



The Darkest Surrender (Lords of the Underworld)

By Gena Showalter

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Editorial Review

Review

"One of the premier authors of paranormal romance."

-New York Times bestselling author Kresley Cole

"Showalter gives her fans another treat, sure to satisfy!"

-RT Book Reviews on The Darkest Passion

"The Showalter name on a book means guaranteed entertainment."

-RT Book Reviews on Twice as Hot

"If you like your paranormal dark and passionately flavored, this is the series for you."

-RT Book Reviews on The Darkest Whisper

About the Author

Gena Showalter is the New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author of over fifty books, including the acclaimed Lords of the Underworld and Angels of the Dark series, and the White Rabbit Chronicles. She writes sizzling paranormal romance, heartwarming contemporary romance, and unputdownable young adult novels, and lives in Oklahoma City with her family and menagerie of dogs. Visit her at GenaShowalter.com.

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"I WANT HIM."

"Where have I heard that before? Oh, yeah. The day of the *Unfortunate Incident*, something you made me swear never to discuss, even upon threat of death. And I won't discuss it now, so don't get your panties in a twist. I just thought you were more careful with your affections nowadays."

Kaia Skyhawk peered over at her twin—Bianka the Heavenly Hills Ho, as Kaia had recently dubbed her. A name her precious sis deserved. Girl had nailed an angel. A freaking angel. 'Course, in return Bianka had dubbed her Kaia: Bed-warmer of the Underworld for getting down and dirty with Paris, the biggest man-whore in existence.

The title didn't sting nearly as much as her last one. Fine, her current one. Harpies had long memories, and shouts of "Look, everyone, it's the Disappointment" still happened anytime she ran into another of her race.

Anyway. Bianka was as ravishingly gorgeous as ever, a dark fall of hair cascading down her back, her amber eyes bright. And just then she was flipping through a rack of designer dresses, a mix of determination and

concern radiating from her.

"That happened, like, a million years ago," Kaia said, "and Strider is the first man Fve...damn it, he's just the first man I've wanted, *truly* wanted," she added before her sister could comment on her "boyfriends" throughout the centuries, "since. Or ever."

"Actually, *that*, as you called it, happened a mere fifteen hundred years ago, but *we aren't discussing it*. So what about Kane, keeper of Disaster, huh? I thought you once had a moment with him? A shock to your senses or something like that."

"Nothing but static."

A snort full of amusement. "Try again."

"I don't know. Maybe his demon sensed a kindred spirit in me and reached out, hoping to fan the flames of a romance. That doesn't mean Kane and I are destined to be together. I'm not attracted to him."

"Better, and okay, Kane's out. Maybe you need to look elsewhere for a boyfriend. Like, say, the heavens. I can set you up with an angel." Bianka held up a flowing swath of blue material with sequined flower appliques sewn into the top and layer after layer of lacy ruffles at the bottom. "What do you think of this one?"

Ignoring the dress as she'd been ignored, Kaia pressed on. "No set ups. I want Strider."

"He's no good for you."

He's perfect for me. "One, he doesn't belong to another Harpy. Two, he isn't psychotic. Well," she added with a few seconds of afterthought, "he isn't psychotic all of the time. And three, he's...he's my consort, I know it." There. She'd said the words out loud to someone other than herself and the brain-damaged man in question.

My consort.

Consorts, as Kaia now knew, were extremely hard to find and utterly cherished because of that. Actually, they were necessary. Harpies were volatile by nature, dangerous and, when annoyed, lethal to the entire world. Consorts calmed them. Consorts appeased them.

If only you could select your consort from a catalogue and be done with it. Instead, instinct picked for you, and your body followed suit. Wouldn't have been so bad, except each Harpy was granted one consort during her seemingly endless life. Only one. You lost him, and you suffered eternally. If you didn't kill yourself outright.

That Kaia had once tried to steal Juliette's, that Juliette had been without her male all this time, not knowing whether he lived or had died, hating him for what he'd done but needing him anyway, that Juliette still loathed Kaia and had promised retribution—retribution the bitch still clearly planned to achieve—shamed her. But then, what could she say to defend herself? Nothing!

She had disobeyed. *She* set the man free. *She* had unleashed his fury upon an unsuspecting community.

