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The Shadow (Florentine series)

By Sylvain Reynard



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From the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Gabriel trilogy comes the hotly anticipated follow-up to *The Raven*, a sensual novel set in Florence featuring the dangerously intoxicating coupling of Raven and William...

Raven Wood's vampyre prince has returned, pledging his love and promising justice for every wrong done to her. In the wake of their reunion, Raven is faced with a terrible decision—allow the Prince to wreak vengeance against the demons of her past, or persuade him to stay his hand. But there is far more at stake than Raven's heart...

A shadow has fallen over the city of Florence. Ispettor Batelli will not rest until he uncovers Raven's connection to the theft of the priceless art from the Uffizi Gallery. And while the Prince hunts a traitor who sabotages him at every turn, he finds himself the target of the vampyres' mortal enemy.

As he wages a war on two fronts, he will need to keep his love for Raven secret, or risk exposing his greatest weakness...



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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *The Raven*

“A fabulous gothic treat of a book filled with ancient vampires, dark vendettas, and star-crossed love.”—Deborah Harkness, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“An addicting mix of mystery, romance, and fantasy.”—Christina Lauren, *New York Times* bestselling author

About the Author

Sylvain Reynard is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Florentine series, which includes *The Raven* and the novella *The Prince*, as well as the Gabriel trilogy, including *Gabriel's Inferno*, *Gabriel's Rapture*, and *Gabriel's Redemption*.

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Prologue

1268

York, England

William wasn't running.

For some time, he'd been waiting in the shadows near one of the lesser gates of the walled city of York, his horse tethered nearby. His beloved Alicia hadn't appeared. The bells for Compline had long since rung and so, impatient and irritated, he left their secret meeting place and led his horse in the direction of her father's house.

Alicia's father was a good man. He was a successful trader who'd clawed his way to the top of the merchant class. But he was Anglo-Saxon. His ancestry, coupled with his trade, made Alicia an unsuitable match for William in the eyes of his aristocratic, Norman parents.

But William wanted her. He'd courted her in secret and they'd made plans to meet and flee north. There they would marry and, with the few jewels and household items William had stolen from his family, they would make their life together.

He was young, strong, and extremely intelligent. Alicia was beautiful, kind, and industrious. Together, they would live a happy life.

Despite her promise, Alicia had not come.

William cursed in Anglo-Norman, his mother tongue, assuming Alicia's father had discovered their plan to

elope and confined her to the house.

He loved her. He would have her even if he had to fight her father sword to sword. Even now, his blood sang in his veins and his body tensed with desire for her. They'd agreed to wait until they were married before lying together, but that hadn't kept them from kissing and enjoying little indulgences whenever they could. He was looking forward to uncovering her for the first time and learning the secrets of her body.

With such pleasant, sensual thoughts in mind, William tripped.

"God's bones!" he swore, dropping his horse's lead and pitching forward.

A low moan resounded from the ground.

When he'd recovered his balance, William bent over what looked like a bundle of clothing. A shaft of moonlight fell from behind the clouds, illuminating his stumbling block.

What he'd thought was a bundle of clothing was, in fact, a woman. She was wearing a dark, hooded cloak, and her skirts were pushed up to her waist. The lower half of her body was naked; blood was spattered on her legs and in between, where her maidenhood had rested.

William recoiled.

He couldn't leave her like that, even to find help. He pulled her heavy blue skirt down, covering her.

The woman shuddered and twitched.

He tugged at his horse and was about to mount him when the woman began whispering. She moved her head from side to side, her long, wavy locks of hair falling free of her hood, sweeping across her shoulders like a torn curtain.

Something about the sight of her hair stopped him.

Still holding the reins, he bent forward.

The woman had been beaten badly. Both eyes were blackened and one of them was swollen shut. Her face was bloody, her lip torn.

She lifted a shaking hand as she blinked at him from her single usable eye.

William felt the earth drop from beneath his feet.

He threw the reins aside and sank to his knees. "Alicia? Alicia, what evil is this?"

She closed her eye and coughed.

He lifted her in his arms, cradling her against his chest.

