



Dark Desires After Dusk (Immortals After Dark, Book 5)

By Kresley Cole

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From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Kresley Cole, an electrifying standalone tale of a ruthless demon mercenary and the lovely young halfling who enchants him, set in the Immortals After Dark universe.

A seductive beauty he can never have, yet can't resist...

Cadeon Woede will stop at nothing to atone for the one wrong that will haunt him forever. But once he secures the key to his redemption, the halfling Holly Ashwin, Cade finds that the woman he thought he could use for his own ends and then forget haunts him as much as his past.

A tormented warrior she should fear, but can't deny...

Raised as a human, Holly never knew that some frightening legends are real until she encounters a brutal demon who inexplicably guards her like a treasure. Thrust into a sensual new world of myth and power, with him as her protector, she begins to crave the demon's wicked touch.

Surrender to dark desires...

Yet just when he earns Holly's trust, will Cade be forced to betray the only woman who can sate his wildest needs—and claim his heart?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

***Sign up for Kresley's email newsletter to receive the latest book release updates, as well as info about contests & giveaways (kresleycole.com/newsletter/)**

Kresley Cole is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the electrifying Immortals After Dark paranormal series, the young adult Arcana Chronicles series, the erotic Gamemakers Series, and five award-winning historical romances.

A master's grad and former athlete, she has traveled over much of the world and draws from those experiences to create her memorable characters and settings.

Her IAD books have been translated into eighteen foreign languages, garnered three RITA awards, and consistently appear on the bestseller lists, in the U.S. and abroad.

You can learn more about her and her work at kresleycole.com or [facebook.com/KresleyCole](https://www.facebook.com/KresleyCole)

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1

New Orleans

Present day

"*Stupid...safety lock,*" Holly Ashwin muttered as she fiddled with the nozzle of the pepper spray in her bag.

With her free hand, she pushed up her glasses, casting another nervous glance over her shoulder. She'd thought she heard footsteps behind her in the night. Was she being followed -- or paranoid?

For months, she'd had the sense that someone was watching her. Yet strangely it hadn't bothered her before. She couldn't explain it, but there had been an almost soothing quality to the presence she'd felt.

Tonight, all that had changed.

She sensed raw menace, and wished she hadn't made the walk from the parking lot to Gibson Hall by herself. Usually her boyfriend escorted her to class, but Tim was at a symposium presenting their latest paper -- alone, because her condition made it nearly impossible for her to travel.

The manicured lawns on the way to her classroom were unusually empty. No doubt there were widespread parties tonight celebrating the full moon, which hung heavy and yellow in the black sky.

There was enough light that she could see the bushes behind her trembling. In a growing panic, she broke off the nozzle of the spray.

"*Crap.*" She hastily abandoned her one weapon, tempted to snag one of the pill bottles in the pocket beside it for a dose of relief. Instead, she increased her pace toward her destination, the math building, brightly lit like a beacon.

Almost there. Her heels clicked along on the sidewalk -- though they never landed on a crack, even in her rush. Apparently, obsessive-compulsive disorder was panicproof....

She checked her watch. She was on time, of course, but she was late enough that her Remedial Math 101 students would be in the classroom already.

A few yards left. Almost to safety....

Once she'd made it up the six stone steps to the doors, she exhaled in relief. Inside, the hall was ablaze with fluorescent light. *Made it.*

Her class was in the second room on the right and would be filled with thirty-three very large and very loyal Tulane football players. Anyone thinking to frighten her would soon learn how a tackle dummy felt at season's end.

Holly's colleagues believed she'd drawn the short straw to have to teach Digits for Idjits, as some of the instructors called it. But Holly had actually volunteered for jock duty.

If she was to teach math, then why not instruct the ones who had exponentially more to learn?

And in truth, they were on their best behavior ninety-nine percent of the time. Though each Tuesday and Thursday night, some of the players always got there early to scribble sprawling messages for her on the blackboard. A fellow instructor had related to Holly that "the boys" -- who were all of five or six years younger than she was -- enjoyed watching her erase things in "those skirts."

Holly wore old-fashioned pencil skirts with hemlines past her knees. Would she never catch a break?

She wondered what she'd be erasing tonight. Some of the past offerings included "Got it bad, sooo bad, I'm hot for teacher," "I've been a naughty boy, Ms. Ashwin," and "Professor + Ginger = Holly Ashwin." They'd crossed the l's to make them t's.

So far she didn't think any of them had noticed her need to erase every millimeter of writing on the board, or to arrange the chalk in the tray into perfect trios, even breaking a stick to achieve a multiple of three....

Outside the door to her room, she took a calming breath and smoothed her tight chignon. After ascertaining that the clasp of her strand of pearls was directly in the center of the back of her neck, she tugged each sleeve of her twinset sweater until the ends perfectly hit her wristbones. She checked the backs of her earrings, then opened the door.

Empty. Every chair sat empty.

CLASS IS CANCELED was scrawled across the board. They'd gone too far this time.

Or maybe it wasn't them? She swallowed, whirling around.