Every year Kaia mailed Juliette a fruit basket with a "sorry about you consort" card, and every year the basket was returned with rotten apple cores, black banana peels, and a picture of Juliette flipping her off with "Die, Whore, Die" written in blood somewhere.

Only reason Juliette hadn't yet attacked was out of respect for Tabitha, who was still a force to be reckoned with among allies and enemies alike.

Don't think about the past. You'll start spiraling.

She'd think about *her* consort. Strider. Barbaric, slutty, idiotic Strider. He was an immortal warrior who'd long ago stolen and opened Pandora's box to "teach those asshole gods a lesson" for daring to pick a "mere woman" to guard such a "dumb relic," and because of his rampant senselessness, he and the friends who'd helped him—the infamous and deliciously frightening for everyone but a Harpy Lords of the Underworld—had been cursed, forever forced to carry the demons they'd set free inside themselves.

Strider, the beautiful moron, was possessed by the demon of Defeat. He couldn't lose a single challenge without suffering debilitating pain. Of course, that made him determined to win *everything*, even something as silly as Rock Band. Which she refused to ever again play with him because she'd totally nailed the bass, then the drums, then the mic, and he'd spazzed out and yelled at her before passing out and twitching with pain. *So* melodramatic.

Anyway, his determination made him stupid, egotistical, stupid, an all around asshat and stupid! But...there was no man more handsome, no man more fierce.

No man who wanted less to do with her.

Had she mentioned he was stupid?

"Well?" Bianka shook the dress in Kaia's face, forcefully claiming her attention. "Opinion, please. And sometime today."

Focus. "Don't kill the messenger, but that thing will make you look like a cracked out prom queen who has no plans to sleep with her boyfriend when the big dance ends—because she doesn't have a boyfriend. She's too weird. Sorry."

Bianka merely shrugged, unperturbed. "Hey, cracked out prom queens might be weird, but they're hot."

"If *hot* is a synonym for *destined to die alone*, you're right. So go ahead. Buy the dress, and I'll buy you a hundred cats to keep you company while you spend the rest of eternity trying to figure where your relationship with the angel went wrong, never really understanding that the problems started *this very night*"

"Do you know *anything* about me? Hello, I like dogs. But fine, whatever." Red lips pursing, her twin snapped the hanger back onto the rack and continued her search for "the perfect gown" to wear when she broke a bit of bad news to *her* consort, Lysander.

Poor Bianka. She hadn't just nailed an angel, she'd bound herself to one. Forever. Lysander lived and worked in the heavens and was so boring Kaia would rather shove bamboo splints under other people's fingernails than spend time with him. Okay, bad example. She actually enjoyed shoving bamboo splints under other people's nails.

There was something so *best-musical-ever* when people screamed and begged for mercy, and she could listen to a good musical all day.

"Kaia?" Bianka said. "What the hell are you sighing about?"

"Musicals."

"Musicals? Seriously? When I'm dying for help? Will you just listen to me for once?"

"In a minute. Geez. I really like this thought train." Or rather, she'd liked the station stop before the musicals. A male this boring needed an equally tedious nickname...like...Pope Lysander the First. That's right. He was an elite warrior with wings of gold and yeah, he was a demon slayer extraordinaire, and okay, that was sexy as hell, but he was also morally upstanding. Like over the edge OCD about it. Kaia shuddered with distaste. He was slowly but surely sucking the fun right out of her once delightful sister.

In fact, Lysander's aversion to blatant shoplifting was the reason they had abandoned Budapest—too many prying eyes—returned to Alaska and broken into Anchorage's Fifth Avenue Mall at night rather than taking what they desired in broad daylight. As usual. Again, too many prying eyes.

To be honest, Kaia was kind of embarrassed about the concession. She would have told *her* man to take his request to "please don't steal in front of humans, it gives them ideas" and stuff it up his ass. Also, she despised the lack of thrill, *needed* it to soothe her darker side, but whatever. She loved her sister. More than that, she owed Bianka a debt she could never hope to repay.

They might not ever discuss the *Unfortunate Incident*, but Kaia had never forgotten it. (See? A Harpy with a long memory.) Every day she remembered how Bianka had writhed in a pool of her own blood, her eyes glassy with pain. How moans of pain had parted mutilated lips.

Bianka sighed. "Okay, let's get your problems out of the way so we can concentrate on me. Tell me why you picked Strider as your heartmate. I know you're dying to extol his virtues."

