



VAMPYRE  
PRODUCTIONS

MANDY M. ROTH

VALHALLA

The Valkyrie Beginnings

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**Mandy M. Roth**

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Dedication:

To the 'manuscript crisis management group' consisting of Michelle, Jaycee, Ellen, Andrea, Jaide, and Cyndy, thank you for your quick responses to my frantic emails and for listening to me babble on the phone endlessly. I bet you're sorry you gave me your numbers now. I can't thank you all enough. I'm enjoying every minute of our wild ride.

To Pennie and Angie for all they do to help behind the scenes and for not laughing at my silly mistakes. And to the readers who I hope enjoy this installment of Valerie's story as much as I enjoyed writing it. Thank you all so much!

Warning: This story contains mature situations, graphic violence, strong language, explicit sex, the loss of child, and a woman's love for multiple men. It is not intended for the faint of heart.

## Chapter 1

"Linnea, really now, do you have to carry on like that? I'm not asking you to end world hunger. I'm asking you to up your quota."

I looked over at my mother sitting by the window dressed in only a two-piece brown suede bikini and wondered how long it had been since she'd been out in the field. She didn't look a day over thirty-five, and had a body that any woman would kill for, but she'd long since given up leaving Valhalla. The elders tell me that once my mother had been their greatest warrior princess, she'd retrieved more souls than any other Valkyrie ever had, but gave that all up when she became pregnant with me. I used to ask her why she gave up the way of our people, but she never answered me.

"Linnea, these are desperate times. The Apocalypse is fast approaching and we need to be prepared to fight evil." She looked at me with eyes so blue that I often wondered how I was hers. My turquoise eyes were a far cry from her deep navy blue. "You know that you have the gift that is needed in this battle. Use it and bring forth more warriors for our cause."

"I've told you before that it's not right to steal men away from the battle fields only to make them fight for our cause. Most are there fighting for their own reasons, families, land—freedom!"

She gave me a look that told me that she was beyond sick of arguing with me about this. "Our cause is the cause of all men. If the Apocalypse is allowed to come then all mankind shall perish. So you see our fight is their fight too."

I gave in, as I usually did. She was right, but I'd never admit that. Instead I turned my attentions elsewhere. I looked over her shoulder, out onto the grassy knoll where many of the men I'd been collecting over the last two years stood training. I'd broken one of the rules that Valkyrie women were supposed to follow, I had become their friend. I took an interest in

their day to day lives and training. I even joined in and sparred with them when time allowed.

I seemed to make angering the elders an art and I didn't care. The elders couldn't continue on their mission without me. Their ways were becoming obsolete and their new targets were too much for any of them to handle. Evil had decided to start playing with the big boys and were rumored to be recruiting the worst of the worst from the supernatural gene pool. We were still pulling brave mortal men off the battlefields. We could offer them immortality, but that was all. We could not make them any stronger than they already were. We could train them to fight better and faster, but that was it.

"Mother, why are we not allowed to share a bed with the men that we bring back?" I asked, with one man in particular on my mind, again.

"Linnea, you know why. We cannot allow a man that resides here to have that much power. Should you become pregnant then they would be eligible to sit upon the board of elders and that can never be."

I looked out at Beau, one of the commanders I'd brought back from the Middle East conflict, as he honed his sword wielding abilities. He'd been working hard and was now sweating enough for me to see it from here. The sun hit his tanned back and seemed to reflect off his skin. I wanted to know what it was like to run my fingers over his muscles, and to lick the sweat from his tight body. I had yet to know the touch of a man, and Beau made me feel like I was missing out on something spectacular.

My mother touched my hand and smiled. "Do not lie with any of these men. Go among the mortals and find a man that catches your fancy, bed him, and leave him. Never look back, because if you do you will see how fragile human lives are. Never get attached to only one male, just keep moving, trust me on this."

"I know, Mother, you're right."

She brought my hand to her lips. "Are you ready for this?"

"Am I ready to go in search of men who possess supernatural gifts? Yes. Am I ready to battle the evil that will try to beat me to them? Not really, but I don't have much of a choice do I? The battles are harder to win now, our men are skilled, but they can't compete against demons of the vampire caliber."

She shook her head. "No, they can't compete, I agree. It was a wise decision you made to go in search of gifted warriors. I still don't understand how you sense them, but it's good that you do. Where are you headed first?"

"First stop is Scotland, the Highlands to be exact. My dreams whispered to me and I checked into them. There are rumors about a man there that possesses enormous strength and the gift to read minds. He's also a warrior. I can't go wrong with that."

"Sounds promising but be careful. I still think you should take a team with you."

"I can't risk any more men. We've lost enough already. Besides, the dark ones will be watching for large groups moving through the portals. They won't be alarmed if it's just one person, and I need all the advantage I can get."

## Chapter 2

I made my way to the waterfall and stopped to take a quick look around. The grass here was always long, green, and full of life. It seemed to be in a constant state of vibrant flowers and beauty. The water that flowed from the two rivers on Valhalla picked here to fall off the edge and down into the waiting lake below. I suppose one could jump for fun into the water, but that wasn't the purpose of the falls. Their purpose was simple—to provide all the Valkyries access to earthly planes. They had been there since before my time and before that of any Valkyrie I knew. Someone put them here, perhaps Odin himself. The God whom it is told we followed here. I do not know. Our past is a mystery, even to us.

It was hard for me to leave Valhalla--such beauty, but I knew what I had to do. I'd been all over the world and had seen so many wonderful places, but none compared to Valhalla. Our heavenly oasis was perfect in every way. For the most part it closely resembled the tropics, but was unique all unto itself.

I lifted my heavy cloak and went to put it on. Two hands caught my wrist and I gasped as I spun around to strike whoever was there. I stopped just short of hitting when I saw Beau's light blue eyes staring at me.

"I'm sorry, Princess Linnea. I just thought that you could use some assistance."

I looked around frantically to make sure that no other Valkyries were near. The men were strictly forbidden to come to the waterfalls without an escort. It was feared that they would fall through the portal and travel to the future, or worse be lost in the time space continuum forever. The fears were justified—twenty-five years ago a soldier did just that, and had never been heard from again. I asked my mother about him, but she refused to comment. I ended up talking with the elders instead. They too, were tight lipped, but at least they confirmed that the rumor was true.

"Beau, I've told you before not to call me that."

"Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but you are a princess, aren't you?"

"Yes, but not that, I mean Linnea, it's my mother's name, I'm not sure why she gave it to me too. Call me whatever you want, just not that." I hated that my mother had named me after herself. This was odd even by our standards. I'd begged to be called something else, something unique, but she'd refused. I preferred anything to being called by the same name as my mother. The crazy female warrior who'd turned down the opportunity to be queen, only to sit alone in her house and not leave Valhalla again.

I looked at Beau and narrowed my gaze. "Why'd you follow me? You know the rules. If they see you here...."

His hand slid onto my shoulder and silenced me. I closed my eyes and allowed him to rub my shoulders gently. It felt so good that I couldn't help but to turn my neck and relax my body. Beau moved his large frame closer to me and brought his lips to my ear. "How is it that a creature as beautiful as you has never known the touch of a man before?" He picked up a handful of my long black hair and brought it to his face, inhaling

deeply and tipping his head back. "Oh, Lin ... you make me crazy with need."

I pulled back slowly. "I've told you before, Beau, I'm different than the other Valkyries, I can't be with just anyone, I could hurt them—you." It was true. My magic exceeded that of the others by leaps and bounds. There was no telling how it would manifest itself during intercourse.

Beau let out a small laugh. "I don't doubt that for a minute. I watched you flip a tank by just holding your hand out, and I know about you being different. All of Valhalla knows that you possess magic that the others don't. I don't care about that, I care about you."

"You hardly know me." That was a lie and I knew it. Beau and I had spent many a night talking in the woods. I knew all about his time and about the problems that plagued mankind in his generation. I also knew all about Beau. He had one sister, who I helped him check in on from time to time, and was moving up fast in his career. He was a fierce fighter, a born leader, but I'd been allowed to see his softer side—the side that he kept hidden from all. It was the one that could say things that would make my heart tight with the anticipation of seeing him again.

"I've been on enough missions with you to have a pretty good idea of who you are. You've got a big heart and want to save the world without hurting anyone in the process. You listen to me go on and on, and you never look bored, even though I know you have to be. You've helped me see my family when I had a hard time getting over being separated from them, even though it broke every rule Valhalla has. You hate the fact that you're special and most of all, you hate being compared to your mother."

Okay, so maybe Beau really did know me. I took another step back. He closed the distance between us and brought his mouth down to mine. His lips grazed mine and I felt my insides tugging at me to go further. I fought the urge that had plagued me since the moment I laid eyes on him and pulled away.

"I'm not a bad guy, you know."

I looked up into his warm face and smiled. "I never said you were. Go, quickly, before you're seen."

"Linnea, you shouldn't be going out on this mission on your own. I heard one of the elders talking about it and it's something they shouldn't be sending you out by yourself to do, and they know it!"

I was shocked by the news that Beau had overheard one of the elder's conversations. Normally, these took place in private chambers and far from the ears of any of the men. I wondered what he'd been up to. He touched my cheek and smiled.

"Hey, you don't get to be part of the U.S. Special Forces and not pick up a thing or two," he said, winking at me.

I let out my breath. Beau was one of only a handful of men that had been recruited in the last ten years of present time. Normally, we stuck to the older, bigger battles. I'd been the one to make the call to go to the Middle East, and so far, Beau had turned out to be a wise choice. He had little in the way of knowledge of medieval weaponry, but he was just what we needed when it came to firearms and ghost operations. He'd also become one of the boldest men we had, and that was not a good thing in the eyes of the elders.

"I wish that I could take you with me Beau, but I can't risk you. The forces that are searching for these men are powerful and they'll stop at nothing to get them. I told you before that it's like the stories of Merlin that you liked so much as a child. They possess those gifts and so much more, I can't protect you from their magic. I'm not even sure that I can protect myself from it. Vampires, werewolves, ghouls, and demons aren't what I want to go up against."

"That's exactly why I should go with you. I'm not saying that you can't handle yourself, but it'd be good for you to go in with some backup," he said, sliding his fingers around to the back of my neck as he moved his face down towards mine. He had a way of making my body feel strange, and that wasn't going to keep him alive on Valhalla. No, if I took him and did what I dreamt about, then he would be sentenced to death, and I would not allow that to happen. I turned my head and he let out a sigh.

"Beau, I can't take you. That's all there is to it, I'm sorry."

He pulled my neck towards him harder than I would have expected. "Beau," I said. His lips came at mine and I had to put my hands on his chest to prevent us from locking lips.

"Why do you keep pushing me away? Don't you find me attractive?"

If he only knew how hard it was for me to say no to him then he wouldn't even bother asking that question. Of course I found him attractive, I didn't know of a woman who wouldn't, but I couldn't act on my



impulses. I wanted to tear his clothes off and take him right where we stood, but that wasn't a good idea, so I leaned up and settled for giving him a chaste kiss.

"Take care of you, and if it were allowed, I would take you on this mission," I said, as I turned and leapt over the edge of the waterfall. I heard him cry my name out, and then I heard nothing but the sound of the wind rushing past me. It pulled at my hair, and ripped at my clothes. It didn't hurt so much as it applied pressure. I'd made the trip through the portals so many times that I'd lost count. I was used to them and had mastered the art of directing myself to the proper time and place better than anyone else.

### Chapter 3

I rose slowly and wiped the mud from my skirt. Somewhere in the journey I'd lost my cloak. That wasn't normal for me, I never lost anything. The meeting with Beau had left me shaken and bit out of sorts. I was so focused on his cries for me that I didn't focus on maintaining my course and my clothing. I was lucky that I wasn't left in the buff.

I looked down at myself and knew that I wasn't dressed appropriately to be running around the Scottish Highlands. I hadn't changed from the normal Valkyrie clothing that I was accustomed to. My breasts were covered by what would in modern day be seen as a tight t-shirt and I was wearing a short skirt. My navel showed and almost all of my legs. This attire would most definitely be viewed as sinful now. If they did not label me a whore, they'd brand me a witch.

I moved behind a large rock and ducked down to survey my area. This didn't look anything like the Inverness burgh that I'd studied before heading out. Not that you could tell a huge difference between burghs during this time period, but no, this hardly looked like Inverness. I certainly hadn't hit my mark, and that scared me. Beau and I were going to have a serious talk when I returned to Valhalla.

I was about to stand up when I heard voices approaching. I ducked back down and listened. I heard one man mumbling about the English and it didn't sound pleasant. I knew that the Scots' opinions of the English during this time period weren't high, but if I didn't know better, I would have thought the English were the devil if I listened to this much longer.

Another voice interjected. It was deeper than the first. It stirred things within me that only Beau had been able to move before. I swallowed the lump that formed in my throat and listened to him to go on.

"Cian, you canna be series about wantin' to run off and support Charles when you've got the wee ones to provide for now. Their mum canna be carin' for 'em herself now, can she?"

My right foot slid in the mud and I did my best to rebalance myself. I failed miserably and ended up sliding right out from behind the rock and landing flat on my back in the mud. It squished up and all around me.

"Who's there?" Another voice called out.

I lay still and hoped that the cover of darkness would protect me. When a head of fire engine red hair appeared above me, I knew that night had done little to help me out. I looked up at the man's wide blue eyes and smiled. His crooked nose told me that he'd had it broken on more than one occasion in his life. His jaw dropped open when he saw me.

"Kerr, come and see what I've found, lurkin' in the mud. She's wearin' nothin' but her drawers," he said in English, or at least I thought it was English. It was so muddled with his accent that I couldn't make out half of what he said.

I sat up, but the man put his hand on my shoulder. "No, lass I think you'd better be stayin' put till we know more about you. We'll not be havin' any sleeveens' runnin' round here." I'd heard plenty of Scottish accents during my work as a Valkyrie, but none were as thick as his.

"Cian, what are you goin' about?" I heard the sexy deep voice that had made my belly tickle say. Another head of red hair appeared above me, but this one was long, straight, and three shades darker than Cian's. The man moved his hair out of his royal blue eyes and it was my turn to look surprised. My insides twisted and I felt my pulse speed up, and thought for sure that I'd become the first Valkyrie ever to die of a heart attack.

I'd never been this attracted to a man before in my life, and Valhalla overflowed with hunks. Not even Beau had made me feel this alive. I traced the edges of the red-headed hunk's jaw with my eyes and took in every detail of his face. He was flawless, and seemed like he'd been left behind by the Vikings. Almost as though they'd stopped by long enough to leave a warrior of their caliber behind, but I knew better. He was a Scot, and he was surprised to see me.

He spoke to me again, but I was too fixated on his mouth to hear what he'd said. I wondered if his lips were as soft as they looked. I wanted to run my fingers over his neck and down his back, so I did. I touched his face and his eyes widened.

"What the...?" he asked, shocked.

"It's a lady, I found her lyin' here, Kerr. What should we do with her? Kerr, yer scarlet, ya' don't fancy her do you?"

Kerr's ears reddened more and he put his hand up and touched mine. His hand was rough, but it felt wonderful. I didn't want him to take it away. His eyes fluttered closed, and Cian grabbed his arm. "Don't go touchin' her, what if she's a faerie?"

Kerr smiled and our eyes met. "Then I suppose it'd be good to have one on our side, don't ya' think, brother?"

"Aye, Kerr, yer right."

I took Kerr's hand and let him help me to my feet. My mother would be appalled that I let a man do something like this for me. She'd always taught me to stand on my own two feet, but right now they were covered in mud, and so was my backside.

"What'd be yer name, lass?" Cian asked.

I debated on telling them that I was a Valkyrie sent to look for Bhreac Laochailan. I didn't want to scare them. They already suspected that I was faerie. I thought about it for a moment and watched as Kerr's eyebrows rose slightly. He looked me up and down one more time before he took off a green wrap he wore and handed it to me. "Here, you'll freeze to death in just that. Cover up or you'll catch the fever."

I nodded and accepted Kerr's offer. He was right. I would freeze without my cloak. I went to wrap it around myself and was hit with a vision. I

staggered forward and grabbed Kerr's arm to steady myself. My head swam with the vision of what was to come. The elders had labeled me a visionary and here now, was proof that my powers were growing stronger.

I saw Cian and Kerr fighting for their lives against a group of men dressed in red. I watched as a killing blow was delivered to Cian. Kerr ran to his side, and was struck down from behind. I sucked in a large breath of fresh air and the vision receded.

I'd had them since birth. Some Valkyrie elders had once possessed the gift of foresight, but had lost it with age. Mine seemed to be growing stronger the older I got.

