



## Gabriel's Rapture (Gabriel's Inferno Trilogy Book 2)

By Sylvain Reynard



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**But those very desires may destroy them . . .**

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But when they return, their happiness is threatened by conspiring students, academic politics, and a jealous ex-lover. When Gabriel is confronted by the university administration, will he succumb to Dante's fate? Or will he fight to keep Julia, his Beatrice, forever?

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### Editorial Review

About the Author

**Sylvain Reynard** is a Canadian writer with an interest in Renaissance art and culture and an inordinate attachment to the city of Florence.

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### Chapter 1

Professor Gabriel Emerson was sitting in bed, naked, reading *La Nazione*, the Florentine newspaper. He'd awoken early in the Palazzo Vecchio penthouse of the Gallery Hotel Art and ordered room service, but he couldn't resist returning to bed to watch the young woman sleep. She was on her side facing him, breathing softly, a diamond sparkling on her ear. Her cheeks were pink from the warmth of the room as their bed was bathed in sunshine from the floor-to-ceiling windows.

The bed covers were deliciously ruffled, smelling of sex and sandalwood. His blue eyes glimmered, traveling lazily over her exposed skin and long, dark hair. As he turned back to his newspaper, she shifted slightly and moaned. Concerned, he tossed the paper aside.

She brought her knees up to her chest, curling into a ball. Low murmurings came from her lips, and Gabriel leaned closer so he could decipher what she was saying. But he couldn't.

All of a sudden, her body twisted and she let out a heart-wrenching cry. Her arms flailed as she wrestled with the sheet that shrouded her.

"Julianne?" He placed a gentle hand on her bare shoulder, but she cringed away from him.

She began muttering his name, over and over again, her tone growing progressively more panicked.

"Julia, I'm here," he raised his voice. Just as he reached for her again, she sat bolt upright, gasping for air.

"Are you all right?" Gabriel moved closer, resisting the urge to touch her. She was breathing roughly, and under his watchful gaze, she fanned a shaking hand over her eyes.

"Julia?"

After a long, tense minute, she looked at him, eyes wide.

He frowned. "What happened?"

She swallowed loudly. "A nightmare."

"What was it about?"

"I was in the woods behind your parents' house, back in Selinsgrove."

Gabriel's eyebrows knit together behind his dark-rimmed glasses. "Why would you dream about that?"

She inhaled, drawing the sheet over her exposed breasts and up to her chin. The linen was full and white, swallowing her petite frame whole before billowing cloudlike over the mattress. She reminded him of an Athenian statue.

He ran his fingers gently over her skin. "Julianne, talk to me."

She squirmed under his piercing blue eyes, but he would not let her go. "The dream began beautifully. We made love under the stars, and I fell asleep in your arms. When I woke up you were gone."

"You dreamed I made love to you, then abandoned you?" His tone cooled to mask his discomfort.

"I woke up in the orchard without you once," she reproached him softly.

The fire in his belly was instantly quenched. He thought back to the magical evening six years ago when they first met, when they simply talked and held each other. He'd awoken the following morning and wandered away, leaving a sleeping teenage girl all alone. Surely her anxiety was understandable if not pitiable.

He unwound her clenched fingers one by one and kissed them repentantly. "I love you, Beatrice. I'm not going to leave you. You know that, right?"

"It would hurt so much more to lose you now."

With a frown he wrapped an arm around her shoulder, pressing her cheek to his chest. A myriad of memories crowded his mind as he thought back to what had transpired the evening before. He'd gazed on her naked form for the first time and initiated her into the intimacies of lovemaking. She'd shared her innocence with him, and he thought he'd made her happy. Certainly it had been one of the best evenings of his life. He pondered that fact for a moment.

"Do you regret last night?"

"No. I'm glad you were my first. It's what I wanted since we met."

He placed his hand on her cheek, tracing her skin with his thumb. "I'm honored to have been your first." He leaned forward, his eyes unblinking. "But I want to be your last."

She smiled and lifted her lips to meet his. Before he could embrace her, the chimes of Big Ben filled the room.

"Ignore it," he whispered fiercely, his arm stretching across her body, pushing her to recline beneath him.

Her eyes darted over his shoulder to where his iPhone lay on the desk. "I thought she wasn't going to call you anymore."

