



Eternal: Shadow Falls: After Dark

By C. C. Hunter

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"Spectacular! I love Della's sarcastic and yet deeply sensitive perspective and can't wait to see how things unfold for her." *Fresh Fiction*

Just when Della feels like she's starting to figure out her life, she finds herself reborn...and her new existence comes with a whole different rulebook.

Della's secret powers always made her feel like an outsider in the human world. Now, just when she's starting to feel like she belongs?at Shadow Falls, a camp for teens with paranormal powers?her life is turned upside down all over again. Attacked by a deadly virus, she must make the difficult choice to be *reborn*. It's her only chance at survival, but it comes with a price: It irreparably bonds her to Chase, a tall, dark and mesmerizing vampire who makes her laugh one minute and infuriates her the next.

Chase already knows too many of Della's secrets, and being eternally bonded to him is the last thing she wants. Even worse, she doesn't fully understand what their bond means. Is the attraction she's started feeling for Chase real?or does fate have something else in store? And what does that mean for Steve, the hot shapeshifter whose kisses make her weak in the knees?

Now Della's battered heart is about to take another hit. While investigating her latest case, she discovers shocking evidence about her father's dark past, making her question everything she believes to be true...and her place in the world she loves.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Yet another spectacular book by the very talented C.C. Hunter. ETERNAL leaves us with one heck of a cliffhanger! This series has it all- superb world building, exceptional character development, and a plot line that leaves you desperate for the next book in the series right now!” *?Fresh Fiction*

“The story and characters just keep getting better and better. I can't wait for the next book. Go Into This One Knowing: This book is fast paced and has a killer cliffhanger.” *?Night Owl Reviews (Top Pick)*

About the Author

C. C. HUNTER is the bestselling author of the Shadow Falls series. She lives in Spring, Texas, where she's at work on her next novel.

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Chapter One

Della Tsang swung one leg outside her bedroom window. The sun had risen but hung on the eastern horizon, spilling just enough light to paint that strip of sky a blood-red. The color had her mouth watering.

Her empty stomach rumbled. She needed blood. Later.

First things first.

She knew what she had to do—hadn't slept half the night because of it.

A blast of late-October air stirred her black hair in front of her eyes. The wind was cold on her face, but not cold like when she'd had the fever.

Since she'd woken from the two-day coma after being Reborn, which was an unusual second transition into being a vampire, all her previous flu-like symptoms had disappeared.

Pushing off the window ledge, her boots hit the wet earth with a squish. She paused right outside the cabin to see if the sound had awoken her Shadow Falls roommates, Miranda or Kylie, almost hoping for some company.

Only silence filled her ears.

They'd both stayed out late last night with their boyfriends. Della had seen Steve, too, but she'd pulled the tired card and called it an early night. She took a small step, still listening for any sign they were awake.

I don't need them. I don't. Della had to do this on her own.

Alone.

That had been her mantra for the last week. Well, not exactly—more like: *Not with Chase*. The lying, conniving vamp whom she'd unwillingly become bonded to when he'd convinced Steve, Della's almost-boyfriend, to let him mingle his blood with hers to up the odds of her surviving the so-called rebirth.

Bonded. She recalled what little information Chase had explained. *It links the two vampires. They become almost a part of each other. It has been compared to the relationship shared by identical twins or perhaps soul mates.*

Pushing that from her mind, she glanced again at the dark woods, sensing something waiting for her ... calling her. There was no turning back.

Reaching around, she closed her bedroom window. A twig snapped from inside the woods. Della turned and faced the trees, inhaling the air to catch anyone's scent.

Nothing but the wet, musky scent of a possum.

She started walking. As soon as she entered the woods, the night's noise vanished. Even the trees seemed to hold their breath. A carrier of the vampire virus, she'd been turned almost a year ago. This second turn, extremely rare, meant she was stronger, faster—meant she could really kick ass and ask questions later.

She'd give the power back in a snap if it would bring Chan back.

Perhaps she should be appreciative for what Chase had done, making sure she lived, but she would've preferred he'd done it for her cousin Chan. Burnett, the camp leader and another Reborn, had survived his rebirth without a transfusion; she probably could have as well. Plus, Chase had done it so secretively and had lied to her until the very end.

The real pisser was—he hadn't stopped lying.

She'd texted him the question: *Who sent you to check on me and Chan?*

His reply: *Don't know. Just following orders*, was bullshit.

He'd messaged her last night. *Five minutes ... give me five minutes. I'm at the gate.*

She'd replied, *Until I get answers, I don't have five minutes for you.*

Not until he came clean. The guy had more secrets than a rogue werewolf had fleas.

If her suspicions were correct, and she'd bet her canines they were, he had information about her missing uncle who'd gotten turned and faked his own death as a teen. Who else would care about her? Who else would know Chan was her cousin? And if it was her uncle calling the shots, why hadn't he cared enough to save Chan, too?

Thinking of her uncle had her automatically thinking of her father and how easily he'd turned his back on her. Adding to her heartache was the discovery that he'd been suspected of killing his own sister.

