



Hidden: A House of Night Novel (House of Night Novels)

By P. C. Cast, Kristin Cast

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In the must-read tenth installment of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling vampyre series by PC and Kristin Cast, Darkness won't stay hidden for long... "Move over Stephenie Meyer." —*People*

The House of Night series is an international phenomenon, reaching #1 on U.S., German, and UK bestseller lists, and remaining a fixture on the *New York Times* Children's Series bestseller list for more than 140 weeks and counting. With nearly 12 million copies in print, rights sold in thirty-eight countries to date, and relatable, addictive characters, this series is unstoppable. Now in *Hidden*, the tenth installment of the series, the stakes are higher than ever before.

Neferet's true nature has been revealed to the Vampyre High Council, so Zoey and the gang might finally get some help in defending themselves and their beloved school against a gathering evil that grows stronger every day. And they'll need it, because Neferet's not going down without a fight. *Chaos reigns at the House of Night.*

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Editorial Review

About the Author

#1 *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author P.C. CAST is an award-winning fantasy and paranormal romance writer, as well as an experienced speaker and teacher. Her novels have been awarded YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and have received the prestigious Oklahoma Book Award. KRISTIN CAST is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author who teams with her mother to write the House of Night series.

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CHAPTER ONE

Lenobia

Lenobia's sleep was so restless that the familiar dream took on a sense of reality that overstepped the ethereal realm of subconscious outlets and fantasies and became, from the beginning, all too heartbreakingly real.

It began with a memory. Decades, and then centuries fell away leaving Lenobia young and naïve again, and in the cargo hold of the ship that had carried her from France to America—from one world to another. It was during that journey that Lenobia had met Martin, the man who should have been her Mate for his entire life. Instead he had died too young and had taken her love to the grave with him.

In her dream Lenobia could feel the gentle roll of the ship and smell the scent of horse and hay, sea and fish—and Martin. Always Martin. He was standing before her, gazing down at her through eyes that were olive and amber and worried. She had just told him she loved him.

"It is impossible." The dream memory replayed in her mind as Martin reached out, took her hand, and lifted it gently. He raised his own arm until the two were side by side. *"You see the difference, you?"*

The dreaming Lenobia made a small, wordless exclamation of pain. The sound of his voice! That distinct Creole accent—deep, sensual, unique. It was the bittersweet sound of his voice and its beautiful accent that had kept Lenobia away from New Orleans for more than two hundred years.

"No," the young Lenobia had answered his question as she gazed down at their arms—one brown, one white—where they pressed together. *"All I see is you."*

Still deeply asleep, Lenobia, Horse Mistress of the Tulsa House of Night, moved restlessly, as if her body was attempting to force her mind to awaken. But this night her mind did not obey. This night dreams and what might have been ruled.

The sequence of memories shifted and changed to another scene, still in the cargo hold of the same ship, still with Martin, but days later. He was handing her a long string of leather tied to a small pouch dyed a deep sapphire blue. Martin put it around her neck saying, *"This gris-gris protect you, cherie."*

In the space of a heartbeat the memory wavered and time fast-forwarded a century. An older, wiser, more cynical Lenobia was cradling the crumpling leather pouch in her hands as it split and spilled its contents—thirteen things, just as Martin had told her—but most of them had become unrecognizable during the century she'd worn the charm. Lenobia remembered a faint scent of juniper, the smooth feel of the clay pebble before it turned to dust, and the tiny dove's feather that had crumbled between her fingers. But most of all Lenobia remembered the fleeting rush of joy she'd felt when, in the midst of the disintegrating

remnants of Martin's love and protection, she'd discovered something that time hadn't been able to ravage. It had been a ring—a heart-shaped emerald, surrounded by tiny diamonds, set in gold.

"*Your mother's heart—your heart—my heart,*" Lenobia had whispered as she'd slipped it over the knuckle of her ring finger. "*I still miss you, Martin. I've never forgotten. I vowed it.*"

And then the dream memories rewound again, taking Lenobia back to Martin, only this time they weren't at sea finding one another in the cargo hold and falling in love. This memory was dark and terrible. Even dreaming, Lenobia knew the place and the date: New Orleans, March 21, 1788, not long after sunset.

The stables had exploded in fire and Martin had saved her, carrying her from the flames.

"*Oh, no! Martin! No!*" Lenobia had screamed at him then, now she whimpered, struggling to awaken before she had to relive the horrible end of the memory.

She didn't wake. Instead she heard her only love repeat the words that had broken her heart two hundred years before, feeling it again as if the wound were raw and fresh.