"I'm not answering, so it doesn't matter." He kneeled between her legs and lifted the sheet from her body. "In my bed, there's only us."

She searched his eyes as he began to bring their naked bodies into closer contact.

Gabriel leaned forward to kiss her, but she turned her head. "I haven't brushed my teeth."

"I don't care." He lowered his lips to her neck, kissing across her quickening pulse.

"I'd like to clean up first."

He huffed in frustration, leaning on one elbow. "Don't let Paulina ruin what we have."

"I'm not." She tried to roll out from under him and take the sheet with her, but he caught hold of it. He gazed over the rims of his glasses, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

"I need the sheet to make the bed."

Her eyes traveled from the white fabric that was clutched between her fingers, to his face. He looked like a panther waiting to pounce. She glanced over the side of the bed at the pile of clothes on the floor. They were beyond her reach.

"What's the problem?" he asked, stifling a grin.

Julia blushed and gripped the material more tightly. With a chuckle, he released the sheet and pulled her into his arms.

"You don't need to be shy. You're beautiful. If I had my wish, you'd never wear clothes again."

He pressed his lips to her earlobe, gently touching the diamond stud. He was certain his adoptive mother, Grace, would have been happy that her earrings found their way to Julia. With another brief kiss, he turned away, sliding over to sit on the edge of the bed.

She slipped into the washroom but not before Gabriel caught sight of her alluring back as she dropped the sheet just outside the door.

While brushing her teeth, she thought about what had transpired. Making love with Gabriel had been a very emotional experience, and even now her heart felt the aftershocks. That wasn't surprising considering their history. She'd wanted him since she spent a chaste night with him in an orchard when she was seventeen, but he'd been gone when she awoke the next morning. He'd forgotten her in the aftermath of a drunken, drug-induced haze. Six long years passed before she saw him again, and then, he didn't remember her.

When she encountered him again on the first day of his graduate seminar at the University of Toronto, he was attractive but cold, like a distant star. She hadn't believed then that she'd become his lover. She hadn't believed it possible that the temperamental and arrogant Professor would reciprocate her affection.

There were so many things she hadn't known. Sex was a kind of knowledge, and now she knew the sting of sexual jealousy in a manner she'd never experienced before. The mere idea of Gabriel doing what they'd done with some other woman, and in his case many other women, made her heart ache.

She knew that Gabriel's trysts were different from what they'd shared—that they were assignations not brought about by love or affection. But he'd undressed them, seen them naked, and entered their bodies. After being with him, how many of those women craved more? Paulina had. She and Gabriel had maintained contact over the years since they conceived and lost a child together.

Julia's new understanding of sex changed her view of his past and made her more sympathetic to Paulina's plight. And all the more guarded against losing Gabriel to her or to any other woman.

Julia gripped the edge of the vanity as a wave of insecurity washed over her. Gabriel loved her; she believed

this. But he was also a gentleman and would never reveal that their union had left him wanting. And what of her own behavior? She'd asked questions and talked when she expected that most lovers would have been silent. She'd done very little to please him, and when she tried he'd stopped her.

Her ex-boyfriend's words came screaming back at her, swirling in her mind with condemnation:

You're frigid.

You're going to be a lousy lay.

She turned away from the mirror as she contemplated what might happen if Gabriel was dissatisfied with her. The specter of sexual betrayal reared its maleficent head, bringing with it visions of finding Simon in bed with her roommate.

She straightened her shoulders. If she could persuade Gabriel to be patient and to teach her, then she was confident she could please him. He loved her. He would give her a chance. She was his as surely as if he'd branded his name on her skin.

When she stepped into the bedroom she caught sight of him through the open door to the terrace. On her way, she was distracted by a beautiful vase of dark purple and paler, variegated irises sitting on top of the desk. Some lovers might have purchased long-stemmed red roses, but not Gabriel.

She opened the card that was nestled amongst the blossoms.

My Dearest Julianne,  
Thank you for your immeasurable gift.  
The only thing I have of value is my heart.  
It's yours,  
Gabriel.

Julia reread the card twice, her heart swelling with love and relief. Gabriel's words didn't sound like they were penned by a man who was dissatisfied or frustrated. Whatever Julia's worries, Gabriel didn't seem to share them.