I rubbed my eyes in an attempt at wiping away the slight headache that I was always left with and looked up to see Cian staring at me like I was a leper, and Kerr with a serious look on his face. He patted my hand lightly and moved in closer. "State yer business woman, and quickly."

I looked at him and nodded. "I seek Bhreac Laochailan of the MacLachlainn clan."

Cian started to say something, but Kerr put his hand up and stopped him. From the size difference, I'd bet that Kerr could break Cian in an instant, and apparently Cian knew that too, because he shut-up. "What is it that you want to see our cousin for?" Kerr asked.

Cian tried to say something else, and this time Kerr shot him a nasty look. Cian nodded. "Aye, what business do ya' got with Bhreac?"

I looked down the darkened dirt road and back at the two men before me. I wasn't sure how much leeway my vision had given me. The group of men dressed in red could be arriving any minute or not for days. I never really did get a set timeline—though, that would have been most appreciated. The events in my visions were always open to change if I intervened, and that's what I planned on doing. I wouldn't let these two die for helping me. I glanced up to find Kerr watching me closely—suspicion covered his face. He knew something was different about me, I could tell.

"Do you think we could discuss this somewhere else?" I asked, nervously watching the road for signs of red coats.

Kerr nodded and glanced down the road. No sooner did he agree to head out with me than I saw the approaching horses. It wasn't until I saw the red coats approaching that I got concerned. The men on horseback spotted us and their pace quickened. Kerr looked at me and tipped his head down.

"Go and hide, if they see ya runnin' 'bout in that outfit they'll think yer a...." He stopped just short of saying whore. I knew what men in this time period did with women they assumed to be whores, and it wasn't kind. As much as I really did want to avoid being mistaken as a prostitute, I wouldn't leave Cian and Kerr to suffer their fate alone. I stood my ground and folded my arms over my chest.

Kerr moved closer to me. His six foot five frame loomed over my five foot seven self. I backed up, but then stopped. "I'm not going to hide."

He reached around me and picked me up. I never saw that one coming. I expected him to argue with me, not to simply resort to moving me himself. I put my hands on his shoulders and pushed at him to put me down. He moved me back behind the same rock I'd landed behind and set me down in the mud.

"Stay here," he commanded and turned to walk back out by the road. I grabbed his arm and was impressed by the size of it. He was not only tall, but strong, that was clear.

"I'm not going to hide. You two need me with you, or you'll...." I stopped just short of saying die.

Kerr looked at me and bit on his lower lip. "I've never raised my hand to a woman before, but if you don't stay put, I'll knock ya across yer arse, if need be."

I argued with him, but was gripped by another vision. This one came so hard and fast that it made me fall over. I held my head tight and cried out from the pain. Kerr grabbed my arms and held me steady.

In my vision I saw the faces of the men in the red coats. I had assumed that they would be the British, but no, they weren't even human. I'd seen them before, many times before, they were demons—vampires to be exact. Vampires were evil's favorite warriors. They were attractive, smart, and deadly. I must have landed in the right place, because they were here for Bhreac too. If they beat me to him they'd kill him or recruit him. It didn't matter to them, they'd just as soon take him dead than to

risk our side having him. I wouldn't let that happen. Good would win here. I would see to that, or die trying.

I opened my eyes to find Kerr holding me close. My head was buried into his massive chest. I took in the fresh, manly scent of him, and was happy that I was already on the ground. I would have fainted if I wasn't.

I heard the sound of voices near us, lifted my head, and locked eyes with Kerr. I started to say something, but his mouth came down on mine hard. I didn't fight him as I had Beau. Kerr's kiss was chaste at first. It stopped being that way when I thrust my tongue into his mouth. I feared that he might pull away, but his body stiffened and his arms wrapped around me tighter. His warm tongue found mine and I suddenly forgot how to breathe.

"You there, tell me where Bhreac Laochailan can be found. Who's that with you?" The accent was common British, but I knew that what lay beneath was anything but common.

Cian answered first. "No, we don't know any Bhreac, are you sure yer lookin' round the right parts?"

"Do not lie to me, little man. I will not hesitate to kill you. I might even enjoy it." I heard the rest of the group laugh, and I shuddered. "You there, in the back, who is that with you?"

Kerr stood up. I grabbed him to me and whispered in his ear. "They can sense a lie. They are not what they appear to be. They are not human." He nodded at me and started to speak. I pulled him to me and kissed him again, this time with so much passion that he fell forward a bit. My intentions weren't just to shut him up—they were to feel his lips on mine one more time before we parted ways. When he pulled back, I let out a sultry laugh.

"How much you willin' to offer for a night of fun?" I called out, trying my best to imitate Kerr's accent. I'd spend my entire life studying cultures and time periods. I was equipped to deal with almost anything. Anything, that was, except a group of twenty vampires. Kerr's eyes widened and I put my finger to his lips warning him to remain silent.

"We have no need for a whore—we are looking for a man."

I let out another laugh. "If that's what you fancy then by all means...."

"Tell your whore to mind her place," he said in a stern voice. "We seek Bhreac Laochailan."

Kerr stood up slowly and looked over at the men on horseback. I watched as he shifted his tartan a bit. His cheeks were now flushed, both from the cold, and no doubt the rush of the kiss. I unfastened the green wrap he'd let me borrow and pulled my top over my head. Kerr looked at me and his eyes widened to the point that they looked like they'd pop from his head. I stood up from behind the rock and covered my breasts with my arm. "I've no clue where Bhreac Laochailan is. I suspect he's in town. I'll be lookin' for him myself soon, he owes me a debt, got a wee one at home that needs takin' care of. Leavin' me to lie on my back to put food on the table, whilst he runs about drinkin' and carryin' on, has put him on my list, if ya know what I mean." I stretched the truth to the breaking point, okay past the breaking point, but I had an advantage. I knew to believe in my lie.

I focused on the man on horse closest to us. He seemed to be the leader. His dark brown hair was pulled into a ponytail at the base of his neck. His jaw was thin, and his face was very narrow. I'd never been into men who had fine features before and he was no exception. His black eyes locked on me and I fought the urge to shudder. I'd seen the demon that hid under the mask of a man he wore now. I knew that upon demand the demon could surface and then we'd all be in danger.

"Who shall I tell 'em is lookin' for him then?" I asked.

The man's lips curved into a smile. "Corbin, tell him to be on the lookout for Captain Corbin because I will find him. We have some business to attend to with him." His eyes skimmed over me. "And, after I find him I'll come back for you. You look like you would be good at least for a little while."

"It'll cost ya."

He nodded at me and turned to his men. "No, it will cost you—dearly ... I look forward to seeing you again." He put his hand in the air. "Let's go then."

Kerr handed me my shirt and pulled the wrap back up to cover me, as we watched the group of guards ride off down the road. "Cian, go to the house and warn everyone. Have them go to the MacDougal's until I send word that it's okay."

Cian nodded. I looked at Kerr. "What about Bhreac? If they find him they'll kill him or worse ... I've got to stop them or find him. That's what I came for. His life is in my hands now ... I must find him, and quickly."

Kerr put his hand on my shoulder. "I think that Bhreac will be fine, let's get you somewhere safe, and warm." He put his hand out to me and helped me over the slick patch of mud. I eased myself down and nearly fell, but Kerr's strong hands held me tight. I nodded at him and moved to let go of his hand. He held mine for a moment and let his eyes flutter closed. I was spellbound and just stood there trying to commit to memory every line of his face. A tiny white scar on his chin caught my attention. It was perfect. He was perfect. He squeezed my hand tighter and I could have sworn that I felt him caress it with his fingers before he quickly let it go, and opened his eyes.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

Kerr's mouth drew up in a partial smile. It was one of those smiles that could warm you straight to your toes. I found myself returning it, and moving closer to him as we continued walking. I listened as he hummed several songs softly. His voice was strong and I could tell that he could sing. He stopped after a few and I walked quietly in the incredibly awkward silence that followed.

"You haven't once asked me about my attire," I said, curious as to why he wouldn't want to know more about me.

Kerr didn't look at me. He kept his eyes straight ahead. "No, I suppose I haven't asked. I guess you'll tell me all I need to know when the time's right."

It was a very laid back approach to the ordeal that we were in. I had to admire his strength. He didn't seem fazed by much, and I liked that. "Well, I think I'll wait on the story of my life, how about you, what's your story, Kerr?"

Kerr looked at me briefly. "Not much to tell. I'm the son of a farmer, Cian's my only brother, our mother passed away a year ago, she had the fever, and now I just help out with Cian and his family. He's got two lads and a wee lass now, and a good wife."

"You don't have a family?" I didn't mean for it to come out the way it did, but I couldn't take it back now.



He let out a small laugh. "No, I've no family of my own. I will soon. I'm sure of that," he said, looking at me out of the corner of his eyes. I suddenly felt like a true outsider. I scrambled to make conversation to avoid the awkward silence.

"So, you've found that special girl then? The one that makes your heart stop when she's near." I was reaching, but anything was better than walking in complete silence. I didn't really want to hear about his precious little Scottish girl who made his heart go pitter-patter, but I didn't want to walk in silence any longer either.

"Aye, I have."

I suddenly found myself hoping for him to elaborate a little bit more, but he didn't. I was crazy, I know, but I needed to hear what his ideal woman was, because I already knew that he was my ideal man, or darn close to it. I tried to think of what else I'd want in a mate, and could only come up with magic. If Kerr had possessed that, then he would have been perfect. He turned and looked at me. "Now, I'll ask you a question, seems only fair. What about you? Do you have a family?"

I let out a laugh, but it was anything but small. "No, I don't have time for a family. I don't even have any prospects for a husband, well, one ... but the elders would never allow ... in my line of work it's hard to settle down and..." I put my hand up and covered my mouth. Women in his day didn't work, and they most certainly married as soon as they could. I was making foolish slip-ups that could jeopardize the natural course of events. I was sent to find Bhreac and no one else. I was not to alter anyone else's views, or lives. If a vision came, then I knew that it was okay to step in, but I wasn't to go above that.

"I find it hard to believe that no man's caught yer fancy."

I glanced over at Kerr and shook my head slightly. "It's complicated."

"Indeed."

## Chapter 4

"Are you content?" Kerr asked as he tried to get comfortable in the corner of the loft.

He had brought up hay for me and laid an old blanket he found over it. He even insisted on me keeping his wrap for the night. I lay under the green cloth that smelled of him and watched him trying to sleep sitting up. My belly was full of the bread he'd gotten us, and I was a little light headed from the wine. I watched him, and wanted to be closer to him, but he kept a safe distance. I don't think that he trusted me. Sure, I hadn't been completely honest with him, but my intentions were good.

Kerr looked so uncomfortable as he slept in the corner. It broke my heart to see him that way. Occasionally, his head would fall forward and his eyes would open quickly. I watched him draw one of his legs up. My eyes scanned his upper thigh and I felt my insides get jittery when I saw that the myths about what men wore, or didn't wear, under their kilts was true. Kerr's head fell forward again and he kicked awake.

I sat up. "This is silly, come and lay with me."

He looked like I'd just announced that I was the devil come to strike him down. "I'd never disrespect ya so," he said, quickly.

"I wouldn't find it disrespectful at all if you stayed warm, and didn't die of hypothermia." I looked into his blue eyes and saw that he wasn't buying it, so I went even further. "And, I would sleep better knowing you were here to protect me." I almost choked on the words as they came out—they were so very unlike me. That did it. Kerr stood up and came over to me. He placed his sword next to him on the floor and lay with his back to me. I covered him with his wrap, smiled, and closed my eyes. Sleep came quickly.

I knew that I teetered on the edge of being in a deep sleep, and that made me nervous, whenever that happened that usually meant that I was about to have another nightmare, or worse yet, a vision. Sure enough, I saw the face of Corbin, the British vampire guard. His black eyes seemed to twirl with specks of orange and gold. I watched in horror as his fangs showed and his face twisted into the demon that hid beneath the surface. Blood ran from his mouth as he approached me. I tried to run, but found that I was unable to move. I put my hands out to keep him at bay, but he pushed

right past them. He went straight for my neck and sank his teeth deep into it. Hot shearing pain shot through my upper body. I tried to pry him off, but I couldn't budge him. I heard his thoughts in my head. He was going to turn me, he'd figured out who I really was and had orders to bring me over as well. I cried out and felt even more pressure on my shoulders.

"Lass, lass, wake up, yer dreamin'."

I woke to find Kerr leaning over me, holding my shoulders. I grabbed my neck and found that it was whole. I touched Kerr's hand and he tried to pull away. "Thank you."

"There's no need to thank me, I wouldna wanna have a dream like that one either," he said, his voice shaky.

I tried to lie back down, but a shiver ran through me and I was unable to get warm again. I knew that it was from the nightmare and the visions. I'd seen so much violence in my life that I had problems sleeping through the night. I wanted to be back on Valhalla right now instead of single-handedly fighting evil. Every bit of me wanted to go and open a portal back to my home, but I couldn't leave Bhreac Laochailan to Corbin and his men.

Kerr looked down at me. "You're still cold. Here," he said, moving his body down onto mine. It was my turn to stiffen up. "I don't mean to make you uncomfortable, I just meant to warm you, that's all, lass." And warm me he did. He was easily two hundred pounds of muscle and every bit of his body was hot. I shifted a little to try and hide the fact that my nipples were hardening under the weight of his body, and found that they weren't the only things hard. My leg brushed past his lower regions and I sucked in a breath as I felt the size of it.

I wanted to touch Kerr. I wanted to run my fingers over his back and know the feel of his touch. I'd never given myself to anyone before, not once in my twenty-four years. I'd fallen for a few men in my life, but all were forbidden for me because they were Valhalla warriors. Maybe my mother was right—maybe I should take a mortal lover and never look back. Kerr's red hair fell into my face. I took a deep breath in and let the earthy smell of him linger a moment. I wanted to make a move, I wanted Kerr to be my first, but I was afraid that he already thought me a whore by my dress and behavior today. For some odd reason, it mattered what Kerr thought of me.

He moved his head and kissed my cheek. I turned my face and let my lips sit on the entrance to his ear. "I want you to take me." As I whispered it, I realized how ridiculous I sounded. My hand moved to his crotch to help make my point.

He pulled his head back and looked down at me. "I'll not take you, but I will make love to you. I've wanted to since the moment I found you lying in the mud." He gave me a wink. "Granted it wasna the most flatterin' of poses, but I've wanted you all the same."

He brought his lips to mine and I felt his tongue push into my mouth. I welcomed it and moved my hands into his long red hair. His body pushed against mine, and his hips foretold the glory that awaited me. I moved my hands down and pulled his white shirt free from his tartan. I pulled it up and ran my fingers over his tight abs in the process. His knee parted my legs and I opened willingly to him.

Kerr pulled his lips away slowly. "I want to be gentle with you, I do. I know that it's yer first time, but I donna think I can be."

I bit at his lower lip and pulled him back to me. "Take me."

I felt his hand move my skirt up and push my panties aside. He didn't bother undressing, he didn't have to. He lifted his kilt up high and before I knew it, the head of his cock was pressed against my opening.

"Are you sure that you want me?" Kerr asked. I could feel the strain in his upper arms to keep his body up. He wanted to be in me and he asked one last time to make sure that I wanted it too. I pushed my hips up and at him. I felt the length of him push into my tight entrance. I cried out and he stopped in mid-stroke. I grabbed the back of his hair and pulled his face to me.

"Did I hurt you?"

I wasn't sure how to answer that, because it did hurt, but it also felt wonderful. I didn't want him to stop, I wanted him to grind my body into the floor and use me until he could use me no more. A smile formed on his face and he bent his head down to me. He pushed his cock into me further and stopped briefly when he encountered some resistance, then continued on. By the time he was fully sheathed in me, I cried out for him to be rougher. He answered my cries and his hips thrust up and down with such a force that I was sure that we'd go right through the loft floor.

I clawed at his neck and back, and fought hard not to cry out from the mix of pain and pleasure. He was so large, and I wondered if he'd been a wise choice for my first time. His rhythm slowed, and he steadied his pace. Our lips locked again and his tongue matched his groin in dodging in and out. My body seemed to dampen more and more, allowing me to take all of him without pain.

He kept one arm down for support and moved his other hand to my breast. He kneaded it in his hand and tried to cup it, but even his large hands couldn't contain all of me. My ample breasts were odd blessings to have. Most Valkyrie's had normal sized chests, but mine was large. I was also shorter than the rest of them, and at least twenty pounds heavier. I wasn't fat. They were just candidates for swimsuit competitions.

Kerr pulled his lips away from my mouth and went for my nipple. The minute his warm lips touched it I felt an overwhelming force building inside me. He sucked on it and I wrapped my legs around his waist tighter. I grabbed at his backside and he brought the full force of his body into me, and I cried out for more.