Her mind couldn't wrap around that. Her father couldn't, wouldn't have done that.

She continued walking, her footsteps soggy. The night had seen its share of rain. Instead of sleeping, she'd

listened to the sound of drizzle dancing on the tin roof of the cabin. But that wasn't the only sound of water she'd heard.

The roar of the falls had echoed in the distance. There was no way, even with her vampire hearing, that she could hear the falls from her cabin. Which meant the falls were calling her.

The falls, being that magical but creepy place where the death angels—mystical beings who stood in judgment of all supernaturals—were said to hang out.

The sound of the falls echoed louder.

“Don't worry. I'm coming.” She wouldn't back out, and not simply because it called her—Della had never been one to come when called. She made this trip because she'd remembered something Kylie had once told her. *I go to the falls to find answers.*

If those death angels could answer Kylie's questions, then by damn, they could answer Della's. Never mind that last time she'd gone there after feeling called, someone ... as in the death angels themselves ... had clobbered her on the head with a rock.

A nervous tickle whispered through her, but she kept going. For the answers, she'd risk it.

But if it was the death angels that knocked her on the head, they'd best be forewarned. This time, she'd be a hell of a lot harder to take down.

* * *

As Della neared the falls, her tickle of unease evaporated, and a sense of well-being grew in her chest.

She stepped between the trees and caught sight of the cascading water. She turned her head side to side, wanting to take it all in. Trees circled the area. Their limbs arched above, almost hugging the area of the falls, making it feel like a special little alcove. The sun, still new to the morning, cast its first golden hue of light through the trees. The air smelled fresh, verdant, and peaceful. She'd never considered what *peaceful* smelled like, but she knew it now.

The ambience reminded Della of a Buddhist temple she'd visited in China when she was twelve. Without explanation, she suddenly knew the death angels hadn't hit her on the head.

“So who was it?” She muttered the question aloud, not the least bit paranoid to be voicing her question to the empty woods.

Just because she couldn't see them didn't mean they weren't there.

She wasn't alone.

She sensed it. For the first time since she'd woken up from that coma after being Reborn, she felt ... less alone. Complete.

“Who was what?” The voice blended with the rush of the falls.

Her heart leapt and her gaze shot to a spot in the curtain of water that blurred as a figure emerged.

Recognition hit and Della's sense of peacefulness shattered.

“What are *you* doing here?” she asked.

“Probably the same thing you are.” Chase’s gaze whispered over her. “I kept hearing it last night.”

“You followed me,” she accused.

He smirked. “Now you’re not even being logical. I was here first. If anyone was followed, you followed me.”

“I didn’t.” Ambivalence rumbled around inside her, and had her clenching her fist. Should she hightail it out of here and continue with her vow not to speak to him until he told her the truth about who had sent him? Or should she cross over the water and go vamp on his butt to get the truth out of him?

She knew which one she wanted to do. Oddly, kicking ass—in a place where peace flavored the air—felt wrong. Decision made, she swerved around and started walking. Hopefully he’d follow her to a less than holy place and she could kick his butt then.

“Whoa! Stop!” he called.

She ignored him. Ignored the sound of the falls. She kept walking, her focus on the ground, the way the wet earth squished around the edges of her boots. Gaze still lowered, suddenly, another pair of wet leather boots appeared in her line of vision.

She stopped, but didn’t look up. Didn’t have to. She knew they were Chase’s boots. Her heart did another tumble. His speed still awed her.

Am I that fast now?

She hadn’t really had a chance to test her limits. Not with Burnett micromanaging her powers. Not with all her pressing issues.

But those issues didn’t need her immediate attention, so she nudged those thoughts aside to deal with the problem at hand—or rather, the problem at her feet. Chase. Lifting her gaze, the visual details—Chase details—hit her at once. She stared, soaking them all in like a hungry sponge.

Details like how his wet, black hair clung to his brow. Like how his white T-shirt appeared shrink-wrapped to his upper body, showcasing every dip and curve of his muscular form. How he appeared buffer, or maybe she’d just forgotten how male-model perfect he was. She hated perfect!

“Hey.” His one soft word seemed to float through the air as he inched closer. His nearness made her skin feel extra sensitive. Maybe she didn’t hate perfect so much. Had he always had this effect on her, or was this just post-bonding crap?

She growled, annoyed at her own weakness. But for the life of her, she couldn’t seem to move back. Look but don’t touch, she gave herself one rule.

He grinned as if he could read her mind.

She growled louder.

“You are a sight for sore eyes.” He reached out as if to pull her against him. She found the strength and lurched back, leaving skid marks in the wet grass.

The look-but-don't-touch rule would stand firm.

He stepped toward her. His scent, part musk, part mint, invaded her air. He lifted his hand.

She sucked cold oxygen between her teeth before speaking. "Your eyes aren't the only thing that's going to be sore if you touch me!"

He held up both of his hands, a sign of submissiveness, but his sexy smile signaled trouble. She would not, could not, give in to these crazy feelings. How could she when part of her heart belonged to someone else?