Rough cloth covered her face, reeking of fumes, drowning out her scream.

Just as her eyelids slid shut and her body went limp, she heard the unholy roar of a man in the distance.

* * *

Rogue demons have my female.

As Cade's old Ford truck tore through traffic to yet another demon lair, he grappled to control the rage his breed of demon was known for.

They've taken Holly...

Almost one year ago, Cade had crossed paths with Holly Ashwin and had recognized the human as his own fated female. Unable to claim a mortal, he'd had to content himself by following her, guarding her.

Which was the only reason why he'd been there when a group of demons had traced her, teleporting her to gods knew where. But they'd hunted on the campus; surely their lair would be near.

Why would they want *her*? Because she was an innocent? Then they'd picked the wrong virgin -- Cade would hang them by their own entrails and watch them dance if they touched so much as a hair on her head.

His phone rang just as he surged past a visibly drunk driver. When drunks drove slowly, it was exactly like they whispered -- noticeably.

"What?" he barked in answer. Tonight he was supposed to receive the details of his latest job. It'd be the most important one he'd had since becoming a mercenary centuries ago.

"I've just left the meeting," his brother Rydstrom said. "I have the information we need."

Riding the bumper in front of him, tempted to give it a tap, Cade asked absently, "So who's the pay?"

"The client is Groot the Metallurgist."

Normally that would have had Cade raising his brows. Groot was the half brother of Omort the Deathless. "He intends to help us against Omort?" Cade's truck overtook another car, nearly trading paint with it.

"Groot's crafted a sword that can kill him."

Then it would be the only one in existence that could. Omort the Deathless didn't come by his name without reason. "What's the job?"

"He wants us to find the Vessel and deliver her to him before the next full moon."

The Vessel. Every Accession, a female from the Lore would come into sexual maturity. Her child would be a warrior of either ultimate evil or of ultimate good -- depending on which way the father leaned.

A car weaved in front of Cade. "Son of a -- "

"What are you doing?" Rydstrom demanded.

"Traffic." He didn't want his brother to know anything was off. Cade had told him that he would stop watching Holly. Though they both suspected she was his female, a future with her was impossible.

Humans were forbidden to demons. Because they never survived the initial claiming.

But Cade hadn't been able to stop himself from watching her from afar, studying her, growing more and more fascinated with the young mortal. Becoming more convinced that she was his.

He knew it was ridiculous. He was an ancient immortal, a brutal mercenary, head of a crew of soldiers of fortune. And yet Cade looked forward to nothing -- except seeing her.

Holly went through her life having no idea that she was the highlight of a millennium-old demon's

disappointing existence....

This new job was supposed to be the last chance for him and Rydstrom to reclaim the crown. If Rydstrom found out Cade wasn't "on," the two of them would be heading for another of their infamous house-killing brawls. Cade used to enjoy working off his anger. Now the idea wearied him.

"How are we supposed to find the Vessel?" Cade asked.

"I was told it's a Valkyrie this time around."

"Handing over a Valkyrie for the use of an evil sorcerer -- you're not worried about our alliance with them?"

"I'm going to take a page from your book and say that what they don't know won't hurt them."

"They will know. Nix will be able to see this." Nix, the half-mad Valkyrie soothsayer, had helped Rydstrom and Cade in the past. In fact, she'd put together this deal, though she'd given them no indication who they'd be working for.

Cade had talked to her less than a week ago about Holly. Nix had revealed nothing about tonight.

"If Nix didn't see that the Vessel would be one of her own before, she might not now. Besides, it can't be helped," Rydstrom said. "Nothing is more important than this job. It was Nix herself who vowed this was our last chance to defeat Omort."

"Do you have a location on the target?"

"Groot's oracles have been searching for her. As expected, she's here in this city."

The coming Accession was already pushing and pulling all the factions together in mystickal hotspots like New Orleans.

"And we're not the only ones who want her," Rydstrom added. "Oracles, witches, and sorcerers are all scrying for her."

Cade could imagine. "You got a name?"

"No name on her. But we have her last known whereabouts, a place called the Hall of the Son of Gib. I know it sounds like typical soothsayerese, but it's a lead."

A chill slithered up Cade's spine. *No. No way.* The Hall of the Son of Gib. Or Gibson Hall -- the mathematics building on the Tulane campus.

Holly wasn't a Valkyrie; yet those demons might have seen her in the predicted location and mistaken her for one. She had the right delicate features and slight build. They could have assumed she was the Vessel.

Only one local demon faction would have had the resources to determine the Vessel's location before Cade and Rydstrom -- the Order of Demonaeus.

"We go for the Valkyrie tonight," Rydstrom said. "I'll be back at the house in two hours. Meet me then."

Two hours. Even if Cade was tempted to ask his brother for help with the Demonaeus, there wouldn't be time to wait for him. "Yeah, will do." Click.

The wide wheels of his truck screeched as Cade cut across three lanes of traffic, careening over the median to speed back in the other direction.

He knew where the Order of Demonaeus was located, had been forced to convene with their kind on more than one occasion.

Cade had even seen ...

Users Review

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