Each move Kerr made sent me over the edge with animal noises and grunts. I could feel my magic building and I was scared that I'd end up releasing it on him. He'd never understand what I was, or where I was from. He'd think I was a witch or more than likely, a faerie. The thought of him being scared of me made tears come to my eyes. Kerr pulled back from me and I assumed he was going to think that he was hurting me again. He moved his lips to mine and smiled. "Yer my Valkyrie, Linnea. Use what magic you must. I'll never fear you."

My orgasm swept through me at the same time the shock of what he'd just said to me hit. I dug my nails into his back and felt his pelvis grind hard into mine right before he filled me with his hot seed. His head dropped down onto my shoulder, and his body stayed planted deep within mine. I lay there stroking his hair wondering about what he'd said when it hit me.

"You're Bhreac Laochailan, aren't you?"

He kissed my ear and let out a small laugh. "Aye, I'm Bhreac Kerr Laochailan of the MacLachlainn clan, at yer service my lady."

I should have jumped to my feet and been outraged that he'd misled me, but I didn't. I stayed there under him and continued to run my hands through his silky red hair. "You have the gift to read minds, don't you?"

"Aye, if you mean I can see what yer thinkin' in my head, then aye, I guess I do. I've had it since I was a wee lad. Folks round here donna talk about it. They know better. I've got some other oddities about me too, canna really explain 'em."

I thought about what I'd just done. I'd broken the biggest rule the elders had. I'd had sex with a potential, but I couldn't not take Kerr back for fear of what they'd say. Corbin's band of demons was looking for him. They would kill him or turn him into a vampire when they found him. I couldn't let that happen to him, because I'd fallen for him.

"Well, it's good to hear you say that you've fallen for me too, because I'm not sure that yer goin' to be able to get rid of me now. I knew when I saw you that you were the one for me. I told you that I'd be having a family soon, didn't I. Now, I've got to do right by you, and make you my wife. I'll not let go— now we can...."

I pulled on his hair. His head lifted and his blue eyes locked on me. "Kerr, I can't marry you, I...."

"I donna do this with just anyone, Valkyrie, and I won't stand by while you take another man to yer bed. When I took you, it was forever, and I thought it'd be the same fer you." As he spoke I felt his cock growing hard within me. I felt him flexing and then I felt the full length of his erection in me once more. "I want to take you and make love to you again, and I want yer word that yer mine now, Valkyrie. I've given you a gift, and soon you will return it to me. I'm a good man. I can provide a good life for you. I'm strong, and will make you a good husband. I'll never hurt you and I...."

Kerr's words were words I'd longed to hear and as I brought my lips to his, I wondered how I would tell him that soon he'd have to leave his clan, his friends, and family and return with me. Kerr moved his body and began pumping his thick cock into me again and I forgot my concerns and concentrated only on him.

I finished putting my clothes on quietly and glanced down at Kerr. His long red hair was spread out around him. He looked like an archangel. I'd never seen anything as perfect as him before. I resisted the urge to touch him. He hadn't been asleep long. He'd stayed up most of the night worried about me, and he was the one Corbin was after.

I peeked out the slightly open shutter and saw that the morning sun was out. As long as the sun was up, we were safe from Corbin and his men. Vampires couldn't hunt during the day and that was the only advantage I had going for me right now. I needed to try and prep another portal, and soon, if I was going to get Kerr out undetected.

I climbed down the ladder carefully, still a little sore from my night with Kerr. I crossed the barn and headed out the door. I had seen a small river running parallel to us on our way in, and wanted desperately to get cleaned up. I wasn't sure whose barn we were staying in, and there were no signs of a home near, let alone people.

I took a deep breath in and started towards the water. I bent down onto the soft grass, and put my hand down into the water. It was cold. I brought some to my face and scrubbed the best I could. I heard a faint giggle and I looked up, expecting to find a child near me, but found no one.

Reaching my hand into the water again, I heard another giggle, this one closer than before. Looking up fast, I saw a young child standing in the center of the river. I went to him, but stopped when I realized that he wasn't in the water, so much as he was on the water. I looked up into his turquoise eyes and felt like in some strange way I looked at myself. He tipped his head to the side and his red hair fell forward, covering his eyes slightly.

"Màthair," he said softly.

I stood up slowly and looked harder at the boy who called me mother in Gaelic, his hair blew back and the water around him turned red. His body began to descend into the water. Red bubbles shot up and around him. His eyes never left mine, and he showed no signs of being frightened. I screamed out for him, and jumped into the icy cold river.

I pushed through the thick red water and realized that it was blood. I didn't panic. Instead, I reached for the small boy, trying to pull him free of this madness. My hand went right through him, and as quickly as he had appeared to me, he was gone. I kicked around and found that I could

no longer touch the bottom. I dove under, needing to make sure that the child didn't drown. My lungs grew tight as I fought the current and found the rocky bottom. I turned in circles, stirring up the sediment at the bottom, hoping beyond hopes that I would find the tiny child.

Something seized me around my waist and jerked me towards the surface. I broke through and took in a deep breath. I felt my body being pulled towards the shore, and I fought to go back under and look for the child.

"Stop, it's me," Kerr said, pulling me out of the water with him.

I grabbed his arms and pulled his upper body to me. My teeth chattered from the icy cold water and the wind. "Ker-rrr ... little boy ... in the water ... called me Màthair ... had my eyes, and," I looked up at him, "your hair, blood came up and then he was gone ... I tried to get him, but...."

Kerr scooped me up in his arms and started back towards the barn. I hit his chest as hard as I could, but he wouldn't put me down. "Please, the little boy, he drowned."

He carried me in and set me down gently on the floor. "No, Valkyrie, he did not drown. He was never really there."

He pulled my clothes off of me and then shed his own. He picked me up and I wrapped my body around his. I tried to get down when he approached the ladder, but he pulled me closer to him and climbed it with ease. He pressed my body down into the hay and lay on top of me. I closed my eyes and thought of the little boy standing on the river and how he'd disappeared when I tried to touch him. Kerr kissed me softly and I opened my eyes. His long hair looked brown when it was wet and he had tiny drops of water on his eyelashes still. I shivered slightly as I smiled up at him.

He rubbed my arms with his hands and looked a little concerned. "We need to get you warmed up, or else you'll catch the fever, and I don't want to lose you to sickness."

He was right. We would both end up sick like this. I hated to use my magic too much because it left me weak, and being weak around demons wasn't a good thing. Kerr kissed my cheek and put his ear next to mine. "We are safe until sunset, use what magic you must."



I was getting used to him being able to read my mind. I touched his cheek. "I need to open a portal and get you back to Valhalla with me. If I do this, then I won't be able to open it today, and one more night could cost you your life."

Kerr's mouth came down on mine and I felt how cold his lips were now. I knew that he'd be sick sooner than me and that if he wasn't on the grounds of Valhalla then he could die. I pulled him closer and let my magic rise up. It danced just under the surface of my skin, waiting for permission to be let out. Kerr pulled back from me slightly and ran his fingers over my shoulders.

"I can feel it," he said, smiling down at me.

I reached up into his damp hair and pulled his face close to me. "Make love to me, please."

He laughed slightly. "Aye, it would be my pleasure."

He pushed his cock into me fast, and it took my body a second to adjust to how cool his body was. I unleashed my magic and let it roll over Kerr's body too. His hair lifted up as warm air pushed all around us. Kerr's body moved in and out of mine and each stroke seemed to coincide with a blast of my magic.

I cried out as my channel tightened around him, milking him. My orgasm ripped through me, and left me breathless and burning as Kerr's body continued to press deep into mine. He let out a moan and I felt his hot seed soaking my womb.

I held him to me when he was done and listened to his heart beating fast. He laughed softly. "I do not think that you should do that too often when we're together, or I'll not be able to control myself, and it'll be short lived for you. I'll finish before you every time."

"You didn't finish before me, you finished with me," I said running my fingers down the backs of his arms. "Are you warm enough now?"

"Aye, and I'm tired again."

I kissed his cheek. "You're tired because you stayed up all night watching over me." My stomach growled slightly. I rolled my eyes and smiled.

Kerr got up and I pulled him back to me. "You need to eat."

The mention of food made my stomach twist into a knot. "No," I said shaking my head lightly. "My stomach is upset. I'm not sure what's wrong with it. Must be from all the excitement."

"Aye, must be," he said smiling wide.

Kerr ran his hand down to my stomach and touched it lightly. He left it there for a minute before moving it up and over my breast. I winced a little as pain shot through my nipple. Kerr's lips curved into a smile and he leaned down and kissed my nipple gently. "Too much excitement, aye, that's it."

"You need to get some rest."

He moved back down on me and laughed softly. "I'll get some rest in a minute. Right now I'd like to take you again." And, with that he pushed himself deep within me. "Yer mine now, Valkyrie, and you will be my wife."

## Chapter 6

I woke to find that it was dark out and that Kerr was nowhere to be found. I searched around the barn that we'd stayed in, but found no sign of him. I immediately feared the worst and started off in search of him. I knew that he was upset with me. Before we'd fallen asleep he'd asked me to be his wife again, and I had refused. It wasn't because I didn't want to, because I did want to say yes to him and spend the rest of my life by his side. But I wasn't a mortal woman, and there was no way the elders would ever allow a marriage between Kerr and I to exist.

I found my way to the edge of the river and decided that I would follow it back to the spot where the portal had opened. I was a little uneasy being close to the water again, after the incident with the little boy, but I needed to find Kerr before Corbin did. As a last resort I'd try to do a locating spell, but I didn't want the vampires in the area to sense my magic.

My stomach twisted in a knot and I felt like I was going to be sick everywhere. I had been queasy for the last day, and wasn't sure why. I needed a drink, but didn't really want to go any closer to the water than I had to. When my nostrils began to flare in an attempt at keeping the vomit down, I gave in and dropped to my knees. I bent down over the river's edge and cupped my hands in the cool running water. I brought the water to my mouth, and let it run down my throat.

Something large struck me in the back of the head and seized hold of my hair. My face broke the surface of the water first, followed close by my head. The icy water filled my lungs. I grabbed at the arm that held my head under and clawed at it. It refused to let go of me. It did yank me out of the water just when I thought I could take no more—hardly heroic.

I drew in a deep breath of air and coughed hard.

"Where is he, where?" My head was turned quickly and I found myself staring into Corbin's face. His black eyes tried to look through to my soul, but I kept it locked away from him. "Where is Bhreac? I know he's with you."

He didn't give me a chance to answer him. He dunked my head back into the river. It wasn't like I'd have told him anything anyway. He pulled me back up and yanked me to my feet. He bent my head back and let his fangs show. I think he expected me to faint or at the very least spill all the information on Kerr that I had. I didn't. I reached down and drew my dagger from my side and drove it hard into him. He laughed and let go of me. I pushed the soaking wet veil of black hair out of my eyes and glared at him.

"You don't really think that your little knife will hurt me, do you? I'm already dead." He let out an eerie laugh and locked eyes with me. "You are a stupid whore. I have no doubt that you will not understand this, but I am im-mor-tal." He sounded it out for me—just in case.

I spun around and caught his chin with the side of my foot, and sent him flying to the ground. Reaching down, I yanked my dagger out of his side. He let out a moan and tried to grab my leg. I brought my dagger out and across his face, watching as his cheek ripped open. He grabbed it and began to laugh. "I already told you wench, I'm immortal." He made a lunge for me and I jumped over his body faster than any human ever could. He spun around and looked at me.

Corbin lunged at me again. I sidestepped him just in time for one of his buddies to slam his body into me. I fell forward and rolled to avoid stabbing myself with my own dagger. I took the other guard with me, and on my third time rolling over him, I thrust my dagger deep into his chest and leapt off of him.

I turned to find Corbin standing there. He brought his hand out and caught me across the face. The impact of his hit sent me flying backwards. I hit the ground and went to roll away. I wasn't fast enough. Corbin appeared above me with his sword drawn. He drove it down and into the pit of my stomach. Words failed to come to me. I had trouble even getting the tiniest of noises out. He backed up and laughed.

"I will enjoy fucking you, even if you are dead. Maybe, I will bring you over too. It would be fun to have you around forever to torture."

I reached down and wrapped my hands around the sword. I concentrated on the cool metal and cried the word "abire"--out. The sword shook for a moment before moving up and out of my body of its own free will. I looked over at the vampire standing next to Corbin and I flicked my wrist in his general direction. The sword flew into the vamp's chest and pierced its heart. I sat up slowly and looked at Corbin. His eyes widened.

"What are you?"

"Im-mor-tal, and a Val-ky-rie" I said, slowly just to be sure he got my point.

I waited for him to attack me again. He didn't, instead he turned to his men and in an instant, they were fleeing. I knew that they'd be reporting back to whatever evildoer gave them their orders this week. I also knew that they'd be back with reinforcements soon. Now that they knew that our side had one here, they'd show no mercy.

I made my way to the rivers edge and tried to clean the wound in my stomach. It wouldn't kill me, but it would come close if infection set in. I needed to clean it and get somewhere safe to rest, or I'd pass out and be left to the elements. It wouldn't matter how immortal I was if I was eaten alive by wild animals or froze to death.

I did my best to clean it out, but the wound went all the way through me. Being immortal didn't give me any less pain than mortals—it only gave me a better chance of surviving injuries. Every step I took felt like someone jabbed me with metal prongs. I made it a mile or so before I

realized that I'd gone in the wrong direction. I fell down onto my knees and looked around at the darkened countryside. I could go no further, I had to rest. I did a silent prayer to the elders that I'd awaken whole and laid my head down onto the hard ground.

## Chapter 7

"You've got to quiet down now, William, you'll wake the dead with that voice."

I opened my eyes to the sound of a high-pitched female voice and wanted to beg to differ with her, she had a voice that could wake the dead, not William. I turned my head, expecting to see the river, and found myself staring into the face of a pudgy woman who didn't look much older than twenty. A head of unruly blonde curls framed her round face. She looked down and saw me looking at her and let out a shriek. "She's alive! Quick, William, go get your father, and uncle Kerr."

She moved closer to me and reached out for my hand. "There now, don't ya' go worryin' none, I'm Darcy, yer sister-in-law."

The confusion must have shown on my face because Darcy smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "Well, not officially yet, but I will be. I never thought Kerr would take a wife, he was always goin' on about some woman who'd fall from the sky, Val-halia—said she was the one meant to be his wife, and no other. He's been goin' on about that since he was a young lad. I don't think ye fell from the sky, but I'm happy all the same that Kerr's found someone."

My eyes widened. Kerr had known that I'd come, and he'd known how, and from where? It was glaringly apparent that reading minds wasn't the only supernatural gift that he possessed. The door to the room opened and I saw Kerr's head of red hair come rushing in. His blue eyes fixed on me and he ran to my side. Darcy stepped out of his way and barked orders at everyone in the house to give us some privacy.

Kerr grabbed my hand and dropped to his knees. He put his head down on my shoulder and began to cry. I reached up and stroked his cheek. He turned his face so that I wouldn't see his tears.

"It's okay, I'm okay," I panted.

He regained his composure and looked at me. His blue eyes looked even more vibrant now that his eyes were red from crying. "I did not mean to look like less than a man in front of ye, I just thought that ... I wasn't sure ye'd make it. What in hell happened to ye? I left ye to say my good-byes to Cian and Darcy, and when I returned I found ye bleedin' to death on the ground, miles from where I'd left ye." He looked like he was on the verge of losing it again. I hated to see a man as strong as Kerr in this much pain. I kissed his forehead lightly.

"Kerr, I'm immortal. It takes a hell of a lot more to kill me than just running a sword through my gut."

His head popped up. "Who ran a sword through you?"

"I'm fine Kerr, I promise." I reached down and lifted the fabric of a white night gown that I now wore and sat up to look at my stomach. A large pink scar covered my lower abdomen. I wasn't worried about it—it would be gone in a week, tops. I reached for Kerr's hand and ran his fingers over it. "See, I'm alive, this couldn't kill me."

"Aye, I see that, I don't really believe it, but I see, but Valkyrie, it did manage to kill someone else."

"Kerr...."

He interrupted me. "The sword killed the child you were carryin', my child, our child." I looked down at my stomach and thought about what he'd said to me after we had first made love. He'd said that he'd given me a gift and I'd return it to him soon. A baby, he knew that his seed had been planted in me and that he'd be a father soon. I brought my hand to my mouth and fought back the vomit that threatened to surface. Kerr moved up and onto the bed with me. He wrapped his large arms around me and held me tight as I took my turn crying. I touched him softly.