Gabriel was sunning himself on the futon, his glasses off, his chest gloriously exposed. With his muscular, six-foot-two frame, it was as if Apollo himself had deigned to visit her. Sensing her presence on the terrace, he opened his eyes and patted his lap. She joined him, and his arms enveloped her as he kissed her passionately.

"Why, hello there," he murmured, brushing a stray tendril back from her face. He peered at her closely. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Thank you for the flowers. They're beautiful."

He brushed his lips against hers. "You're welcome. But you look troubled. Is it about Paulina?"

"I'm upset that she's calling you, but no." Julia's expression brightened. "Thank you for your card. It said what I desperately wanted to hear."

"I'm glad." He squeezed her more closely. "Tell me what's bothering you."

She toyed with the belt to her bathrobe for a moment, until he took her hand in his. She looked at him. "Was last night everything you'd hoped for?"

Gabriel exhaled sharply, for her question had taken him by surprise. "That's a strange question."

"I know it had to be different for you. I wasn't very...active."

"Active? What are you talking about?"

"I didn't do much to please you." She blushed.

He stroked the flushing skin lightly with the tip of his finger. "You pleased me a great deal. I know you were nervous, but I enjoyed myself tremendously. We belong to one another now—in every way. What else is troubling you?"

"I demanded that we switch positions when you would have preferred me on top."

"You didn't demand, you asked. Frankly, Julianne, I'd like to hear you demand things of me. I want to know that you want me as desperately as I want you." His expression relaxed, and he drew a circle or two around her breast. "You dreamed about your first time being a certain way. I wanted to give that to you, but I was worried. What if you were uncomfortable? What if I wasn't careful enough? Last night was a first for me too."

He released her, pouring coffee and steamed milk from two separate carafes into a latté bowl and spreading the tray of food between them on the banquette. There were pastries and fruit, toast and Nutella, boiled eggs and cheese, and several Baci Perugina Gabriel had bribed a hotel employee to run out and purchase along with the extravagant bouquet of irises from the Giardino dell'Iris.

Julia unwrapped one of the Baci and ate it, eyes closed with pure pleasure. "You ordered a feast."

"I awoke ravenous this morning. I would have waited for you but..." He shook his head as he picked up a grape and fixed her with a sparkling eye. "Open."

She opened her mouth, and he popped the grape inside, tracing his finger temptingly across her lower lip.

"And you must drink this, please." He handed her a wine glass filled with cranberry juice and soda.

She rolled her eyes. "You're overprotective."

He shook his head. "This is how a man behaves when he's in love and he wants his sweetheart healthy for all the sex he plans on having with her." He winked smugly.

"I'm not going to ask how you know about such things. Give me that." She grabbed the glass from his hand and downed it, her eyes focused on his, as he chuckled.

"You're adorable."

She stuck her tongue out at him before fixing herself a breakfast plate.

"How do you feel this morning?" Gabriel's face grew concerned.

She swallowed a piece of Fontina cheese. "Okay."

He pressed his lips together firmly, as if her answer displeased him.

"Making love changes things between a man and a woman," he prompted.

"Um, aren't you happy with, uh, what we did?" The pink of her cheeks faded immediately, leaving her pale.

"Of course I'm happy. I'm trying to find out if you're happy. And based upon what you've said so far, I'm worried that you aren't."

Julia picked at the fabric of her robe, avoiding Gabriel's probing gaze. "When I was at college the girls on my floor would sit around and talk about their boyfriends. One night they told stories about their first times." She nibbled at the tip of one of her fingers.

"Only a few of the girls had good things to say. The other stories were awful. One girl had been molested as a child. Some of the girls had been forced by a boyfriend or a date. Several of them said that their first times were completely awkward and unfulfilling—a boyfriend grunting and finishing quickly. I thought, if that's all I can hope for, I'd rather stay a virgin."

"That's horrible."

She fixed her eyes on the breakfast tray.

"I wanted to be loved. I decided it would be better to have a chaste affair of the heart and mind through letters than a sexual relationship. I had my doubts that I would ever find anyone who could give me both. Certainly, Simon didn't love me. Now I'm in a relationship with a sex god, and I can't give him anything like the pleasure he gives me."