"*Too late, cherie. This world too late for us. I see you again, though. My love for you don't end here. My love for you, it never ends ... find you again, cherie. That I vow.*"

As Martin captured the evil human who had tried to enslave her, and then walked back into the flaming stables with him, saving Lenobia's life, the Horse Mistress was finally able to wake herself with a wrenching sob. She sat up in bed, and with a trembling hand brushed her sweat-soaked hair from her face.

Lenobia's first waking thought was for her mare. Through the psychic connection they shared, she could feel that Mujaji was agitated, almost panicked. "Shhh, my beauty. Go back to sleep. I am well." Lenobia spoke aloud, sending soothing feelings to the black mare with whom she had a special bond. Feeling guilty for upsetting Mujaji, she bowed her head and cradled her hand, twisting the emerald ring around and around her finger.

"Stop being so foolish," Lenobia told herself firmly. "It was just a dream. I am safe. I am not back there. What happened then cannot hurt me more than it already has," Lenobia lied to herself. *I can be hurt again. If Martin has come back—really come back—my heart can be hurt again.* Another sob tried to escape from Lenobia, but she pressed her lips together and forced her emotions under control.

He might not be Martin, she told herself firmly, logically. Travis Foster, the new human hired by Neferet to assist her in the stables, was simply a handsome distraction—him and his big, beautiful Percheron mare.

"Which is probably exactly what Neferet intended when she hired him," Lenobia muttered. "To distract me. And his Percheron is just an odd coincidence." Lenobia closed her eyes and blocked the memories that lifted from her past, and then repeated aloud, "Travis might not be Martin reincarnated. I know my reaction to him is unusually strong, but it has been a long time since I have taken a lover." *You have never taken a human lover—you vowed not to*, her conscience reminded her. "So it's simply past time I took a vampyre lover, even if briefly. And *that* type of distraction will be good for me." Lenobia tried to busy her imagination with considering and then rejecting a list of handsome Son of Erebus Warriors, her mind's eye not seeing their strong, muscular bodies, but instead envisioning whisky brown eyes tinged with familiar olive green and a ready smile ...

"No!" She would not think of it. She would not think of *him*.

But what if Travis could really hold Martin's soul? Lenobia's errant mind whispered enticingly. *He gave his word he would find me again. Perhaps he has.* "And then what?" Lenobia stood and began to pace restlessly. "I know all too well the fragility of humans. They are too easily killed, and today the world is even more dangerous than it was in 1788. My love ended in heartbreak and flame once. Once was too much." Lenobia stopped and put her face in her hands as her heart knew the truth, and pumped it through her body and soul, becoming reality. "I am a coward. If Travis is not Martin I do not want to open myself to him—to take a chance on loving another human. And if he is Martin returned to me, I cannot bear the inevitable, that I will lose him again."

Lenobia sat heavily in the old rocking chair she'd placed beside her bedroom window. She liked to read there, and if she couldn't sleep her window faced east so she could watch the rising of the sun and look out at the grounds beside the stables. Though Lenobia appreciated the irony, she couldn't help but enjoy the

morning light. Vampyre or not, at her core she would eternally be a girl who loved mornings and horses and a tall, cappuccino skinned human who had died long ago when he had been far too young.

Her shoulders slumped. She hadn't thought of Martin so often in decades. His renewed memory was a double-edged sword—on one side she loved recalling his smile, his scent, his touch. On the other his memory also evoked the void his absence had left. For more than two hundred years Lenobia had grieved for a lost possibility—a wasted life.

“Our future was burned away from us. Destroyed by flames of hatred and obsession and evil.” Lenobia shook her head and wiped her eyes. She must regain control over her emotions. Evil was still burning a swath through Light and goodness. She drew in a deep, centering breath and turned her thoughts to a subject that never failed to calm her, no matter how chaotic the world around her had become—horses—Mujaji, in particular. Feeling calmer now, Lenobia reached out again with that extra special part of her spirit that Nyx had touched, and gifted with an affinity for horses, the day sixteen-year-old Lenobia had been Marked. She found her mare easily, and instantly felt guilty at the mirrored agitation she sensed in Mujaji.

“Shhh,” Lenobia soothed again, repeating aloud the reassurance she was sending through her bond with the mare. “I am only being foolish and self-indulgent. It will pass, I give you my vow, sweet one.” Lenobia focused a tide of warmth and love on her night-colored mare, and, as always, Mujaji regained her own calm. Lenobia closed her eyes and released a long breath. She could envision her mare, black and beautiful as the night, finally settling down, cocking a back leg, and falling into a dreamless sleep.

The Horse Mistress concentrated on her mare, shutting out the turmoil that the young cowboy's arrival at her stables had caused within her. *Tomorrow, she promised herself sleepily, tomorrow I will make it clear to Travis that we will never be more than employer and employee. The color of his eyes and the wa...*

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