"Oh God, the boy by the river, he called me mother, and the blood came up ... it was a sign, of what was to come."

"Aye," Kerr said.

"I didn't know that I carried a child, our child. I would have never fought back, I would have just run."

Kerr's body tightened and pulled me closer to him. "Tell me who did this to you, to us."

I instantly blocked my mind of any thoughts of how I'd come to be impaled by Corbin's sword. I could feel the hate burning through Kerr's veins and I knew that he'd stop at nothing to have revenge. I also knew that these weren't the types of things that he needed to be chasing down. "Don't protect him, Valkyrie."

"I'm not protecting him, Kerr, I'm protecting you."

He pulled away, but I held tight to him. "Don't go, please don't leave me."

Kerr's leg moved over mine, and left my body fully engulfed by his own and I loved it. "I will kill the person who did this, mark my words, Valkyrie." I knew that he would most likely die trying and I couldn't let that happen.

"Kerr, leave with me tonight ... come back to Valhalla with me."

"Not until whoever has done this to you pays."

I couldn't let anything happen to him. I was desperate because I knew that I couldn't live without him. "Kerr, come with me and I'll marry you." I shocked even myself with that one.

He moved his head back and looked into my eyes. "Tell me again, I want to see into yer jeweled eyes and know that yer serious, Valkyrie." Each time he called me this, it sounded more and more like Valerie. I smiled and looked at him. "Tell me, Valkyrie, tell me that you love me and mean it."

I didn't have to try to believe in loving him, I did. Somehow, I'd fallen for him the moment I'd seen him. "Bhreac Kerr Laochailan, of the clan MacLachlainn, I love you and I'll marry you."

Kerr's lips met mine and I found myself lost in a sea of his warmth. He took great care not to bump my stomach. I told him I was fine, but he still refused to on the grounds that he didn't want to cause me any more pain. I moved my body over his and laid on top of him. I planted kisses all

along his jaw and worked my way down to where his shirt started. His hands inched my nightgown up slowly. His fingers moved to my upper thighs, and he stopped.

"I can't, Valkyrie, I don't want to cause you any pain. It's not been but two days since you lost the...." He didn't finish the sentence. He didn't have to. I knew that the child was gone, and I also knew that my immortal body had repaired within minutes of losing the baby. I didn't want to think of that now, I couldn't.

I moved my hands down his body and shifted my weight to lift his kilt. I looked down and found his cock hard and ready for me. His mouth told me no, but by the looks of it, his cock said yes. I slid my body down and over his thick shaft, slowly at first, unsure if it really would cause me any pain, and then when I felt only the pleasure of having Kerr deep within me I continued. I rode his body until we were sweat soaked and screaming out for one another as our bodies climaxed together.

I collapsed on his chest and let him hold me in his arms. I thought he'd fall asleep. Instead, he moved my body to his side and began spooning me. His hand moved down and over the already fading scar. He caressed it and moved his hand up to cup my breast. He tweaked my nipple lightly as he whispered in my ear. "I will be sharing these soon I see."

I turned my face to meet his. "What?"

"The lil' one will be wantin' these and I'll have to share 'em."

"But, you said that...."

He kissed my lips. "Yer body has accepted my seed again. We are a perfect match, Valkyrie."

## Chapter 8

I dismounted the horse with Kerr trying to help me the entire way down and started over to sit down on a large rock. We'd been traveling for days



and I was tired. I was tired all the time as of late. It wasn't safe to try and take Kerr through the portal near his home, the one I'd come through. Corbin and his men knew that I wasn't human now and they'd been scouring the area looking for me. I'd been forced to use a back up portal that was in Inverness. It was really the one I first thought I'd come through, but since Kerr wasn't near there, I got dropped off closer to him. The Inverness portal was a big one and I'd made several trips through it already. The battle of Culloden in 1746 was always good for new recruits. I looked into Kerr's face, he'd be there within a year if he stayed here, and he would most likely perish. His clan was supporters of the rising and that battle ended poorly for them.

I reached down and touched my stomach. I shuddered to think of anything happening to Kerr. He saw me and ran to my side. "Ye alright?"

"Stop worrying. I'm fine, but you're driving me nuts with the constant obsessing. I'm fine."

"I'm allowed to worry about my wife," he said, kissing my lips softly.

It felt so strange to be called that. Kerr had found a priest, a friend of his family's, and he'd performed a small handfasting ceremony in the kitchen of Kerr's cousin's house. It wasn't a wedding outright, but it was close enough. We promised to love one another for life—that wouldn't be terribly hard to keep.

The setting and the circumstances of the ceremony weren't what I had dreamed they'd be, but it felt right. I touched Kerr's face and let my finger trace the edge of the tiny white scar on his chin. "Well, husband of mine, stop worrying so much, I'm fine."

"I'll stop worrying when I know yer safe on Valhalla," he said, wrapping his arms around me.

"You mean when we're safe on Valhalla, don't you?"

He nodded slightly, but avoided answering my question. "Are you ready to tell me who attacked you yet? That'd make me feel better too."

"Please, not this again, Kerr."

He winked at me and I knew that was more of a promise to leave it alone just for the moment than a promise to drop it for good, but I took it. I

tried to lie back on the large rock, but Kerr pulled me to him. "Come on now, ye said it's up over the second ridge, didn't ye?"

I nodded. The portal back to Valhalla was just ahead a bit. I had wanted to get there just before dark to increase our chances of leaving without interference on the part of Corbin's men, but we'd gotten held up when a passing group of real British guards patrolled the area. Now the moon was high and the night was on us. We just had a little bit more to go before we'd be safe from Corbin's men, and under the watchful eye of the elders.

Kerr put his hand around mine and started to walk. He stopped and closed his eyes. He turned his head to the side and looked like he was in pain for a moment before letting out a gasp and grabbing me tight. "Come, we need to get you home."

"You mean we need to get us home, right?"

He didn't answer me. I pulled on him to stop moving. "Kerr, what did you see?"

He turned around quickly and kissed my lips. He put his hand on my stomach and pulled me close to him. "Promise me that no matter what happens, you'll go back to Valhalla. We'll have another chance at happiness, I'm sure of it. Do not mourn yer losses, for we will meet again."

"Kerr?"

He scared me. I went to reach up for him and heard a rustle in the bushes off to our right. Kerr grabbed my hand and pulled me towards the second ridge. Two men jumped out in front of us. In a matter of seconds, their faces were twisted and fangs were showing. They let out ear piercing screams and focused their eyes on Kerr. "You're the one we've been looking for."

Kerr tried to move me behind him, but I gave him a hard time about going. "It doesn't matter what you turn me into, I'll never fight on yer side, demon or not. I will walk in the light of day and perish before I aid you in hurtin' the innocent."

I turned and looked at him. That's what he'd seen! He knew what was going to happen—they were going to try to turn him! I had to stop it. I couldn't let them turn Kerr into a vampire. I called upon my power, the

same power that set me apart from the other Valkyries and I concentrated it in their direction. I sent a force of wind so great at them that it sent their bodies hurtling backwards and into the trees. One stopped moving when a branch went straight through his heart—the other looked like he'd just had the wind knocked out of him.

"Kill her and turn him." I heard Corbin's cold voice say from behind me.

I spun around to find at least twenty other demon-guards waiting for us. Kerr turned to me. "Go, run, go home. We will meet again, Valkyrie, I promise."

"NO! I'm not leaving you here with them." I brought more power up and sent another blast of gale force wind towards the vampires. I managed to knock a few out of commission but the rest came swarming at us. Kerr sent one flying backwards with his bare hand. He caught another by the neck and twisted it quickly.

Three came at me. Two with their swords drawn and one with a pistol pointed at me. I tried to bring more power up, I'd never attempted to use so much in such a short period of time before and wasn't sure I could. The pistol went off and I tried to move out of the line of fire, but felt the bullet rip through my lower abdomen. Kerr screamed out for me, and I fell forward clutching the dying dreams of having a family with him.

I looked up at Kerr and saw his blue eyes fill with water, then turn to rage. He twisted around and sent another vampire flying away from him. I pushed to my feet to help him. I struck out and managed to hit one in the neck. I felt my fingers crush its windpipe and was disappointed that I didn't take its head off. I pulled upon what power I had left and waited for the next one to come at me. As soon as it did, I cried out "core," and felt my hand pass right through its chest. I seized hold of its heart and brought my foot up to push it backwards. I kept hold of its beating heart and then tossed it aside. I turned to try and repeat my performance on another one and heard the sound of another pistol going off. A hot searing pain ripped through my upper back. I screamed out and found it cut short by the quick coughing up of blood.

I fell forward and felt someone grab a hold of my hair. My head was pulled back and I found myself looking into the very pissed off face of Corbin. I smiled and spit blood at him. His tongue flickered out and he retrieved all of it. I felt the vomit rising up in me and had to fight to keep it down. He pushed me to the ground and kicked me hard in the gut. His boot came at me again and again. I screamed out and tried to grab his

foot. I wanted to rip his leg and beat him with it—did that make me a monster too?

Corbin's body was ripped away from mine, and tossed aside. Kerr dropped down in front of me. "Oh God, Valkyrie, yer bleedin' all over."

A cramp in my stomach made me cry out again and I reached for Kerr's hand. "The baby...." I gagged on my own blood. It would take the care of other Valkyries to piece me together again, but I knew that the baby was lost.

Kerr leaned down to pick me up. "No worries about that now, lass, we need to get you home."

"But, the...." I tried to talk again.

"I love you no matter what, Valkyrie," he said before his body was suddenly pulled away from mine. I looked up to see Kerr being dragged backwards by four vampires and Corbin standing over him—looking ominous, like a cloud before the storm.

"Hold his head still, I have never seen a human with this much strength, imagine how powerful he will be soon when our blood runs through his veins."

The vampires bared Kerr's neck to Corbin and I fought to stand up. Kerr never made a sound as Corbin sunk his fangs deep into him. I staggered and fell backwards, and felt the air around me change. The portal opened. I must have fallen into its path. I tried to walk forward to go to Kerr, but strong arms grabbed me from behind.

"Linnea, oh my God, what happened...?" I heard Beau's voice stop dead when he saw the swarm of vampires on Kerr.

"Help him...." I coughed and went limp.

Beau picked me up and looked towards Kerr—Kerr's eyes locked on mine and I saw them start to swirl to black. He was dying and the change was taking place. I reached out for him.

"Take her and GO!" Kerr cried out through gritted teeth.

Beau backed up into the portal and tried to calm me down as I cried out for Kerr.

## Chapter 9

"Won't you at least see him for just a few minutes?" My mother asked.

I folded my arms in the chair and turned my face away from her. She tossed her hands in the air. "Beau doesn't deserve this treatment. The man went against the elders for you. He found his way to you through a portal and brought you back to us safe. Freezing him out for a year isn't right, you should be thanking him. They're talking about allowing him a say on the board now, you know."

That made me turn my head and look at her. Getting a say on the board was a huge deal and it wasn't given to just anyone, especially not a man. My mother looked out towards the field. No men were training there today, no, today they were out learning the art of firearms and that was much too noisy to have near the homes. "Linnea, you've been working yourself too hard. You should take a break. Bringing in six new recruits a week is insane. You can't keep going like this, it will...."

I stood up. "It'll what, Mother, kill me?" I pulled my shirt up, revealing my unmarred torso to her. "Many have tried to kill me and look," I ran my hand over my smooth, tight, skin, "not a scratch."

She looked past me and spoke softly. "I know that you fell in love with him."

"Beau?" I asked, shocked that my mother would think that I loved Beau.

"No, the potential that you went to the Highlands for, the Scot, Bhreac, and I know that he was lost to the other side. Your heart will never truly heal the loss of him, but someone else will come along and fill that gaping hole that you feel now, trust me."

"Don't be silly, Mother. I only knew Kerr a couple of weeks. I was foolish to marry him." Even I knew this was a lie. I loved Kerr from the moment I saw him and would until I took my final breath.

My mother laughed and then smiled. "Linnea, it only takes a moment to fall in love, and even the shortest of love affairs can stay in your heart for a lifetime."

"You sound like you speak from experience, Mother."

"I do, now go and finish up this run, then when you return home, take some time, and mend fences with your friend Beau. He meant well, and now that he is in the favor of the elders they may be willing to make an exception to their rules for the two of you."

I turned and headed out of the room. I wasn't going to discuss the idea of marrying Beau, it was preposterous. My mother was right on one thing. I was overdue for some rest time. I'd been burying myself in work since I'd lost Kerr, and she was right about Beau, not in the sense of marriage, but that I did need to work things out with him. As much as I hated to admit it, he'd done what needed to be done. Kerr was lost to me, and to our cause, forever. Knowing this made it hurt more. It wasn't supposed to hurt still, it had been a year—it should have felt better, right?

I walked into my room and headed for my wardrobe. I stood in front of it and put my palm on it. "Rome, 351 AD," I said softly. I opened the door and found it full of the clothing I'd need to blend in. After my experience in the Highlands, I'd returned home and bewitched my wardrobe to produce costumes suitable to each time frame I traveled to.

I reached in and pulled out the white knee-length tunica. It seemed shorter when I put it on, but it'd have to do. I didn't want to be mistaken for a whore again. I grabbed hold of the white stola and draped it over myself. It went to the floor and was slit up the side. I had a hard time getting the shoulder clasps done, but managed. I glanced in the mirror and shook my head at the high waisted dress--it wasn't very flattering. I pulled out the golden cords and wrapped them around my body. They served two purposes—they slimmed out the unflattering garment and gave me places to tuck my weapons. I put the palla back in the wardrobe, a shawl would normally do, but I needed the red cloak, it would better hide the sword that I took along. I slipped into my sandals and stood back to admire my handiwork.

I frowned when I saw my waist-length black hair flowing freely. From what I knew of Rome, which wasn't much since it was to be my first trip there, the women wore their hair up. I wasn't very good at doing anything with hair above and beyond brushing it. I said a quick chant and hoped for the best. I opened my eyes to find my hair piled high on my head. It

was curly now, and long ringlets fell loose down my shoulders and back. I didn't have much faith that this hairstyle would hold up through the portal, but I went ahead with my mission anyway.

I glanced down at the parchment in my hand. I looked for a Roman soldier named Gregorios. He was twenty-three and had been rumored to have supernatural gifts. My jaw tightened when I read this again. I had refused to go on any more hunts for gifted recruits after Kerr. Gregorios was to be my first in a year. According to my paperwork, I'd find Gregorios in the battle of Mursa. He was more than qualified in the bravery department and the speculation that he possessed special gifts only added to his appeal.

I'd become very focused on the mission. I wanted to prevent the Apocalypse from coming and I wanted to defeat evil, but most of all, I wanted to take out my frustrations on any demon I could, and I knew that they'd be crawling all over this recruit—revenge would serve just fine cold.

## Chapter 10

I cursed myself again as I walked past the slave trader for the fourth time. He still tried to get me to purchase one of his slave girls. As much as I wanted to buy them all, I couldn't. I had nowhere to go with them all. They were too young to come to Valhalla yet, and I couldn't take that many through the portal anyways. At most I'd be able to get four through it, including myself.

The man reached out and touched my arm. I looked down at him and raised an eyebrow. "Why are you touching me?"

"I'm sorry, my lady, I have such a good deal going today on these girls and a lady such as yourself requires lots of care."

I grabbed his wrist and twisted his hand off me. I was sure that I'd used a little too much pressure, but I didn't care. The filthy swine was in the

business of trading little girls. He let out a small cry and the girl behind him gasped. He turned around and struck her across the face. His hand came back and he went to hit her again. I reached out and grabbed his wrist. I squeezed it hard and felt his bones crushing. He turned and his beady little eyes locked on me.

"If you ever raise your hand to one of them again, I will kill you, do you understand?" He nodded frantically. I let go of him and smiled. "Good, now answer some questions for me."

After brow beating—okay, actually beating--the slave owner for a few minutes, I figured out why I wasn't able to find the battle of Mursa. I was a year too early. I should have guessed after I went over the waterfall's edge, I had thought of Kerr again and lost my concentration. There was no way that I could wait around here for a year to take Gregorios, and according to all the literature I had, he would not be ready to come with me until then.

I kicked out at a tiny pebble by my foot and turned to head back into the marketplace. I hit something hard and looked up to find that it wasn't a something, it was a someone, and he was beautiful. I got lost in his forest green eyes for a moment. I shook my head and smiled up at him. I'd never seen hair so silky and blonde before. It hung loose to his shoulders, and seemed to radiate light out at me. His head blocked the sun, but I could still make out how innocent and soft his features were. They were a sharp contrast to ... I turned my head and stopped myself from thinking any further of Kerr.

"I'm sorry," I said and went to back away.