Gabriel's eyebrows shot up. "Sex god? You've said that before, but believe me, I'm not—"

She interrupted him, looking him straight in the eye. "Teach me. I'm sure last night was not as, um...fulfilling as it usually is for you, but I promise that if you are patient with me, I will improve."

He cursed obliquely. "Come here." He pulled her around the breakfast tray and into his lap again, wrapping his arms around her. He was quiet for a moment, before sighing deeply.

"You assume that my previous sexual encounters were completely fulfilling, but you're wrong. You gave me what I've never had—love and sex together. You're the only one who has ever been my lover in the true sense."

He kissed her gently in solemn confirmation of his words. "The anticipation and the allure of a woman are crucial to the experience. I can safely say that your allurements and my anticipation were like nothing I've ever experienced before. Add to that the experience of making love for the first time... Words fail me."

She nodded but something about her movement disquieted him.

"I promise I'm not flattering you." He paused as if he were pondering his next words carefully. "At the risk of being Neanderthal, I should probably tell you that your innocence is tremendously erotic. The thought that I can be the one to teach you about sex...that someone so modest is also so passionate..." His voice trailed off as he looked at her intently. "You could become more skilled in the art of love by learning new tricks and new positions, but you can't become more attractive or more sexually fulfilling. Not to me."



Julia leaned over and kissed him. "Thank you for taking such good care of me last night," she whispered, her cheeks turning pink.

"As for Paulina, I'll deal with her. Please put her out of your mind."

Julia turned her attention back to her uneaten breakfast, resisting the urge to argue with him. "Will you tell me about your first time?"

"I'd rather not."

She busied herself with a pastry as she tried to think of a safer subject. The financial woes of Europe came readily to mind.

He rubbed at his eyes with both hands, covering them briefly. It would be far too easy to lie, he knew, but after all she'd given him, she deserved to know his secrets. "You remember Jamie Roberts?"

"Of course."

Gabriel lowered his hands. "I lost my virginity to her."

Julia's eyebrows shot up. Jamie and her domineering mother had never been very pleasant to Julia, and she had always disliked them. She had no idea that Officer Roberts, who had investigated Simon's attack on her a month previous, had been Gabriel's first.

"It was not the greatest of experiences," he said quietly. "In fact, I would say it was scarring. I didn't love her. There was some attraction, of course, but no true affection. We went to Selinsgrove High School together. She sat next to me in History one year." He shrugged. "We flirted and messed around after school and eventually..."

"Jamie was a virgin but lied and said she wasn't. I wasn't attentive to her at all. I was selfish and stupid." He cursed. "She said it didn't hurt much, but there was blood afterward. I felt like an animal and I've always regretted it." Gabriel cringed, and Julia felt the guilt radiating from him. His description made her almost ill, but it also explained a great deal.

"That's horrible. I'm so sorry." She squeezed his hand. "Is that why you were so worried last night?"

He nodded.

"She misled you."

"That's no excuse for my behavior, before or afterward." He cleared his throat. "She assumed we were in a relationship, but I wasn't interested. That made it worse, of course. I graduated from being merely an animal to being an animal and an asshole. When I saw her at Thanksgiving, I hadn't spoken to her in years. I asked her to forgive me. She was remarkably gracious.

"I've always felt guilty for treating her badly. I've stayed away from virgins ever since." He swallowed noisily. "Until last night.

"First times are supposed to be sweet, but seldom are. While you were worrying about pleasing me, I was worrying about pleasing you. Perhaps I was too careful, too protective, but I couldn't have borne it if I'd hurt you."

Julia put her breakfast aside and stroked his face. "You were very gentle and very generous. I've never known such joy, and that's because you loved me with more than just your body. Thank you."

As if to prove her point, he kissed her deeply. Julia hummed as his hands tangled through her hair, and she wrapped her arms about his neck. He slid his hands between them to the front of her robe, parting it hesitantly. He lifted his head, his eyes questioning.

She nodded.

He began whispering kisses against her neck and drew his mouth up to tug at her earlobe. "How do you feel?"

"Great," she whispered as his lips skimmed down to her throat.

He moved so he could see her face while one of his hands traveled to rest atop her lower abdomen. "Are you sore?"

"A little."

"Then we should wait."

"No!"

He laughed, his lips curling up into his signature seductive smile. "Did you mean what you said last night about making love out here?"

