angels hated being called such. *You still have to wait a little longer before taking me to your Lord.*

His head suddenly shot up, sensing a heartbeat somewhere in this forsaken park where innumerable untold crimes plagued what should have been an idyllic town. He closed his eyes to better hear the stray thoughts that knocked against his mind.

Ah.

It was the missing accomplice of the man he had murdered, whose plan was to rape a college student who liked jogging in this neck of the woods every night. Stupid of the girl really – if it were up to his bodyguard, Demetrius would have long snapped her neck for her brainless ways. In Demetrius' opinion, idiocy and never curiosity was always what killed the cat.

Alexei stepped back into the shadows, waiting.

The man came, drawing a breath before saying in a nervous, high-pitched voice, "Jim?"

It was his last word before Alexei took hold of his mind. A barrier he did not expect tried to keep him away, a warning that he used to heed but not now – not when he no longer cared about what befell him.

There were three ways for ennui to take over the soul of a sin eater. One was when the endless passage of time became a rot in his soul. The second was when Sceleri used their powers to entice so that a mortal would be made to go against the Maker's Will.

Sin committed with full knowledge or intention by man did not possess any taste. But sin that was deliberately nourished by a Sceleri had a divine taste and was

addictive in nature, a drug that corrupted their souls and broke its inherent barriers against ennui.

But the greatest taboo of all was to kill an innocent with one's own hands. That would poison Heart's Stain, transforming sin eater into sin itself, a monster that only recognized the thirst to kill until it was killed by another.

Somewhere in his mind, he realized that was exactly what he was doing now. Jim's accomplice, a young man named Arthur, was not the man Alexei had expected him to be. Arthur had been blackmailed into being an accomplice, but he had still done the right thing in the end. Arthur had confessed to his crimes as a petty theft – the source of the blackmail – and led the police here to hunt Jim down.

But he was too late – for everything.

Alex's nails sliced into his chest.

The younger man's heart began to sing its swan song.

The first notes of its melody flavored the air, and the sin eater in him woke at its sound, hungering for what the music of death promised.

An innocent heart, Alexei mused, his fangs coming out of its own accord. So this was what it smelled like. Never had any morsel he had sampled in this world smelled so fine.

Alexei.

Alexei pulled back the very last minute, throwing Arthur away with a frustrated snarl. The hunger for what was forbidden died, and he glided away as he heard police sirens heading to his direction. He spared a glance at the unfortunate man, noting the rhythm and speed of his heartbeat. He flew away only when he was absolutely sure Arthur would live, rescued by the police.

Alexei, Alexei.

That voice again - it was his only salvation, whether he wanted it or not.

Whoever she was, wherever she was – she was the only one who could make him forget what Calista had did – what she had made him do.

The cries of the innocents that he had slayed suddenly rose in his mind, deafening him. It was the start of yet another waking nightmare. Their deaths should have turned him into a monster, but it had not. It was proof that he hadn't wanted those murders, Nikolai had once told him. It was proof that he had not been evil.

The words never offered comfort to Alexei. That he had been blinded by his love for Calista did not matter. He could never return those lives to earth, and he would pay for them throughout eternity.

Alexei, Alexei. Come to me.

I will, Alexei answered even though he couldn't be sure that the woman would hear him.

He closed his eyes, his mind painting a woman so vividly he could almost feel the silky touch of her skin. *Turn to me*, Alexei begged her in his mind. *Turn to me so I can find you.*

She was lying on a circular bed covered in blue velvet, wearing something ridiculously childlike and made of cotton. Her hair was like a shot of midnight against the white satin pillows. He inhaled, and he swore he could smell the citrusy scent of her shampoo.

Turn to me. He willed her to bid his words.

Alexei's eyes widened when the woman in his mind sighed before slowly turning to her other side, facing him. Her eyes fluttered open. They were the brightest shade of violet, exquisite in its purity.

Her lips didn't part, but even so he could hear her voice, soft and filled with such need for him that Alexei trembled. Not even Calista, not even before ennui took her, had needed him this badly. This woman dreamt of him, wished for him, thought she could fall in love with him even though to her Alexei was but a figment of her imagination.