The man walking with the Golden-Adonis grabbed his arm and pulled him in the other direction. "Stop staring at her, Gregorios. She's out of your class."

I stood still and watched as the man tugged Gregorios down the alleyway. Gregorios turned around two more times before he disappeared. I looked around at the Romans and laughed out loud. Somehow, the Gods knew what they were doing, and they'd sent me here for a reason. Perhaps Odin himself had written this meeting in the stars—I laughed at the thought and set out to follow him.

I walked down the crowded alley in search of Gregorios. The alley was littered with people and it was almost impossible to move, let alone find anyone. The further I walked, the narrower the alley seemed to be.



Finally the crowd tapered off and I found myself standing outside of a brown door. A large man, no doubt a soldier by the looks of his toga, pushed past me and entered. He gave me a sideways glance before passing. The sound of voices surrounded me and I went ahead and followed him in.

I looked around the large room and knew that I stood in a bar, a pub, a tavern—whatever the hell they called it. From the looks of the women sitting on the men's laps, it was one that offered more than just drinks, perhaps it was a brothel. I was shocked to see a man fondling a woman's breast in plain view of the public. She didn't seem to care. She was too busy kissing a second man to pay notice.

"Hurry up, Gregorios. I don't want to be found in a place like this. If my mother caught word of this she'd have my hide."

"Maxus, old friend, don't worry. I do not think that your mother would talk with anyone who frequents this establishment," I heard a male voice say.

"As much as I would like to believe you, Gregorios, I do not need to anger the woman any further. You are lucky that yours is...."

"Dead," Gregorios said flatly. "And, I do not consider myself lucky at all. I have no one now."

"You have your friends."

"Go get some wine, Maxus, and I will be back out in just a minute."

"Gregorios, tell me that you can go longer than a minute."

I heard a loud thump and then saw the man who'd been tugging on Gregorios come walking out of the back hallway rubbing his chin. He made his way past me and to the bar. I took this opportunity to get to know my recruit a little bit better. I was disappointed that he sought the comfort of a whore, but he was a man and a soldier, and he needed a release.

I followed the sound of his voice and pressed my ear to the door. I was shocked to hear more than one female voice in there with him. "Oh, Gregorios, we weren't sure you'd come."

"I made you a promise years ago, and I've honored that, haven't I?"

There was a collective "yes" from the group. "Now, lie down and I will begin. I see a few of you are new." He let out a sigh.

"Oh, don't worry about them none, they're trustworthy. They'll not tell a soul."

"Very well, let's do this then."

I leaned up against the door to hear better.

"Will it hurt?" A young voice asked.

"Just for a moment, then you'll be good as new."

I covered my mouth. I couldn't believe that he was going to have sex with all those girls at one time. I pressed my ear to the door and felt the temperature of the air around me change. A sensation that I was familiar with hit me next, it felt like someone ran the tips of their fingernails all over my skin—it was magic, someone was using magic! I leaned against the door more and felt it give. I fell forward and closed my eyes tight. I really didn't want to have the image of the handsome recruit screwing several females in my mind forever. I would have to look at him on a daily basis and I was sure that I'd have a hard time if that was etched in my brain.

"What the...?" I heard Gregorios say.

"Sorry, I've got her," Maxus said from behind me. He grabbed hold of my shoulders and hoisted me up. I managed to keep my eyes closed until I was safely out of the room. "Miss, I don't know what you're doing down around these parts, but it'd be wise for you to go home now. This is no place for a lady."

I smoothed my cloak out and smiled up at Maxus. "Thank you."

## Chapter 11

I stood at the edge of the waterfall and concentrated on September 8, 351 AD, the battle of Mursa. I wouldn't make the same mistake twice. I'd just

returned from having spent two days chasing Gregorios around Rome while he visited almost every whorehouse they had. I wasn't sure if I was more upset with the fact that he'd done that, or that I was attracted to him even though he was a swine.

I closed my eyes and thought of the date I needed to go to. A year would have passed for him now, and he would be in the middle of the bloodiest battle that century would see. I jumped forward and felt the wind ripping at my sides. I put my arms out and welcomed the pressure, it felt so safe.

The portal dumped me off in the middle of an open field and that was unusual. I looked up to see Gregorios on his knees, with his head bent down. I looked around him and saw charred bodies. The scent of magic filled the air, and the realization of what he'd done hit me. He'd burned these men alive. I took a step towards him and felt the portal tugging at my back. It did not want to close yet, and that meant that danger came. I pushed out of it and watched as Gregorios looked up at me.

"You've been sent here to punish me haven't you?"

I smiled at him and shook my head. "No, you are one of the bravest warriors I've ever seen, and from the looks of it, one of the most powerful."

It took him a minute to understand that I wasn't here to kill him. He looked up at me and focused on my face. "Your eyes."

"Yeah, they're turquoise and are considered plain where I come from."

"I don't understand how anyone in their right mind would think you plain."

I walked towards him and bent down to help him to his feet. He didn't fight me. He let me guide him up. "I'm a Valkyrie, a Falkyr and I've been sent to collect only the bravest of souls, and yours is one of them."

"Your name is Valerie?" he asked. As soon as the word fell from his lips, I thought of Kerr and the way he pronounced Valkyrie, and I started to cry. Gregorios touched my cheek and came away with one of my tears.

"I did not mean to make you weep, Valerie."

I didn't correct him about my name. It felt good to hear him call me that. "Valerie?" he said softly. I laughed. I hadn't laughed like that in over a year, and it felt wonderful. I pulled back from him slowly.

"I'm going to offer you something that I've never offered anyone before—a choice. You can choose to come with me to Valhalla and fight on the side of good in a battle for mankind, or you may stay here." I put my hand out and motioned to the battlefield. "From what I know, you were to live through this and live to be an old age." He looked around and then back at me. I heard someone coming and felt Gregorios draw on his power. He moved his body in front of mine.

I touched his arm, and felt my body react to being near him. I hadn't had the desire to be touched by a man since Kerr, and now I stood behind a man that was very much like me—a practitioner of magic. He possessed the gift of magic, the same gift that I had, and it would be rare to find that in someone I was attracted to again, and I knew it.

"Close your eyes, Valerie. I do not want to frighten you with the horrors that I am capable of," he said.

I moved my hand up his arm and let my power build. I let the tiniest bit of it spill out and onto him. He spun around and grabbed hold of me. "You have it as well!" He sounded a bit out breath, no doubt from shock.

I smiled at him and nodded my head. "I've never had anyone to share it with, at least no one who understood it and recognized it for what it was."

Gregorios looked around and then back down at me. "I shall come with you. What do you need to do now?"

Normally, I would have taken only his soul back with me. He would become corporeal once he set foot on Valhalla's ground and he would never again age, but I didn't want to take only his soul, I wanted all of him. I wanted to bring Kerr back with me like this, and would have if things hadn't turned out the way they did.

"This also has to be your choice," I pulled his mouth towards mine, and stopped just short of kissing him. "With this kiss, we will forever be bound—linked. You will be considered my equal—my mate."

Gregorios brought his lips down on mine and I let a piece of my very essence slip into him, and in return, I felt a piece of him move into me. I pulled away from him slowly, not wanting the moment to end. His green

eyes closed and his face twisted. He let out a small moan, and tightened his grip on me.

"What just happened?" he asked.

"I bestowed upon you the gift of immortality, come, we have to hurry." I could feel the threat of evil looming around us. Their foot soldiers would have sensed the portal opening by now and be searching for me. I wasn't worried about losing Gregorios as I had Kerr, because now he was an immortal, like myself and they couldn't turn him into a demon, at least I didn't think so, but I didn't want to throw more at him than he was ready to deal with.

"Come, let's go."

I grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the portal. He came with me willingly and moved his body into the portal. It wrapped around us both and yanked at our clothes and hair. I pulled Gregorios to me and held him close. His body wrapped around mine and I knew that he tried to protect me even though the portal posed no harm. The pressure on us increased, and Gregorios held me even tighter. With my ear pressed firmly to his chest, I could hear his heart beating fast—and him sighing.

The wind and pressure stopped and I felt the earth beneath my feet again. I opened my eyes and looked around at the beautiful tropical heaven that I called home. "This is Valhalla," I said, still holding onto him.

"It is beautiful." His eyes moved to the waterfalls and he leaned out to have a better look. I pulled him back to me and laughed.

"You don't want to fall over that, at least not just yet. Who knows where you'd end up? You'll be able to navigate through the portals on your own, soon enough." He didn't find it as funny as I did, but that was to be expected.

I laughed harder and turned to see Beau running towards us. He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Gregorios standing with me. On all my other returns, including Beau's, I'd brought back their soul, in a soul-decanter, and once I reached Valhalla they would materialize—become corporeal—they were always nude, and Gregorios was not.

Gregorios let go of me and tried to push me behind him. His red toga blew slightly in the wind and caught the attention of Beau.

Beau moved closer and gave me a puzzled look. "You okay, Princess?"

Gregorios turned and looked at me. "Princess?"

I shrugged my shoulders. I wasn't very impressed with my status, and didn't expect him to be either. Beau moved closer to us and Gregorios drew his sword. I put my hand out and touched his shoulder. "It's okay, this is Beau. He's one of the Captains of the guard. He'll be assisting you with anything you'll need." Beau made a coughing noise. I looked up at him. "Care to add anything?"

"Yeah, don't you mean I'll be showing him to his quarters, and getting him acquainted with the others?"

"No, I said what I meant, and Gregorios will be staying with me."

Beau took another look at Gregorios and then started to shake his head. "You didn't ... no, you wouldn't." He stepped forward and touched Gregorios lightly on the arm. "Shit, you did."

## Chapter 12

I rolled my eyes and listened to Alodie go on and on about the decision I had made. Her blonde hair was pulled back so tight from her head in a bun, that it made her skin pull as well. Beau often called her Joan Rivers, but I wasn't sure why.

I watched her sitting at the elders' table with her hands folded, making comments to the others like I wasn't even there. She was good at that. She hated the fact that I was a Princess and she wasn't. I couldn't help that. It wasn't a birthright so much as a show of power. Only the finest Valkyries were given Princess status. The greatest of us all was named Queen. Valhalla had been without a Queen since before I was born. My mother had been appointed Queen, but had refused to accept the throne. This shocked and angered some of the elders.

Alodie looked down the table to her twin sister, Annice, and then back at me. "What prompted your decision to make him an equal?" she asked, sounding every bit as condescending as she looked.

"I've already been over this with you a thousand times. I'm hungry, tired, and I'm leaving now."

"Linnea...."

I spun around. "You will address me as Valerie and Valerie only. Do you understand? And, if one of you dares to question my decision again...." I let hot fire build in my hand. I spun my hand around it and formed a blazing ball. It wasn't really hot, nor was it fire. It was an illusion. I learned to do that when I was young and it still scared the others. It was a parlor trick—smoke and mirrors. Yet, they were still afraid. I could create real fire, but I don't think I could control it as well.

I glanced down at the bluish-orange ball in my hand. I smiled softly and then looked up. I watched the table of elder Valkyrie women, who all looked to be no more than thirty, sit back in their seats—scared. Bronte, one of my mother's biggest supporters stood up and clapped. The others looked at her like she'd just grown a second head.

"I think we may have a new candidate for Queen in our presence."

The silence in the room was deafening. Alodie was the first one to make a sound of protest. I looked up at her and then down at the ball of fire in my hand. I winked and she shut her mouth. I didn't want to be appointed Queen. I just didn't want to hear her mouth run anymore. I let the fire dissipate and rounded on my heels. I stormed out of the hall, and down the path to the training fields.

I was halfway to the training grounds when I heard shouts. My pace increased when I recognized Gregorios' voice as one of them. I cut through the bamboo that grew wild along the edges of the path, and regretted it almost immediately. I came out on the other side battered and bruised to find Beau and Gregorios engaged in a sword fight.

Beau wore a pair of camouflage army pants and a black tee shirt. Gregorios hadn't taken to wearing modern clothes yet, and still wore his tunic. They looked so odd—the modern man versus the gladiator.

Beau's sword was above his right shoulder, drawn back with his arm, as he circled Gregorios. I moved in closer, but wasn't sure what to do. If I

yelled out and distracted either of them, someone could get hurt. Immortality meant little if you lost your head or heart in a sword fight. I moved in closer and watched as Beau's facial expression hardened.

"You've no business here, in the form you're in. She'll never love you. You're just a pet, something she brought home to try and patch up an ugly incident. You're a band-aid. She'll discard you soon, like the trash you are."

Gregorios didn't accept the bait. He just kept his eye on Beau and his sword out in front of him. Beau struck out at him, and Gregorios deflected it with ease. Beau tried again, and again he deflected it. Their swords locked and their faces pressed close together. The hate in Beau's eyes shocked me. He had no reason to hate Gregorios, they weren't from the same time period, and had never met prior to Valhalla. As far as I knew, Americans had no problems with ancient Romans.

"She'll never love you," Beau spit his words out as he went.

Gregorios spun around and brought Beau's feet out from under him. He thrust his sword down, and stopped just short of ramming it through Beau's neck. I stood in horror as the tip of the sword pushed lightly on Beau's skin. "Are you worried for her, or are you jealous that she did not choose you? She may never love me, and that's fine, but I will follow her anywhere and give my life for her and her happiness. Would you do the same?"

Beau kicked out and caught Gregorios' stomach. He sprung to his feet and went at Gregorios with an intensity I'd never seen before. I decided that this had gone way too far and ran towards them. Gregorios saw me coming and it broke his concentration, giving Beau the upper hand and leaving Gregorios now dangerously close to being beheaded.

"You deserve to die. You don't deserve her, neither did that filthy Scot. I know she let him touch her ... at least he got what was coming to him ... as if he ever had a chance with the Princess."

My blood boiled and I screamed out Beau's name while I ran at him. He spun around just in time for me to pummel him to the ground. I slapped his face so hard that my hand stung, and then I balled my hands into fists and began beating on his chest and face. I felt someone pulling me off of Beau. I kicked out, and managed to catch Beau several more times before I was moved too far away to reach him.



"It's okay, Valerie," Gregorios said softly in my ear.

Beau sat up and wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth with the back of his hand. "Her name isn't Valerie, it's...."

"Don't ... don't ever let me hear you utter my name again, you bastard!"

Beau looked up at me. "Princess, I didn't mean to offend you, I was just...." He turned to spit blood out. "I know you've had a hard go of it since you lost that Scot, and I...."

I kicked out frantically, but Gregorios held tight to my waist. "If you ever utter one word about him again, I'll kill you, do you understand, Beau? I will cut your head off and put it on a stake in the center of the grounds for all to see." I glared at him.

"I'm sorry, Linnea ... Valerie. I didn't mean ... please forgive me...."

I stopped kicking and Gregorios put me down gently. I turned away from Beau. He tried to say something else to me, but Gregorios intervened. "Perhaps, you should leave her be for a bit, she is upset and could use...."

Beau let out a laugh. "Oh, give it a rest. Kissing her ass now won't make her want you anymore. She doesn't fuck men ... no ... she just lures them from the battlefield with her beauty, teases them, and then turns on them. Sorry there, Caesar, but she'll never fuck you."

"How dare you speak of her like that?" Gregorios tried to go around me and I caught his arm and pulled him to me. His body was stiff and his attentions on Beau, I reached up and pulled his neck down to me. I put my lips on his. It took a minute for his body to relax, but finally his arm moved around me and he started to return my kisses. Beau laughed out loud behind me, and I pulled away from Gregorios to look at him.

"Don't get your hopes up, Caesar, that's what she does best, she teases. She wouldn't know how to handle a real man—a real dick in her."

Gregorios' arms tightened, and I noticed the veins in his neck starting to pop out. I leaned up and kissed his cheek gently. "Let me handle Beau, please." He nodded softly, and I turned my attention back to Beau. I walked to him and put my chest against his. I pulled on his tee shirt to bring his face closer to mine.

"For your information, I do know what to do with a dick, too bad that Scot's not around. You could ask him about it, or in the morning, you could ask Gregorios how I am in bed, because you'll never find out first hand."

I pulled away from Beau and watched as the realization of what I'd just said sank in. He looked like he'd been slapped and I loved it. He had no business bringing Kerr into this. Hell, he had no business in my affairs at all. He turned away from me and stormed off. I wanted to shout out details of my time with Kerr, but those were private and I had too much respect for Kerr to do that.

Gregorios came to my side and touched my shoulder. I let my head fall down onto his hand and started to cry. He pulled me close to him. He never asked what had made me so upset, or who this Scot was that we'd been talking about. He just stood there holding me in his arms, letting me weep freely without guilt.