She shivered at the way his voice inflamed her but returned his smile, winding her fingers in his hair, tugging him closer. He opened her robe and began to explore her curves with both hands before dropping his mouth to kiss her breasts.

"You were shy with me this morning." He pressed a reverent kiss over her heart "What changed?"

Julia brushed against the hint of a dimple in his chin. "I will probably always be a little shy about being naked. But I want you. I want you to look into my eyes and tell me you love me as you move inside me. I will remember that as long as I live."

"I'll keep reminding you," he breathed.

He divested her of her robe and positioned her on her back. "Are you cold?"

"Not when you're holding me," she whispered, smiling. "Wouldn't you rather have me on top? I'd like to try it."

He threw off his robe and boxer shorts quickly and covered her body with his own, placing a hand on either side of her face. "Someone might see you out here, darling. And I can't have that. No one gets to see this beautiful body except me.

"Although the neighbors and passersby might be able to hear you...for the next hour or so..." He chuckled as she inhaled sharply, a tremor of pleasure coursing all the way down to her toes.

He kissed her, pushing her hair away from her face. "My goal is to see how many times I can please you before I can't hold back anymore."

She grinned. "I like the sound of that."

"So do I. So let me hear you."

The blue sky blushed to see such passionate lovemaking, while the Florentine sun smiled down, warming the lovers despite the gentle breeze. Beside them, Julia's coffee and milk grew stone cold and sullen at being ignored.

\* \* \*

After a brief nap, Julia borrowed Gabriel's MacBook to send an email to her father. She had two important messages in her inbox. The first was from Rachel.

Jules!

How are you? Is my brother behaving himself? Have you slept with him yet? Yes, it is COMPLETELY inappropriate for me to ask that question, but come on, if you were dating anyone else you would have told me already.

I'm not going to volunteer any advice. I'm trying not to think too much about it. Just let me know you're happy and he's treating you properly.

Aaron sends his best.

Love you,

Rachel.

PS. Scott has a new girlfriend. He's been secretive about her so I'm not sure how long they've been dating. I keep bugging him to introduce me but he won't.

Maybe she's a professor.

Julia snickered, glad that Gabriel was showering and not reading over her shoulder. He'd be annoyed at his sister for posing such personal questions. She took a few moments to phrase her response before typing her reply.

Hi Rachel,

The hotel is beautiful. Gabriel has been very sweet and gave me your mother's diamond earrings. Did you know about that?

I feel guilty about it, so please let me know if this upsets you.

As to your other question, Yes. Gabriel treats me well, and I am VERY happy.

Say hi to Aaron for me. Looking forward to Christmas.

Love, Julia. XO

PS. I hope Scott's girlfriend is a professor. Gabriel will never let him hear the end of it.

Julia's second email was from Paul. It could be said that he pined for her, but also he was grateful to have maintained their friendship. He would rather keep his longings to himself than to lose her entirely. And he had to admit that since she'd begun seeing her boyfriend Owen, her very skin glowed.

(Not that he would have mentioned it.)

Hey Julia,

Sorry I didn't get the chance to say good-bye before you went home. I hope you have a good Christmas. I have a gift for you. Would you give me your address in Pennsylvania so I can send it?

I'm back at the farm trying to find time to work on my dissertation in between large family gatherings and getting up early to help my dad. Let's just say my daily routine involves a lot of manure...

Can I bring you something from Vermont?

A Holstein of your very own?

Merry Christmas,

Paul.

P.S. Did you hear that Christa Peterson's dissertation proposal was accepted by Emerson?

I guess Advent really is the season of miracles.

Julia stared at the computer screen, reading and re-reading Paul's postscript. She wasn't sure what to make of it. It was possible, she thought, that Gabriel accepted Christa's proposal because she threatened him.

Julia didn't want to bring up such an unpleasant topic during their vacation, but the news troubled her. She typed a short reply to Paul, giving him her address, then she emailed her father, telling him that Gabriel was treating her like a princess. She closed the laptop and sighed.

"That doesn't sound like a happy Julianne." Gabriel's voice sounded behind her.

"I think I'm going to ignore my email for the rest of our trip."

"Good idea."

She turned to find him standing in front of her, wet from the shower, hair tousled, a white towel wound around his hips.