Alicia cried out from the movement. She shifted in his arms, too weak to struggle. A single, trembling hand sought the fabric of her skirts, tugging at them as if to cover herself.

The sight pierced him.

"Alicia." His voice broke. "Who did this?"

“Strangers.” Her breathing was labored. “I called for help. No one came.”

Her fingers pulled at his shirt.

“Will,” she managed, burrowing against him. For a moment, she seemed to hold her breath, then her body slowly grew limp.

William clutched her to his heart, as his beloved’s life seeped out of her body.

He lifted his eyes to the dark sky above and cried out.

Chapter 1

July 1, 2013

Umbria, Italy

The Prince of Florence stood outside a house in Umbria, conflicted.

He’d already paid his respects to the Princess of the region, managing to avoid her romantic overtures. He’d enjoyed her body on previous occasions—she was beautiful, intelligent, and vibrantly sexual, as were most of his kind. On this night, however, he’d found her charms wanting. Having politely declined her invitation to fornicate, he hunted on Umbrian lands with her begrudging permission.

Locating Professor Gabriel Emerson and his family was easy. He and his wife, Julianne, owned the house that stood majestically on a hill, the lights from its windows cheering the darkness. The Prince’s conflict was not in finding the Emersons or in escaping the embrace of the Princess. No, his conflict derived from a promise.

Raven Wood was human, beautiful in an unconventional way, and very brave. She was also protective of others, including strangers. In a tender moment, she’d exacted a promise from him that he would spare the lives of the Emersons. He’d made the promise in good faith, not just because he wished her to confide in him about her mysterious past, but because he cared for her and longed to make her happy.

Since she’d quit him, making it clear she could not accept the fact that he was incapable of love, he’d been tempted to go back on his promise and punish the professor for having the audacity to claim rightful ownership of stolen works of art. That he did so unknowingly was no excuse. The Prince desired revenge, and now that the only human in the world who could persuade him to indulge in mercy had rejected him, he had no reason to forgo it.

That was how he’d come to stand outside the house, listening as Katherine Picton, an older friend of the family, bade her hosts good night and Clare, the infant daughter of the Emersons, was put to bed in her parents’ room.

He waited impatiently while the Emersons pursued their pleasure in a hot tub that was placed on the balcony off their bedroom.

The Prince wrinkled his nose as their marital union dragged on and on. It seemed every time he encountered the couple, they were engaging in intercourse. He tapped his leather-clad foot on the garden floor, willing them to couple faster.

It was a starless night, dark and still. The sky was a velvet arc above him while the summer breeze whispered in his ear. As he heard Julianne cry out in pleasure, he remembered Raven doing the same, while he gently loved her.

His jaw clenched.

Love—a polite euphemism for the joining of bodies for physical pleasure.

And yet he could not be scornful of the term when applied to her.

It had been almost a month since he'd known the pleasure of a woman—almost a month since he'd had Raven in his bed. He could still feel the warmth of her skin beneath his hands, the soft curves of her figure as he caressed her, the scent of her blood as it filled his nostrils.

But it was the memory of her green eyes that kept him still as Julianne kissed her husband and returned to their room. Raven had large eyes that brimmed with feeling.

Don't you ever tire of death?

Her voice interrupted his thoughts.

The truth was that he did tire of death. Even now he felt conflicted. But the Prince tamped down his misgivings and scaled the wall of the villa, eager to surprise the professor while he was alone.

And surprise him he did.

“We meet again.” The Prince's conversational tone belied his menacing figure.

Startled, Gabriel stood in the hot tub, his wet, naked body shining in the dim light that shone from the bedroom.

“What do you want?” he barked, fingers curving into fists.

“I want you to cover yourself, to start with.” The Prince tossed a nearby towel toward the man, regarding him with distaste.

The professor wrapped the towel around his waist and stepped out of the water. He placed his body between the Prince and the door to the bedroom, which he quickly closed.

“I said, what do you want?” The professor's posture was decidedly defensive.

“I want what's mine to remain mine. I'd like you to stop taking things from me and parading them in public as if they were your own.”

The professor regarded the Prince with incredulity. “I have nothing of yours. Leave. Now.”