## Chapter 13

"I should really go and sleep with the other soldiers. This is not right. I do not deserve special treatment," Gregorios said as he moved towards my bedroom door.

I took a step towards him. "You've been sleeping here for close to a week now, why the sudden change of heart?" I already knew what had prompted it. At least I think I knew anyway. Beau's little outburst early in the day had left me crying in Gregorios' arms and feeling very vulnerable. I wondered if he now felt the same way.

"Valerie, I do not want to burden you. This paradise has many other accommodations that are better than any other lodging I've ever known. I do not need to be under your feet." He started to walk out of the room.

"Wait, don't go."

He ran his fingers through his long blonde hair and bent his head down. "I cannot stay with you tonight."

I moved off the edge of the bed and walked to him. "Why? Why is tonight different from the other nights you've spent here with me, lying in that very bed, sleeping sound by my side?" We hadn't had sex, we had really just slept, and it had been the best rest I'd had since I'd lost Kerr.

Gregorios lifted his head slightly. His green eyes darted away from my gaze. "I do not sleep sound next to you, I lay there watching you rest, memorizing every tiny feature of your beautiful face, and longing to touch you. When you kissed me today, my body reacted in ways it shouldn't have, and I know now that I cannot lay by your side and just sleep. It is better that I go, and...."

I touched his arm. "Wait, your body reacted? You mean you got an ...." I almost said erection, but didn't. Gregorios didn't need me to finish my sentence. He nodded and dropped his head in shame. "My Gods, Gregorios, I watched you move from brothel to brothel, you had at least a dozen women in the room with you at each one. I find it hard to believe that your body reacted to me in a way any different than with them."

He looked up at me. "I knew I'd seen you before ... in the market place, a year ago, I bumped into you ... then you fell through the door, and," he started to laugh, "you thought I had intercourse with those women?"

I didn't find it as funny as he did, but now that he asked, yeah, that is precisely what I thought. I nodded my head, and he burst out into laughter. When he was able to catch his breath, he reached out and took me in his arms. It was a bold move on his part, and I liked it.

"Valerie, I've never known the touch of a woman. I wasn't in the room with the whores for pleasure. No, I was there to give them some of my magic. I cast out energy, a spell of sorts that keeps their wombs from accepting new life—from having children for at least a year, sometimes two. It's all they have, and they tell no one about me. So many of them have died giving birth, or died trying not to give birth. Some have children and can't afford them, and dump them off or worse yet, raise them in that environment."

He looked away and I saw his eyes start to tear up. "My mother was a woman like them. She worked on her back for next to nothing, and conceived me while doing it. She had no clue who my father was, and I'm sure I got my gift of the magic from him. She tried to raise me and still work. I was forced to sit outside the door while she...." He couldn't hold back the tears anymore. I moved my body close to his and wrapped my arms around him. He didn't tell me any more about his mother, but I

suddenly understood his commitment to helping the women who worked in brothels.

I decided to break the tension and lighten the mood. "You mean to tell me that in all that time you never once got to...?"

His laughter cut me off. "Oh, no, I think I scared them, and for good reason. I'm a monster. Did you see what I did on the battlefield? I burnt those men alive, Valerie."

I took two steps back from him and put my hand out. I called upon the fire and formed it into a ball like I'd done for the elders earlier. Gregorios' eyes lit up. He put his finger out to touch it and I closed my hand, making it disappear in the process. "See, you're not alone, and you're not a monster."

His hand closed over mine and I found myself looking right at his chest. I wished that I was taller so I could see directly into his eyes, but my view wasn't too bad either. I put the palm of my hand on his chest and waited to see if he'd push me away.

"Valerie, why do I feel this way every time you touch me?"

I didn't need him to clarify. I knew what he was talking about. Since I'd shared my essence with him I'd noticed a heightened thrill every time his body was close to mine. Whatever it was, it made me want to run my fingers over him—all the time. I hadn't been sure if the feeling went both ways, until now. His hand slid over mine, and our fingers laced together. He brought my hand to his lips and I felt like I was going to liquefy. He kissed it gently, and I let out a small sigh.

"If I stay here with you tonight, I do not think I will be able to conduct myself in a proper manner, so I should go. Pleasant dreams, Valerie," Gregorios said, bending down to kiss me.

I moved my hands behind his neck and laced my fingers tightly. When he tried to stand up, I went with him. His hands moved around me and he lifted me with ease. I never thought of myself as large, but I wasn't waify either. I was toned--I had to be--my line of work demanded it. Gregorios never broke a sweat. Holding me up put us eye to eye, and for the first time I was able to see just how beautiful his emerald green eyes truly were.

"Gregory, you have the fullest lips I've ever seen on a man."

He looked away sheepishly. I put my lips on his and bit down gently, tugging him back to me in the process. "I like them," I said, with my teeth still tugging on him. I pushed my tongue into his mouth and found his. He was reluctant to respond to me at first, but when I wrapped my legs around his waist, he gave in to me.

He moved our bodies towards the bed and kept his mouth in constant contact with mine the entire time. He laid me gently across the bed and even took the time to make sure that I wasn't lying on my hair. I thought that was sweet. He stood up and backed away from me. His normally milky white face was flushed now. He walked away.

"Gregorios, no, don't go, stay with me." I moved my hands down and slid my dress up, revealing my upper thighs to him. His eyes followed my hands as I moved the black material up higher on my body. I stopped just short of showing him all I had to offer, when he came closer to me.

"I've never...."

I put my hand out to him. "I'm sure you'll do just fine."

Gregorios took my hand and leaned over the edge of the bed, his legs now planted firmly between mine. He took his time taking his tunic off. He was embarrassed, and I couldn't see why. He was sexy beyond words. His body was lean and tight. He wasn't a large man, so much as he was tall, but he was perfect all the same. I glanced down at the nest of blonde curls between his legs and had to take back my original thought of him not being a large man. He tried to cover himself with his hands, and failed, even his big hands couldn't hide his excitement.

Gregorios began to back away, and I reached down and pulled my tiny black dress up and almost over my head. The cool air hit my naked breasts and my nipples responded to it.

Gregorios' eyes looked my body over and his fingers moved away from his groin and to my stomach. He was reluctant to touch me at first. I pulled on his wrist and brought his hand, and his body, to my breast. He helped me slide my dress over my head and caught one of my nipples in his mouth on the way back down. I quickly moved my hands into his hair and let the silky strands glide through my fingers.

Gregorios' hands moved down my sides and he stopped when he hit my panties. He knew what they were now. He'd asked me about them when he'd walked in on me changing our second day back. This world was so

very new to him, and he learned quickly. He slipped his fingers under my panties and pulled them down slowly. He drew in a deep breath when he uncovered the dark patch of curls between my legs. His grip on my underwear tightened and I heard a ripping noise before I felt them falling away from my body.

"Sorry, I...." he said, pulling back from my body.

"Gregorios, its okay, I want you too ... I want you now."

He nodded and moved his body back to mine. He was being so careful not to touch me that we'd be at this for a year before he got up the nerve to just take me. I pulled on his body.

"Here, lie next to me ... wait, you said that you had a spell that would prevent a woman from conceiving a child, like birth control, right?"

"Yes, I mean, it is not permanent, well, only as permanent as I make it, I could give enough magic to get a woman through a night, or enough to get her through several hundred years."

"Will you do it for me?"

He bent down and kissed my stomach. I felt a wave of hot energy run through it, and my legs shook slightly. His lips moved down and he continued to kiss my skin lightly. The heat followed his lips and when he reached my velvety folds, he parted them and kissed the edges of my entrance. He moved his head up slowly and let his tongue move out and across the swelling mound before him. Heat splashed through me and I cried his name out.

He stood up quickly. "Are you alright? I didn't hurt you did I? I normally just push power out at the girls, but I could not help myself ... I...."

"Come here," I said, laughing slightly and putting my arms out to him. He moved over me and I opened my legs wide for him. "Is it done?"

He laid his body against mine. "Yes, you are protected."

I grabbed the back of his neck and brought his lips to mine, bringing the length of his cock into me as well. I grunted and moaned away the pain of having something so long within me and felt the pleasure push through. Gregorios lifted his head from me and looked shocked more than

anything. He froze. "Oh ... err ... you feel so good, I do not think I can move...."

I put my lips over his and drowned away his worries with kisses. I pulled on his hips to get him going again. He was timid at first, but after a few swift pushes, he drove himself into me with a fire only a virgin could bring to the table. He was still incredibly sweet and tender with me, even though I knew that he didn't want to be. I held tight to his shoulders as he moved his hips and slid his hard member in and out of me.

As I lay there making animal noises and feeling my orgasm build, I held Gregorios even closer to me, leaving him lying flat against me. His long body left me staring at his chest. He moved his arms out and propped himself up so that he wouldn't suffocate me. When I found his green eyes looking directly at me, I knew that he would be the one that would fill the void in my heart that Kerr had left.

Gregorios' rhythm changed and I felt my like my entire body was being touched by tiny fingers. My magic answered his, and rose to the surface. It countered with a soft breeze that blew around us, and through us. I felt Gregorios reaching places inside me that were impossible for anyone to reach. I screamed out for him as I tightened around him. His throbbing shaft let loose the power it had been holding back, and for one brief shining moment, our magic and our bodies merged into one entity.

I lay under him shaking from my toes up. It was involuntary and each shake sent another wave of pleasure throughout my body. He pulled out slowly, but didn't move away. He wrapped me in his arms and rolled onto the bed next to me. I snuggled into his body and traced the edges of his nipple.

"What did you think?" I asked, curious to see if his first time had been as joyous as mine had been.

He kissed the top of my head, and pulled me closer to him. "I could not form a thought right now to save my life, Valerie."

I laughed. "That's good, right?"

"That is very good."

## Chapter 14

"It's nice to be home."

I took Gregorios' hand in mine and smiled. "It is good, but I like it better when we're gone."

He retied his ponytail and looked around at the waterfalls. "I still can't get used to the time thing, Valerie, we were in South America for thirteen months, and before that we were in Germany for close to a year, but here, on Valhalla, we've only been gone a few days."

"You get used to it. I've told you before that we can jump around any time from the past to the present, and while we could spend a hundred years there, only to come back to Valhalla to find that a few years has passed—if that. I stopped trying to figure it out when I was a child. You should too, Gregory. It will only make your head hurt," I said, laughing.

He winked at me and took the soul-decanter that held the souls of the men we'd recruited out. "I should get these to Beau. He'll want to start getting them accustomed to their new surroundings as soon as possible."

"You two seem to be getting along better now."

"I've been at Valhalla for four years now, and if you factor in the time we've spent in other places, then I've been with you for close to a century. I think he's figured out that I'm not going anywhere."

"Gregory?"

He laughed a little at me as he smiled. The sun caught his blonde hair and made my breathing quicken. "I love the fact that you decided to up and shorten my name, I guess it's fair, I totally changed yours." He stopped talking and looked at me. "What's wrong?"

"Are you happy here? I mean, do you ever regret coming with me?"

Gregory set the decanter down gently and came to me. "I love you and I can't imagine my life without you in it."

I pulled his hand around my waist and stood on my tiptoes to reach his mouth. "Mmm...." he said as he pulled away slowly.



I reached my hand out and planted it on the front of his pants. He made another groan and tipped his head back. "Val, I have to get these souls to Beau. Some have been trapped for months."

I let out a sigh. "I know, I know, and in my own defense, to them it's only been a matter of seconds since they agreed to come with us."

"Are you saying they could wait a little longer then?" Gregory asked, looking back down at me.

I ran my fingers up his chest and let my hands slide to the sides of his neck. He purred softly as I traced the edges of his jaw. He had to lean down to reach me. I always felt bad about that, but Gregory never seemed to mind. His mouth touched mine and I was just about to slip my tongue in when I heard a loud cracking noise, and then something I'd never dreamed I'd hear—drums.

Growing up I'd heard tales of the drums beating to warn of danger approaching, but I'd never in my life heard them do it. I knew that Valhalla was enchanted, so did every demon, that's why we never had any problems, not until now that was.

Gregory looked around, unsure of what was going on. He glanced at me and I smiled up at him. If Valhalla was in danger then the waterfalls would be the way the enemy arrived. They were the only portals in and out of the Valhalla and I didn't want Gregory anywhere near them. I felt the temperature changing and the air pressure increasing. Something was on the verge of coming through and it was large—larger than anything I'd ever seen pass through them before.

"You'd better get those souls to Beau, he'll be needing them. I'll meet you back at the house in a little bit."

"Val, what's going on with the drums? Did I miss something, is today a day for celebration?"

I smiled and wanted him to go, to run, but I didn't alert him. "Yeah, Beau will fill you in on it, you should get going. The faster you get there, the faster you can meet me at home for a little celebration of our own."

Gregory kissed the top of my head and took off in a fast run towards the training grounds. I exhaled a breath that I hadn't realized I'd been holding. This was serious and I couldn't risk Gregory. I'd lost Kerr being

foolish and letting my guard down, and I wouldn't lose him too—I couldn't.

## Chapter 15

I bent down and retrieved my sword, and gun. I wasn't sure what was coming through the portal and I wasn't about to take any chances. I backed up and waited as the waterfalls faded away for a moment only to return to view with several demon brigades standing before them. I lost count around hundred and prepared myself to die fighting to defend Valhalla and all its inhabitants.

A line of the demons turned and looked in my direction. Some of them were obvious, and had horns or scales, some even had additional eyes, but others looked like normal men. I suspected that those were the vampires. They seemed to be the masterminds behind most of the demonic operations. I backed up a little to get a better stance before they starting swarming me, but stopped when I saw the thin pale face of the monster I'd had nightmares about for close to five years, Captain Corbin. His dark eyes locked on me and formed a grin so sinister that it made me shudder.

"Bring her to me!" he shouted out.

The entire group of demons turned and looked at me. I couldn't take them all on with just my sword and gun. I concentrated hard on the earth below me. I let nature be my guide and I pulled at it with my magic. I begged it to come to me, to help me protect it. After a second, I heard it answer. I heard the sound of whistling wind, and thunder. Corbin spun around and then back to me.

"Seize the witch now, before she can use anymore magic!"

I put my hands out to my side and let my palms face upward. I looked a little like a scarecrow near the edge of a cliff, but I didn't care. I just needed to feed off the power of the land and to direct my energy appropriately, and as far as I was concerned, Corbin was the one I was gunning for.

A pain ripped through my right shoulder. I screamed out and looked down to see an arrow sticking out of it. Two gray beasts hurdled towards me and I kicked out to keep them at bay. I tried to pull the arrow from my shoulder, but it wouldn't budge. I settled on snapping it off at the base of my skin and dropping down to avoid taking a demon to the head—which would, I'm sure, hurt like hell.

I stood quickly and starting calling on the power of the land again. I felt another arrow hit me in the stomach. I reached down and snapped it off too. Arrows whizzed past my body, but not from the direction of the intruders, but at them. I turned and saw Gregorios and Beau charging at us with legions of our men in tow. I looked back at Corbin and smiled.

"Game on," I said, lunging for my sword. I grabbed it and rolled. I came to my knee and delivered a blow that left a half-snake, half-man lying in two pieces on the ground before me. I heard something growl and then saw a blur before I felt the impact of the beast slamming into me. Its furred body rode mine to the ground and its wolf-like face held teeth that were razor sharp, and snapping at me. I pushed my fingers through its eyes and it rolled off of me. I grabbed my sword and tried to run it through its body. Someone grabbed me by my hair and yanked me off my feet. I heard Corbin laugh right before I felt him sink his teeth deep into my shoulder.

I screamed out, the pain was more intense than I had ever felt before. Corbin used his mind tricks to see to it that I suffered greatly.

Gregorios appeared next to me and thrust a handful of fire out at Corbin. He tore his mouth away from me and fell backwards. "Retreat, retreat!" he cried out. His black eyes met mine and he licked his bloodied lips. "I will find you again. My Master wishes to have you."

Beau ran past and started for Corbin. I grabbed his arm and stopped him in mid-motion. The demons jumped over the edges of the waterfall and into the portals. The drums stopped when the last of them was gone. I looked around at the corpses that littered the ground around us and looked up at Gregory. He flicked his wrist and they burst into flames. Beau staggered backwards and then grabbed me. He pulled my hair back and looked at my neck.

"Shit, he got you, Val!"

Gregory looked closer at my bite mark and then at Beau. "Will she turn into one of them?"

"I don't know. There's a good chance that she will if we don't get it cleaned out, and fast."

"Guys, I'm fine ... real-ly...." I said, falling to the ground.

## Chapter 16

"But you still haven't answered the question of how they managed to pass through the portals to begin with," Bronte said from the end of the elders table.