"Fine, I'll keep my hands to myself." He looked over her shoulder at the falls and then back at her. "But can't you see it's fate?"

A spray of sun shot through the trees and cast swirly shadows over his face. That's when she noticed the purple bruise under his eye. Considering vampires didn't bruise easily, that had to have been a hell of a lick.

"What's fate?" she asked, trying not to care that he'd been hit. Hurt. That he could have been killed.

Bonded.

"This," he said, moving his hands between them.

"What's this?" she asked.

"Us."

"Us what?"

"Us. Here."

She glared at him. "Did you forget how to use complete sentences?" she smarted off.

He half chuckled. "Come on. Doesn't it seem strange that we were both lured here?" He shifted slightly and the precious gold light touched his face. His hair, wet from his trip through the falls, appeared almost black, and his eyes, a light golden green, almost glowed with the sun on them. But noting the bruise again, she felt a sympathy pain under her left eye.

She had to remember not to let herself get lost in those eyes—in emotions she couldn't explain.

"I wasn't lured." Her heart danced around the mistruth as the sound of the cascading water hummed in the background. "I came here for a reason." That much was true. She stiffened her shoulders.

"What reason?" he asked.

"To find answers. Answers that you aren't giving me." Accusation rang in her tone. She pressed both her hands on her hips and stared up at him. Oddly, she'd forgotten how tall he was. He towered above her. She wasn't accustomed to feeling small or feminine, but his presence did that.

He tucked his hands in his jean pockets and tipped back on his heels. "What answers?"

She raised her chin and studied him, trying not to note the bruise or worry what he'd done to get it. "Who sent you to check on me and Chan?"

For a flicker of a second, he hesitated, then spoke, “I did answer that. The Vampire Council.” But the sneaky vamp looked away as soon as the words left his mouth. And she knew he always did that when he lied.

“That’s bullshit,” she said. “You’re still keeping something from me.”

He glanced back at her. “It’s not a lie. I got my orders from the council.”

She studied him. This time he didn’t blink or turn away. Did that mean he spoke the truth?

No, she didn’t trust him. If he could learn to control his heartbeat when he lied—and he’d admitted he could do that—then he could learn to control his facial reactions. Surely by now he’d figured out why she constantly challenged his word.

“Did they also order you to let Chan die?” The moment the question left her lips, she felt her resolve strengthen. It didn’t matter that her strength came from her own guilt—she’d take it.

Chase inhaled and looked down at the ground, shifting the tip of his right boot into the wet earth. When he looked back up, she saw a flicker of emotion in his eyes.

“No. Letting Chan face the rebirth on his own was my decision. I told you, I didn’t think he would survive, and if I’d tried to save him, I wouldn’t have been able to save you.”

“Do you have any idea how that makes me feel?” Her throat tightened. To save her, he’d let Chan die.

His shoulders lowered half an inch. Refocusing on his gaze, she spotted empathy in his eyes.

She hated empathy. It ranked right up there with pity.

She turned to leave. He grabbed her. Gently.

His thumb moved in small circles over her elbow. “I’m sorry. But I’m not responsible for his death any more than you are. We didn’t make this happen. And I did what I thought was right. It wasn’t easy for me, either. I liked Chan. But he was just too weak.”

Her skin tingled where the tips of his fingers moved. Remembering her no-touch rule, she shook off his hand. “Which is exactly why you should have helped him. If two people are in a river, you save the one who can’t swim.”

“And let you drown?” he asked.

“I might have made it through the rebirth. Burnett did.” The second the words left her mouth, she worried Chase didn’t know Burnett was a Reborn, but his lack of surprise put her at ease.

A frown tightened the corners of Chase’s eyes. “Burnett’s an exception. Less than three percent of Reborns live. The odds weren’t in your favor.”

“I would have taken those odds if I’d been given a choice. But I wasn’t. You didn’t even tell me Chan was dead and you knew. You kept this whole Reborn thing and your being here to help me to yourself. And why? Because you knew I’d be opposed to it.”

He kicked at a rock on the ground. The pebble soared through the air and hit a tree with a dead thump. “So I’m the bad guy for wanting to save your life?”

She leaned in. “You’re the bad guy for not being up-front. And you’re still doing it.”

His mouth tightened, and he crossed his arms over his chest. “Okay. I didn’t tell you everything. Be mad at me for that. But you can’t just ignore me or the fact that we’re bonded. You feel it. I feel it. You can’t deny it.”

“Watch me. I’m good at denying shit!” She seethed and darted around him to start back.

“God, you’re stubborn!” he called out, then again appeared in front of her.

She came to an abrupt stop, slamming her hands on his chest to stop from falling face forward. He caught her by the waist. Gently. His touch sent her heart racing this time.

“Either tell me the truth or leave,” she said, stepping out of his embrace. It was her last ultimatum. “Who are you working with besides the Vampire Council, and don’t tell me no one, because my bullshit detector goes off every time you tell me that.”

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Users Review

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