Alexei, come to me.

He took a step closer even though he knew it would not bring him any nearer to her. She was a vision still, but Alexei ached all the same. Only she made him feel this alive again – this free from the weight of his own sins. He wanted to lose himself in her body, to taste the sweetness of her nipples as he sucked them hard, and to feel her become wetter for him – wetter and wetter until he could slide his cock into her moist entry and hear her moan his name.

Alexei.

Yes, just like that, beloved. He wanted to hear her call his name with the same abandon, with that same sense of naked need, when they finally meet.

Alexei.

Her voice alone made Alexei shudder, sharpening the passion inside him to an excruciating pain. The balls under his cock had become heavy with want, begging for a release that he knew would be nothing short of sensational.

Come to me.

His fists clenched at his sides. *For better or for worse, but more for the world's sake than yours or mine, I will.*

Chapter One

Thank you for purchasing the 5th installment of Heart's Stain. Your game shall be downloading shortly. Included in your purchase is a bonus track of Stained Halo, which is also used as BCG music in this installment. To download, simply visit our website and input the discount code we have sent to your email. Let us know if you enjoy the game by chatting with us on Facebook or Twitter.

Danni Corsair's fingers flew on the touchscreen of her phone as she keyed in the password for her account. Now that she was a sophomore in the University of Forest New Jersey, Danni had regained her confidence for playing mobile games under teachers' noses.

She watched the loading bar with rising impatience, itching to tap her fingers on the table but doing her best not to. That would be *suicidal*, since it would draw the attention of Professor Anthony, who was notorious for not taking kindly to cellphone usage during class.

She bit back a sigh when the loading bar for downloading reached full and the second bar – for installation – started. Just a few minutes, just a few --- *yes, yes! Finally!*

Making sure that her *Accounting Principles* textbook hid her phone from every angle – she would just *die* if Professor Anthony ended up confiscating her phone - Danni punched the necessary buttons rapidly to get the game starting.

**Who do you choose?
Alexei
Kythan
Nikolai**

**Would you like to purchase additional stories for these characters?
Demetrios
Constantin**

She went for *Alexei*, natch. Once she finished his storyline, she would – as always – jump to Demetrios' next. He was her favorite next to Alexei, although it did mean throwing away \$3.99 again for his story.

Would you like to play the prologue?

Umm, *duh*.

That was like asking if she had Heart's Stain as the wallpaper for her laptop *and* her iPhone, which she did. Besides, the prologue was always the best part of the game because it allowed her to *reminisce* about her – oops, make that her *character's* love affair.

Sheesh. She had to get a hold of herself or everyone would think she was such an *otaku*. That basically made her like any of those die-hard Comic-Con fans, only this time she just went crazy over Heart's Stain. It was an *otome* game – a simulation, role-playing, choose-your-own-romance type of game that had the lead female character pick her match from a harem of hot-looking guys. The gameplay for *otome* games was universal: players had to get as many correct answers possible with multiple-choice questions to win a happy – or the happiest – ending with the guy they picked out.

It was a lot harder than it sounded. Really. In fact, Danni had died several times in the game's debut installment, which had been released four years back. But she was *fourteen* then. People had to cut her some slack for that.

The loading bar for the prologue reached a hundred percent. Excitement made her tense in her seat even though she had watched this a hundred times already.

*One day a tall, dark figure broke into my room and changed my life with just a glance from his eyes – glittering like aquamarines, those eyes were red-rimmed – a circle of immortal blood, the mark that distinguished vampires from humans.
He was a creature of the night, a prince to his kind, and the man I thought only existed between the pages of a*

book.

The words appeared below exquisitely drawn images of Calista in the arms of the prince. That very first night, he had already brought Calista to an orgasm – Calista’s very first, too. Danni swallowed, crossing her legs uncomfortably. She hoped her cheeks weren’t on fire – like they usually were whenever the first sexual encounter between the two was replayed during the prologue.