Alodie looked like she was ready to snap. Everyone had been pointing the finger in her direction and demanding answers to how Valhalla could have been invaded. She was as clueless as the rest of us, but everyone looked for a scapegoat and as her eyes darted towards me, I knew that she'd found one. She pointed her long finger at me and stood up.

"There, there is your problem. She brought a man back in our midst as an equal!"

The elders all turned their attentions to me. Gregory tried to stand and I put my hand on his knee to stop him. I stood slowly and had to lean on Gregory to keep my balance. I hadn't felt quite right since Corbin had bitten me. Gregory patted my hand gently to let me know that he was there to support me. I looked up into Alodie's cold blue eyes and let her see my anger. She stiffened a bit, no doubt worried that I might decide to burn her alive. It was a thought, but I didn't think I'd have to resort to that—at least I hoped not.

"My bringing Gregorios back with me, as my equal, had nothing to do with the demons coming through the portals. They have found a way to access the grounds and we need to be focused on that, not pointing fingers at one another. They've been heavily recruiting from the same power sources we have. Who knows who they've got on their side now, and what they're capable of?"

Bronte stood and pounded on the table. It was a way to show support. I watched as others followed. When Annice started to show her support,

Alodie had no choice but to join in. She put her hands up to indicate that she wanted to speak. All fell silent.

She looked at me. "You and Gregorios are to put together a team and go in search of more supernatural potentials, and then we shall attack the demons in their home—on their grounds ... they have brought the fight to our front door. Let them see what we are truly capable of."

"Excuse me," Gregorios said. He stood slowly and moved close to me. "I think that they may have come here strictly for Valerie."

We all turned and looked at him—shocked. It was Alodie who finally asked him to clarify what it was he talked about, and he did. "They never once attacked us, they went for her, but none of their shots were fatal." He reached out and touched my shoulder. "They went for areas that would not kill her, and when the one bit her he said that his master wants her."

"It is a trap." I heard my mother's voice and turned, surprised to see that she'd left the house. She moved down the center isle. She wore one of her long white gowns that I loved on her. Gregory had commented that she looked more like my sister than my mother, and it was true, she didn't look to be much older than me. Her eyes met mine. "Do not leave Valhalla, Linnea, I beg you."

Alodie cleared her throat. "If you do not mind, my lady, I believe, as does the rest of the board that we need to be fully prepared to fight the coming war. We need your daughter to find more men, she and Gregorios are the only two who can handle themselves against the magic that the demons have now. As much as we respect you, and want to honor your wishes, we have to do what is right for Valhalla."

My mother looked up at Alodie and shook her head. "Do you really think that I would suggest anything that wasn't right for Valhalla? I love this place, even more than you. I've sacrificed much to be here, and you know this, Alodie."

The way my mother said her name made me think that Alodie knew more of the story than I did, but now wasn't the time or place to push that. I filed that away for another date and took Gregory's hand in mine. "I will go in search of more men, but I will do it alone."

Gregory yanked me to him. "No, Valerie, this is suicide. You can't go alone, take me, take the team, take all of Valhalla, just don't go alone."

"I will go with Gregorios and Valerie," Beau's strong voice boomed over the entire room. I started to shake my head, but Alodie nodded.

"Very well, prepare to leave at once. We will send additional Valkyries out to retrieve the souls from you. This will save you from having to stop back here unnecessarily."

I knew that there was no point in arguing with Alodie, she knew that I didn't want Gregorios, or anyone else for that matter, to be hurt, and that's why she insisted I take them with me. I pushed past Gregory and started past my mother. She grabbed my arm and pulled me to her. She pressed her mouth to my ear and whispered softly. "Do not go, it's a trap. I have dreamt of your Scotsman two nights in a row."

I couldn't move. She had never once mentioned Kerr in the last four years. Now, I wasn't sure what to do. I touched her shoulder and looked back at the board of elders. They were watching us with wide eyes. I smiled at them and nodded.

"It begins tonight."

## Chapter 17

"I grabbed everything that you told me to," Beau said, his arms full of three backpacks. I put my hand out over them and they morphed into bags more appropriate for Italy in the 1700's. Beau smiled and set them down gently. "Watching you work your magic never gets old."

"Thanks, I think," I said, brushing past him to head to my wardrobe. I put my hands on it and thought of our destination. I opened the door and pulled out three white wigs. I handed one to Beau and he looked at it like it would bite.

"It's time to play dress up or you don't come," I said, unwilling to give even an inch on this. I handed the shorter of the two jackets in the wardrobe to Beau, and then gave him his pants and boots to match.

He looked down at the pile and then back to me. "They're baby blue."

"I know, mine's not much better, stay there, you're going to have to help me with this one." I turned my back to him and undressed. I reached in and grabbed my under garments. I pulled the corset on and turned back to Beau, holding my arm across my breasts, and shrugged. "Yeah, and you thought yours was bad"

Beau's eyes were on my breasts. I touched his chin and he looked up at me lazily. "I'm sorry, did you say something?"

I laughed softly and turned around. "Help me lace this up, please."

"Sure," he said. I felt his fingers moving up my back. His breath was hot against my neck and I wondered what he must be thinking about.

"How are things with Sorena going?"

Beau made a tiny noise and his fingers moved up to my shoulders. He turned me to him and looked down at my breasts. They were pushed up high, and looked like they were being offered to him. "Sorena is good. She is worried about me leaving, but I told her I'd be fine."

I was happy to hear that they were still together. He'd started dating another Valkyrie six months earlier. In fact, most of the men were now dating. The elders were starting to lose their grip on Valhalla, but maybe it was for the best. It worked out nicely, but the men outnumbered us three to one, so not everyone was happy.

The door opened and Gregory walked in. He took one look at Beau and I, and spun on his heels to leave.

"Gregory, no, wait!"

He stopped, but he didn't turn around. Beau moved past us with his clothes in hand and shut the door behind him. I was thankful that he didn't try to smooth things over. I put my hand on Gregory's back and let my cheek rest against him. "I love you."

I reached my hands around him, and his fingers found mine. "I know ... I just can't shake the feeling that I'm going to lose you to another man. The dreams are getting worse."

"The ones where I run off with a demon?" I asked, unable to hide the amusement in my voice. It was so absurd.

"The ones where you are a demon, Valerie," he said, turning his body to me. "I keep seeing you as demon, and you're with another man. I try and get you back, but you won't come, you don't even know me." He tipped his head back and I knew that he fought his emotions. I'd had to wake him too many times during the night because he screamed out in a cold sweat, to not take him seriously. He kissed the top of my head and pulled me close to him. "The last one was the worst."

"Why?"

His body stiffened, and he held me so tight to him that he started to cut my air off. I had to tap on him to get him to let go. "I ran a sword straight through you, Valerie. I killed you. Your blood was on my hands, and I held you as you took your last breath."

I laughed softly and he jerked me back from him. His green eyes found me and they were wild. I'd never seen him this worked up before. "This isn't funny! I'm going to lose you and I know it."

I shook my head. "I'm not going anywhere. I love you."

"Yet, you won't accept my proposal."

I let out a sigh. "Not this again, Gregory. I can't marry you, they won't allow it."

"We've been together so long and you still won't let me lift my magic from you so that we can conceive a child. You won't marry me ... you won't make any commitment to me at all. How am I not supposed to be concerned?"

I couldn't tell him that I was already married. I'd never told him about Kerr, and he'd never asked. I think he suspected that there was someone dear to me once, but he wasn't the type who demanded answers. This need for a commitment from me was new, but the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. We'd been together for four years, Valhalla time, and around eighty years on earth time.

"Yes, Gregorios, I will marry you when we get to Italy."



At first he looked shocked, and then he picked me up in his arms and swung me around. He stopped and looked into my eyes. "Children too?"

The mere mention of having a child set me on the verge of tears. I looked away from him and he kissed the top of my head again. "We will wait until it's safe for you. I don't want you to suffer another loss."

I looked up at him with questions in my eyes. He smiled at me softly and touched my chin as he spoke. "The first night we laid together, when you asked me to use my magic to keep you from conceiving, I felt the loss in your womb when my power swept through it. I've known that you lost two children since then."

I started to cry. For the children I'd lost, for Gregory not feeling like he could share this with me, for my not sharing it with him, but most of all for Kerr. My love for him had never died and this opened old wounds. Gregory started to rock me back and forth. "I'm not asking you to forget him. I'm just asking you to give me a chance to make you as happy as he did, that's all."

I grabbed Gregory by his hand and pulled him behind me as I ran from my room. I ran across the field and down the lane to Alodie's home. Gregory followed close behind me, but never asked what I was doing. I pounded on her door and waited for her to answer. She cracked the door open and it took me a minute to catch my breath.

"I'm ... I'm going to marry Gregorios," I said.

She smiled and gave me a very smug look. "No, you're not, my Queen."

"What?"

"You heard me. Bronte has nominated you for our Queen and now I've decided to second that nomination."

My mouth fell open. She knew exactly what she did. She made it impossible for me to marry Gregory. If I was the official leader, the Queen of Valhalla, then I was only permitted to wed royalty, if I wed at all. The only royalty that was worthy of the Queen were Fey, creatures of magic, mostly faerie, and as far as I knew Gregorios didn't fit the bill.

Gregory put his hand on my shoulder. "Accept her offer, Valerie. I understand that you can't marry me."

I shook my head. "No, we'll marry before it's official and she'll have no choice but to accept you as my husband."

Alodie laughed. "Oh, I'm sorry, but it's official as of now. Consider yourself warned. The anointing ceremony will take place one week from today. Unless you can prove he's fey, if not you'll have to find another suitor."

I spun around and snatched Gregorios' hand. He tried to stop me and talk to me, but I wouldn't listen to him. I rushed back to my room and grabbed my dress. I threw his clothing at him and stormed around the room. He caught me by my waist and tossed me on the bed. I looked up with wild eyes and realized that this was the only option I'd left him with to get my attention.

His green eyes blazed and his jaw was tight. "Stop, and listen to me! I love you regardless of what they say, and I'll keep on loving you. They can't stop that ... they can't stop me from loving you, Valerie."

I looked at the bags on the floor and back at Gregory. I'd let one man slip through my fingers. I wouldn't let another. Alodie could keep her rules, and I would keep Gregory.

"Let's do it, let's get married anyway." I spoke softly, afraid that Alodie would somehow hear me.

His mouth came down on mine. I drank in his tongue, and pulled his body closer to me. I ran my hands up his back and wanted more than anything to have him inside me, but I knew that time was of the essence so I pulled back from him. He stood slowly and brought me with him. He was so sweet and helped me into my dress. Beau appeared in the doorway and it took me a minute to recognize him. I'd seen him dress as a pirate, and a Viking before, but I'd never seen him like this. I laughed a little and Gregory turned to see him standing there.

Beau rolled his eyes. "Just wait, it'll take you four days to figure the damn clothes out."

Gregory snapped his fingers and he was dressed and ready. I was even impressed with that one. I'd never seen anything like it from him before. It shouldn't have caught me off guard. His powers seemed to grow by the minute. I was pretty sure that he was now more powerful than even me. I looked up at Beau and then at Gregory. "Just so you know ... I'm planning on disobeying Alodie on our little trip."

Beau laughed. "So, how is this different than any other time you leave?"

We all laughed as we headed towards the waterfalls.

## Chapter 18

"Mi sono divertito moloto." The older man said more to Gregory and Beau than me, and I was the only one who could understand him. He walked down the hall, and we followed close behind.

Gregory leaned over and took my arm in his. "What did he just say to us?"

I smiled. "He said to make yourself comfortable."

"Good, for a minute there I was worried that he'd tried to proposition me again."

I watched as il singor Biordo walked us to our rooms. Gregory was right to be concerned, Mr. Biordo had already tried to seduce him and Beau several times since we had arrived. I knew then why he ran an inn. He liked men and what better way to meet them than to offer rooms to them? He'd taken a particular interest in Gregory. I was sure that it was because he was more boyish than Beau. Gregory's face was smooth and void of any signs of facial hair. His chest was the same way. Beau on the other hand had a five o'clock shadow by eleven in the morning. Apparently, this wasn't exactly what Mr. Biordo was into, but he'd take it. He turned and winked at the men as he motioned to our rooms.

Gregory laced his hand in mine. I smiled and shook my head lightly—adjusted myself to hear in English, not Italian, and smiled. It was another extension of my gift, like a built in translator. I could speak to Mr. Biordo and he would hear his language, Beau and Gregory would hear English.

Mr. Biordo looked at Gregory holding my hand and looked displeased. I smiled and patted Gregory's hand. "Mio martio ... my husband." It wasn't the complete truth, but close. I did plan on marrying him soon.

Every time I thought of marriage, I thought of Kerr. It made my chest tight to think of him being changed into a vampire. I spent the first year without him wondering every day that I woke, if this was the day that he walked into the sunlight. I thought for sure that I'd feel it when he died—when he gave up and let the light of day take him. But I never did. Maybe I wasn't as close to Kerr as I had thought.

Gregory pulled me to him and kissed my painted cheek. He led me into our room and nodded at Beau as he entered his own room. I looked around at the lavish furnishings and laughed as Gregory tossed his wig aside and stripped off his clothes. I leaned over and saw that Mr. Birodo had not yet left the doorway and most likely would not if he believed he would get to see Gregory naked.

"We have company," I said to Gregory as he lifted me in the air.

He didn't bother to turn around. "Let him watch, I need you now, Valerie, this can't wait. My loins are on fire, and I need you now!"

I ran my hand down the length of him and found what I was looking for, him hard. I smiled and pulled his lip with my teeth. "Mmm, you're right, this can't wait." He lifted me higher and I looked over his shoulder at Mr. Birodo. "Thank you, and good night."

Mr. Birodo licked his lips a little as he closed the door. I was betting that he would be peeking in shortly, but I didn't think Gregory cared. I know I didn't. I ran my fingers through Gregory's hair, untwisting it from the tie that now held it back. I let the silky strands fall loose around me. I was surrounded in a blanket of blonde and I loved every minute of it. I never tired of him. His mouth came down on mine and his hands worked their way up and under my dress.

"Wait," I said, wanting us to be as safe as possible. His hand touched my stomach and he knew what I wanted him to do, but he didn't look like he was happy about it. "I can't risk this now, we have too many enemies."

Gregory nodded and kissed my cheeks lightly. "The second that you're ready, you'll tell me, right?"

"Of course I will! I want a family with you."

"I'll settle for practicing now," he said, his voice low with an edge of humor in it.

## Chapter 19

"Stephan, wait, we mean you no harm!" I cried out as I ran down the alley after the potential we'd come in search of. He was fast for a mortal, I'd give him that. According to the information we had on him, he had the ability to move things with his mind. I think we may have underestimated him a bit. He'd already sent a cart full of bread pummeling into Beau and when Gregory tried to use magic to stop him, he deflected it back at him.

I'd fallen behind a little, making sure that my men were okay, but gained fast on Stephan now. He was one of many potentials that I'd gone in search of over the years that misunderstood our intent, and thought that we were the devil come to take their souls to hell. Stephan would most likely end up there if he didn't stop running from me and let me help him. I sensed some serious negative energy around us, and my money was on demons. They always seemed to be one step ahead of us, and I got sick and tired of it.

I caught sight of Stephan's skinny little body turning down another alley. I thought he was part cat, the way he landed on all fours with every twist and turn he took. I seriously regretted my decision to wear authentic clothing to search in each era. My boots weren't made for running, and my arms hurt from holding up all of the excess material that my costume had. I'd fallen over it twice already and didn't want to do it again.

I hit the corner and turned fast. I stopped dead in my tracks and couldn't believe what my eyes were seeing. Stephan's back was to me, and his feet were at least a foot and a half off the ground. He was being turned by the vampire that now held him captive.

I ran towards Stephan and tried to rip his body free of the vamp. The vampire tore its mouth away from Stephan's neck and hissed at me. Its twisted face held eyes of black and fangs that would send any man running. I was normally a little put off when a vamp showed me its true form, but there was something about this one, something familiar. Its long, dark red hair hung in silky waves to his mid-back. I looked harder at it and saw a tiny white scar on his chin, the one I'd learned to love so many years ago.

"Kerr?"

I said his name as he dropped Stephan and grabbed me. I had the power to destroy vampires, but I couldn't use it against Kerr. I reached out to touch his face and he threw my body to the ground. I cried out as his six foot five frame fell on me. He pinned my body down and struck my exposed neck with his mouth. Corbin's bite still had odd effects on me, and now with Kerr pulling blood from me, I could feel his cool, static-like energy pushing through me. I tried to pry his face from me, but he wouldn't budge, he grabbed my wrists and pinned my arms back as he continued to feed from me.