The Prince's gaze flicked over the professor's shoulder, watching through the windows as Julianne cradled her daughter in her arms.

“You have many riches. You’d do best to attend them and not grasp after what is not yours.”

The professor scowled. “Again, I’m asking you to leave.”

The supernatural being shook his head, regarding the man with cold gray eyes. “I’m told you have difficulty listening to instructions. I perceive this to be true.”

“I told you to leave. You don’t seem to be listening, either,” the professor rejoined.

“You stole my illustrations.”

At the first sound of the professor’s protest, the Prince lifted his hand, silencing him. “I know you didn’t steal them personally. But the illustrations belonged to me before they fell into the hands of the Swiss family who sold them to you. I have taken them back and they shall remain with me. Forever.”

“You lie. The family owned the illustrations for almost a century.”

“Yes.” The Prince gave Gabriel a challenging look. “Before that, they were mine.”

The professor blinked in confusion.

When he’d regained his composure, his sapphire eyes narrowed. “You were the one who came to our hotel room in Florence. I couldn’t see you but I could feel your presence.” Gabriel lowered his voice. “What are you?”

“What I am is inconsequential. Let’s simply say I’m not human. I am also not accustomed to arguing with human beings or offering second chances.”

Once again the Prince’s gaze was drawn to the figures of the mother and child inside the house. “Do you love your wife?”

Gabriel’s spine stiffened. “Yes.”

“Enough to die for her?”

“Without hesitation.” Gabriel took a courageous step forward.

A long look passed between the Prince and the professor. The Prince was the first to break the silence.

“I have more respect for a man who is willing to live for his family than one who is willing to die for them. Protect your wife and child. Abandon any attempt to recover the illustrations and persuade the Italians to do the same.”

“I paid a fair price for them. Your story sounds like a comic book.”

The Prince’s eyes flashed and he snarled.

The professor went back on one foot, his face a mask of terror.

The vampyre resisted the urge to attack, to exercise his power and dominance. He gazed at Gabriel, noting his tenseness, the smell of adrenaline rushing through his body, his quickened heart rate, and wondered why he hadn’t fled.

Gabriel pressed his back against the bedroom door, signaling to the vampyre that he would have to go through Gabriel and the door in order to attack his family. He was willing to give his life to protect the wife and child who remained blissfully unaware just inside.

The Prince thought of another human being who was a protector; a woman who'd almost given her life to intervene in the beating death of a homeless man.

He didn't like being reminded.

"Your wife is ill," he announced abruptly, adjusting his shirtsleeves.

Gabriel's features shifted. "What?"

"You're an intelligent man, or so they say. By now I'm sure you realize I have certain—abilities. One of them is sensing human illness. I can't identify the problem, but there is something wrong with your wife, something causing her blood to lack iron.

"When I first met her at the Uffizi two years ago, I scented the illness. Whatever it is, it still threatens her."

The professor appeared noticeably shaken by the revelation and turned his head to gaze at Julianne through the window.

"You acquired illustrations that were stolen," the Prince continued. "Since I'm the original owner, I've taken them back. I should have destroyed you, but instead, I've gifted you with vital information about your wife's health. I think you'll agree I've been more than generous."

Gabriel turned his attention back to the Prince. It was clear he was struggling with what to believe, but his desire to protect his family won out.

"I'll drop the investigation and speak to Interpol personally." Gabriel spoke through clenched teeth. "I shouldn't be held accountable for the actions of others. If the Italians choose to pursue you, that's their misfortune."

"If your involvement ceases, we have no quarrel." The Prince gave him a sustained glare, then approached the edge of the balcony and turned.

Gabriel was still standing in a defensive posture outside the bedroom. He'd clapped a hand over his mouth, as if restraining himself from raising the alarm.

The Prince fixed him with a stony gaze.

"Be sure to live long enough to ensure your daughter has a good life. Things happen to children when they lose their father."

He vaulted over the railing and flew to the ground, before disappearing into the darkness.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Donna Miller:

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The Shadow (Florentine series) can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to place every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing The Shadow (Florentine series) although doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource details that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can certainly drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial contemplating.

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