"You're beautiful," she blurted before thinking.

He chuckled and pulled her to her feet so he could embrace her. "Do you have a thing for men in towels, Miss Mitchell?"

"Maybe for one particular man."

"Are you feeling all right?" He raised his eyebrows expectantly, his expression hungry.

"I'm a little uncomfortable. But it was worth it."

His eyes narrowed. "You need to tell me if I'm hurting you, Julianne. Don't hide things from me."

She rolled her eyes. "Gabriel, it doesn't hurt; it's merely uncomfortable. I didn't notice it during because there were other things on my mind—several other things. You were very distracting."

He smiled and kissed her neck loudly. "You need to let me start distracting you in the shower. I'm tired of showering alone."

"I'd like that. How are you feeling?"

He pretended to ponder her question. "Let's see—loud, hot sex with my beloved inside and outside... Yes, I'd say I'm great."

He hugged her close, and the cotton of her robe absorbed some of the water droplets from his skin. "I promise it won't always be uncomfortable. In time, your body will recognize me."

"It already recognizes you. And misses you," she whispered.

Gabriel moved the top of her robe aside so he could kiss the slope of her shoulder. With a gentle squeeze, he walked to the bed, retrieving a bottle of ibuprofen and handing it to her.

"I have to run over to the Uffizi for a meeting, then I have to pick up my new suit at the tailor's." He appeared concerned. "Would you mind shopping for a dress by yourself? I'd go with you, but my meeting won't leave me with much time."

"Not at all."

"If you can be ready in half an hour, we can walk out together."

Julia followed Gabriel into the bathroom, all thoughts of Christa and Paul forgotten.

After her shower, she stood in front of one of the vanities, drying her hair while Gabriel stood at the other. She found herself glancing over at him, watching as he carried out his shaving preparations with military precision. Finally, she gave up putting on lipstick and simply leaned against the sink, staring.

He was still naked to the waist, the towel now low on his hips, as he painstakingly shaved in the classical style. His brilliant blue eyes narrowed in concentration behind his black glasses, his damp hair impeccably combed.

Julia suppressed a laugh at the degree to which his quest for perfection was manifested. Gabriel used a shaving brush with a black wooden handle to mix European shaving soap into a thick lather. After spreading the foam on his face with the brush, he shaved using an antiquated safety razor.

(For some professors, disposable razors simply aren't good enough.)

"What?" He turned, noticing that she was perilously close to ogling him.

"I love you."

His expression softened. "I love you too, darling."

"You're the only non-British person I've ever heard use the term darling."

"That isn't true."

"It isn't?"

"Richard used to call Grace that." Gabriel gave her a sad look.

"Richard is old-fashioned, in the best sense." She smiled. "I love the fact that you're old-fashioned too."

Gabriel snorted and continued shaving. "I'm not so old-fashioned, or I wouldn't be making mad passionate love with you outside. And fantasizing about introducing you to some of my favorite positions from the Kama sutra." He winked at her. "But I am a pretentious old bastard and a devil to live with. You'll have to tame me."

"And how shall I do that, Professor Emerson?"

"Never leave." His voice dropped, and he turned to face her.

"I'm more worried about losing you."

He leaned over and kissed her forehead. "Then you have nothing to worry about."

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Tenesha Little:**

The book Gabriel's Rapture (Gabriel's Inferno Trilogy Book 2) can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. Exactly why must we leave a very important thing like a book Gabriel's Rapture (Gabriel's Inferno Trilogy Book 2)? Several of you have a different opinion about e-book. But one aim that book can give many info for us. It is absolutely appropriate. Right now, try to closer together with your book. Knowledge or data that you take for that, you are able to give for each other; you may share all of these. Book Gabriel's Rapture (Gabriel's Inferno Trilogy Book 2) has simple shape but the truth is know: it has great and large function for you. You can seem the enormous world by start and read a guide. So it is very wonderful.

#### **Gerald Wright:**

As people who live in the actual modest era should be up-date about what going on or facts even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era and that is always change and move forward. Some of you maybe

will update themselves by looking at books. It is a good choice for you but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know what type you should start with. This Gabriel's Rapture (Gabriel's Inferno Trilogy Book 2) is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and want in this era.

#### **Kim Adams:**

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