For a moment, Kaia could only blink at her sister, certain she'd misheard. "Are you freaking kidding me? Heart-mate? Did you just say *heartmate*?"

Bianka snickered. "I did, and I almost gagged. Ly-sander's influence, you know. Anyway, Strider's such a tool. And a challenge." Another snicker echoed. "Get it? A challenge...he can't lose one...but he sure as hell acts like one."

Kaia rolled her eyes. "I think you've been hanging with the angels too much. Your IQ has dropped."

"What? That was funny." Square-tipped nails painted bright blue drummed against the metal rack between them. "And by the way, the angels aren't that bad."

"Whatever you need to tell yourself, my love."

Bianka blew her a kiss full of fang. "All's I'm saying is that Strider's gonna be a handful—and not the good kind. He's—actually, wait. I recant. He's too big to be anything but a good handful. Or more. But he's also gonna be a bad one. Wait. That doesn't ring true, either. How should I put this? He's going to—"

"I get it already! He's got a huge package, and he's irritating as hell. What's your point?"

"Glad you're finally up to speed. It's sad, really, that you need so much explanation." The sparkle in her sister's eyes dimmed. "Anyway, you told him how you felt about him and he rejected you. He'll be annoyed by any further contact you initiate, and an annoyed demon-possessed warrior is a global disaster waiting to happen."

"I know." If she had realized his importance to her sooner, she wouldn't have slept with his friend Paris, the keeper of Promiscuity. Otherwise known as Paris the Sex-orcist, a male so sensual he could make your head spin. And if she hadn't slept with the Sexorcist, Strider the Stupid wouldn't have rejected her.

Maybe.

Or maybe he would have. Because to her consternation—yes, consternation, and not an all-consuming, organ-flaming rage—he kinda sorta desired another woman. Haidee, a pretty female who belonged to his friend, Amun, keeper of Secrets.

At least Haidee was off limits, and Kaia didn't have to worry about Strider getting handsie. Honor among evil demons, and all that.

But damn it, just the thought of his *gaze* on another woman caused Kaia's nails to elongate and sharpen, her fangs to sprout and her blood to boil. *Mine*, every cell in her body cried. She would kill anyone who made a play for him, as well as anyone *he* made a play for; she wouldn't be able to help herself. Her dark side would take over, driving her to protect what was hers.

"Seriously, he's lucky to be alive, and not just because I want to chop off his man parts and feed them to zoo animals while he watches," Bianka continued. "Any man who can't recognize your worth deserves a good torturing."

"I know." Not because Kaia was anything special—though she was, kind of, maybe...damn it, she used to be—but because no one could reject a Harpy without suffering severe consequences.

Actually, most Harpies would have taken Strider despite his wishes. So maybe *she* was the stupid one for allowing him to push her away. She just...wanted him willing. She *needed* him willing. To abscond with him was to defeat him, and to defeat him was to hurt him.

She couldn't bring herself to hurt him. Even at the expense of her sanity.

"You're too good for him, anyway," Bianka said, loyal as always.

"I know," she repeated once more, lying this time. She would only ever be a disgrace to her clan. He deserved better.

Her sister sighed. "But you still want him." A statement of fact, not a question. "Yeah."

"So what are you going to do to win him?"

"Nothing," she said, fighting a wave of depression. "I chased after him once." And he'd found her lacking. "I'm not going to do it again."

"Maybe—"

"No. A few weeks ago, I challenged him to kick more Hunter ass than me." Hunters, the enemy out to destroy all things demon. The fanatics loved to go after innocents who dared get in their way. The pre-dead guys who would meet the tips of her claws if they approached Strider again.

Well, if they dared approach him with a weapon in hand. She might let them crawl toward him to apologize for the trouble they'd caused throughout the centuries. Torturing the Lords—only *she* was allowed to do so. Blowing up buildings—yawn. Could they be any more B-movie? *Sooo* irritating. Decapitating the keeper of Distrust—okay, that one was a little more than irritating, considering Strider was still messed up about it and everything.

Speaking of Distrust's murder, Haidee had helped carry it out. Yep, that Haidee. The one Strider desired.

Kaia didn't understand it. If he could want Haidee despite her crimes, why couldn't he want Kaia?

Users Review

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