I could feel my body growing cold. I tried to focus on anything that would help me bring my Kerr back to me, but for every bit of blood he drew from me, he clouded my mind.

I thought of Gregory and screamed out as the image of his face dissolved away. I tried to concentrate on what had just upset me, but I came up with nothing. I had no memories and I knew that I should. I couldn't think clearly, and there was something, someone on me. I felt the pain in my neck and hit at the creature on me. It pulled its head back. Its mouth oozed blood. I tried to keep my eyes open long enough to see what the monster was going to do next, but I was so tired. The last thing I heard was the creature saying, "Linnea?"

## Chapter 20

I felt like I swam in a sea of nothingness. I reached my arms out, but there was nothing, no one there to grab onto. I didn't fall—so much as I glided downwards. All I knew was that it was cold, so very cold. I called out, hoping that someone would hear me. My body fell faster now, and the pit of my stomach hollowed as I plunged into the black abyss.

I screamed out and opened my eyes. My mouth tasted like copper. I turned my head to the side and looked at my surroundings. The off white room was beautiful. I'd never seen such a sight. It seemed to go on forever. I sat up slowly, drawing the sheets up to cover my naked body. My hand brushed over something cool and I turned to see a man lying

next to me. I touched his dark blue jacket lightly and his eyes opened. They were as blue as his coat and took my breath away. He moved towards me and his long red hair fell forward.

"Linnea?"

I pulled the covers up higher and moved away from him. "Where am I?"

"You're safe, lass. I'm so sorry. I did not know it was you." He said, as he reached his hand to touch me. I jerked my leg away from him.

"Who are you?" I asked, unsure why this man was here with me, and why he kept calling me Linnea. I had a name. I just couldn't seem to remember what it was.

The man sat up and I saw for the first time how big he was. He was well over six feet tall and seemed to be solid muscle. He put his hand out to me and I screamed.

"No, Linnea ... it's me, Kerr."

I shook my head and tried to pull the cover out from under him so that I could stand. "Don't touch me!"

"What's wrong? Do you not know me, Linnea?"

"Who is Linnea? And, no, I don't know you." I spit the words at him, but even as I said them, they didn't feel true. My hand went to my lower stomach and I found myself rubbing it lightly, and thinking of this man Kerr.

He noticed me doing this too, and he smiled. "Yer startin' to remember," he said his voice thick with a Scottish accent.

"Remember what?"

"That is what I would like to know." I heard a man's voice say.

I turned my head and found a brown-haired man standing there. His light grey eyes found me and he smiled. "Hello, Linnea, it is nice to finally meet you."

I didn't say anything as he walked towards me. He was shorter than the man next to me, but still taller than me. His feet never touched the floor, yet he moved. I pulled back and closer to Kerr.

Kerr put his hand on my shoulder and I stiffened up. I wasn't sure if I should be afraid of him or hiding behind him. Kerr leaned his face up and exhaled deeply. I got the feeling that he wasn't happy to see our new visitor. "Valentino, what brings you here?"

"Oh, Kerr, I think you know why I'm here. I have come to sample the newest arrival. We in the vampire community have been waiting a long time for her to come. There has been much talk of her since," he put a finger to his chin and looked past me at Kerr, "shortly before you became one of us. Hmm, coincidental, don't you think?"

Valentino came to a stop next to the bed. He laid his pale hand on the sheet and pulled it slowly. I grabbed hold of it to keep it close to me. Kerr sat up and pulled my body towards him. Valentino's face changed. He smiled and looked at Kerr. "What is it about this one that has you so fired up?" He pulled the sheet more and my left breast came uncovered. "Ah, I can see why you like her so very much. Is she as good in bed as she looks?"

Kerr growled and pushed past me. Valentino laughed as he backed up. He reached his hand out to me and I felt compelled to take it. His hand was icy cold, but mine wasn't much warmer. I found myself moving to my knees and willed myself to stop. Kerr's large hands grabbed my waist and pulled me back to him. Having his hands on my bare skin broke the hold that Valentino seemed to have over me.

Valentino threw his hand out and Kerr cried out. I turned and found that Kerr's face was slit open. The cut started just under his right eye and went to his chin. I could see his jawbone and instantly I grabbed hold of him to apply pressure to his wound. The harder I looked into his blue eyes, the more I wanted to be close to him. My hands held his face closed and his blood ran through my fingers. I leaned forward and licked the trail of blood from the back of my hand and let it slide down my throat. When I got to his cheek, I licked along the edges of his fresh wound and let my eyes flutter closed. He tasted so good. Each and every drop of his blood held power--magic. His arms locked around my body and I worked my tongue in deeper, licking the edges of his raw bone. Heat flared between us, and I pulled back. Kerr's face began to heal, slowly at first, and then faster. He reached his hand up and ran it over his smooth skin.

"How?" Valentino asked from behind me.

I wasn't sure what had happened or why I'd felt compelled to taste Kerr's blood, but I knew one thing, my stomach was full, and now I wanted



something more, I wanted sex. I pressed my naked body against Kerr and went for his mouth. There was a sharp pain across my back, like someone had just struck me with a whip, followed closely by another. I spun my head around and found Valentino glaring at me.

"You will obey me, you are mine. I sired you! That thing that you cling to could not bring himself to make you one of us once he'd already drained you of your blood. He fought the good fight to leave you dead, but I have had my eye on you for some time, Linnea, and now you are mine."

I looked down at my back and saw that he'd slit it open in much the same fashion that he'd done Kerr's face in. I should have been scared, but I wasn't. I smiled and watched as my skin pulled back together. There wasn't so much as a drop of blood left on my pale white skin.

Valentino reached out to touch me and I flung my hand up at him. His body flew back against the wall. Kerr grabbed me by my shoulders and turned my face to him. His blue eyes locked on me and he looked worried. "Linnea, you mustn't provoke him, he's a monster."

I caught sight of Kerr's fangs and let my tongue run over my own. "So are we," I said pulling his mouth towards me. He threw me down and lunged over the top of me. At first I thought he came at me, but then I realized that he was headed for Valentino. Kerr's body slammed into his and the two flew up, off the ground, and into the wall. The room shook, and I jumped to my feet. I no longer cared if my body was covered or not.

Kerr was bleeding again, but now so was Valentino. I tried to push my way between them, but was met with a fist to the face. My head snapped back and my cheek felt like it was going to explode. I staggered backwards and tried to steady myself using a chair. My fingers ran over the smooth wood and a thought came to mind. I kicked out hard and the chair slammed into the wall, shattering into pieces in the process. I slid my foot under a piece of wood and kicked it up high into the air. I put my hand out and caught it without thought.

I raced at the men and saw that Kerr had just pressed Valentino's body to the wall. I ran past him with the wooden leg of the chair held firmly in my hand. I knew how to end this, somewhere deep inside of me I knew. I pulled my arm back and went to drive the stake into Valentino's chest. Kerr caught my wrist and jerked my body back. "NO!"

I looked at him with wild eyes. Valentino laughed as he wiped the blood from his lip. "If you kill me, Linnea, you die too. It is the price you pay

for being mine. Now, come to me and obey your master. I have needs, and your mouth can attend to them."

There was something in his voice, something that made me want to do as he said. I put my hand out and Kerr touched it lightly. Any thought I had of going to Valentino left the moment Kerr's fingers slid around mine.

Valentino turned and stormed towards the door. Kerr pulled me to him and I didn't fight when he lifted me into his arms. He took me and set me down on the edge of the bed. He turned and went to the chest nearest him, and came back with a long white nightgown.

"Here, put this on. He'll be back you know, and you can be sure he'll think of a way to separate us. He and I have not seen eye to eye since we met, he'll not be takin' the loss of you lightly. I expect that he'll come after you harder, now that he knows how I feel about you." He began to turn away, but I reached out and touched his hand. It was so large and rough. It looked like it should be smooth and silky, but it wasn't. I pulled it to my face and put the palm of his hand on my cheek. I didn't care that it was rough. I just wanted to feel his touch.

He dropped down in front of me, wrapped his arms around my waist, and let his head fall into my lap. "Linnea, I never thought I'd see you again. I prayed." He let out a laugh as he said this and then went on. "I prayed everyday that you'd fall from the sky near me and we'd be together again. I never met to hurt you. I did not know it was you until it was too late. So many times before I've thought a woman was you, only to find out that it was just my imagination running wild again." He hugged me tighter and kissed my thigh. "You finally come to me and I end up handing you right to the demons I died trying to save you from. I'm so sorry, Linnea, can you ever forgive me?"

I touched his head and let my fingers run through his red hair. I had no idea what he talked about, but he was upset and wanted my forgiveness, so I gave it to him. "It's okay, everything will be fine."

Kerr lifted his head slowly and planted a kiss on my lower abdomen. My body tightened under his touch. I put my hand on his cheek and tried to remember him. I tried to remember anything about myself. I came up empty. Kerr's eyes closed and his head tipped to the side.

"Do not strain yerself. You won't remember who I am for a long, long time, but when you do I will be there. I have seen it, and it gives me hope.

We will be together again, as we once were, as we had planned on being, but not for a very long time."

Every word that fell from his lips sounded so sweet. I loved listening to him speak. There was something about him, something that I couldn't put my finger on, and I knew that he was wrong. We'd be together sooner than he thought.

I lifted his head and brought my lips to his. He didn't respond to my advances. "No, Linnea, you do not have to do this out of pity for me. One day you will see me the way you once did, and I am willing to wait for the centuries for that to happen. I do not want you to have any regrets about us."

He rose to his feet and handed the gown to me. I took it from him and dropped it on the bed next to me. I stood up and let the sheets fall away as I walked towards the door.

"Linnea, where do you think yer goin'?"

"I need to feed."

"You fed from me, and my blood should sustain you for several days."

I turned to him and looked into his blue eyes. "That's not the hunger that I need to feed."

I saw the realization of what I told him cross over his strong face. "What have I done to you?"

I shrugged my shoulders and took another step towards the door. The air shifted slightly behind me and I knew that Kerr was there. His hands hovered near my back. I could sense the struggle within him, but I didn't care. I'd known him all of a day. I may have felt an attachment to him, but it wasn't stronger than my need for sex. Glancing back, I saw the hesitation on his face.

"Either fuck me, or let me leave to go and find someone who will," I said, void of any real emotion.

"Linnea, all I've wanted to do for the past thirty-five years is be in you, and hold you again, but I want it to be you, not whatever it is that stands before me now." He grabbed me and spun me around. He shook my shoulders as he yelled at me to remember him.

"I don't know you! Don't you understand that?"

He let go of me and I fell backwards. He tried to pick me up, but I jerked my arm away from him. "Linnea, if I told you our history you'd be in great danger. Valentino would destroy you, just to get back at me. He hates that I am not quite forty years dead and as powerful as he is. He has been alive for many centuries and he does not share power well."

I pushed off the floor and ran for the door. Kerr tackled me and we both hit the floor. I looked up at him, strangely excited by his aggression. He started to apologize to me, but I licked his neck. "Do it again," I said.

"Linnea," he said, pinning my body to the floor. I could feel him growing hard under his pants, and I could smell his desire for me. Each breath I took made my body grow damp. I tried to kiss him, but he turned his head from me. Anger spread throughout me quickly. Heat flared and I looked up to see that I held a small ball of fire. Kerr saw it too. "No, Linnea, you don't want to do this. When you remember me you will regret this."

I looked up at the fire that seemed to spin in my hand and smiled. "You'll regret this more if you don't get off of me."

## Chapter 21

I pushed the inn to the door open. After I'd left Kerr I'd felt drawn to here. I had gotten some odd looks from passerby in the street, no doubt from my wearing only a thin night gown, but I didn't care. I needed to get to the inn, but I didn't know why. I felt someone watching me again, and knew that Kerr was still there. I'd been sensing him since I'd left. I hadn't actually seen him yet, but I knew that he was there.

"Madame, what are you doing walking around in that," a short pudgy man asked as I walked into the inn. "Your party has been looking for you for three days now. Where have you been?"

I moved closer to him. He had a smell about him, not offensive, but rather the smell of something wrong—something evil. I took a deeper breath and closed my eyes. I saw this fat little man touching little boys, in ways that he shouldn't. He forced himself on them, using them to pleasure himself. I opened my eyes and looked at him. He was evil, even more than me. I couldn't allow him to hurt another child so I took matters into my own hands. I grabbed hold of him and bared his neck. My teeth grew, as I knew they would and I sank them deep into him. I drank until I could drink no more, and then I drained him, careful not to get blood all over my white gown.

I dropped his limp body to the floor and licked my lips clean of him. I heard something then, something familiar. I moved towards the staircase and listened closer.

"I don't give a damn what Alodie says. We need more men here to find Valerie," a deep voice said.

"Beau, we can't risk the men. I love her too. She just finally agreed to marry me."

I knew that voice. I took the stairs two at a time and ran towards the voices. I hit the door and it burst open. Two men stood before me. One with short, dark brown hair and tanned skin, the other with long blonde hair and pale skin, both looked shocked to see me.

"Valerie," the brown-haired said, running towards me. He swept me up in his arms and spun me around. "Gregory and I thought you were dead, we thought that ... oh, God, Val, you're ... cold." He touched my cheek as he put me down. "You're ice cold, Val, what's wrong?"

"Get away from it, Beau!" the blonde one yelled.

Beau turned to the tall blonde and I could sense his confusion. "Gregory, what's going on ... Val's back. She's...."

Gregory lifted his hand and Beau was sent hurtling away from me. I looked down at the man on the floor and smiled. My tongue ran over my fangs and his eyes widened. I turned to Gregory and started towards him. He flicked his wrist in my direction and I felt like someone had just hit me with a bat in the stomach. I clutched my midriff and fell to my knees.

Beau screamed out and tried to run to me, but Gregory stopped him. "She'd kill you without a second thought. That's not Valerie."

I was confused. "Why do you call me this? My name is Linnea." I tried to stand up, but he sent another wave of his magic at me. I screamed out and clutched the rug. "Why do hurt me? I am drawn to you, and you hurt me?" I could feel the tears welling up, and wasn't sure why.

Gregory looked at Beau and ordered him out of the room. Beau protested and Gregory looked at me. "I made you a promise in South America. We promised to destroy the other if we ever fell victim to the demon side."

"NO!" Beau screamed out. Gregory sent his power out at Beau and hit him with such a force that he was knocked unconscious.

Gregory lifted his arms and his face was streaked with tears. "I'm sorry, Valerie, but I can't let you live like this, you're too powerful and could hurt too many people."

There was a swooping noise behind me and then I heard Kerr's voice. "Don't kill her, I beg you. She was selective in her choice for a kill. She picked an evildoer when she had passed at least twenty other people on her way here to find you."

"Who are you?" Gregory asked, looking at Kerr.

"He's the Scot ... the man before you ... the one that she...." Beau rubbed the back of his head as he sat up.

Gregory's green eyes narrowed. "You did this to her? She loved you for over a hundred years. She just finally agreed to marry me. I knew that she grieved for someone, but I never realized that someone was a vampire." Gregory's head dropped down. "She never got over losing you or the babies, never, and this is what you do to her?"

Kerr pulled me into his arms and put his body in front of mine. "Magic-man, I do not want to hurt you, she obviously loves you. She didn't hesitate to hurt me to get to you. She's no memory of us, or what she was, and for the record I was the one who attacked her ... I did not know it was her until it was too late ... but, I was not her maker, I fought against her being brought over." Kerr's body stiffened. "I was not always a vampire. I was just a man—I was her husband once, long ago."

Gregory put his arms down and shook his head. "She can't be one of them now," he said, choking back tears. "She can't be gone. She's got to be in there somewhere, right? We can get her back, we can save her."

"She will be saved, but not for two hundred years, and it will be you who brings her back to us. Mark my words."

Gregory looked confused. I bet he wasn't near as lost as I was. I didn't have a clue who or what they were talking about. I still wanted sex, and they wanted to stand around and discuss the future. Kerr's hand moved back and he pulled my body to him. "I give you my word that I will watch over her, and keep innocents safe from her. I ask you, please do not destroy her. I promise you that she will come back to us eventually, we must keep her safe until then."

"Why should I trust you now? You're one of them," Gregory said.

Kerr sighed before he spoke again. "Because when I held her dying in my arms I could read her thoughts, she was both happy and shocked to have me alive, but she knew she was dying and she worried about you, and if you would be alright without her." Kerr looked over at the candlesticks on the table and they flew across the room and landed gently at Gregory's feet. "If I had wanted to kill you I could have. You're not the only magic-man here, but her love for you is strong, and I will not hurt her to stop you, and I know that there will be an end to this one day."

"Your word that you will keep her from harming innocents?"

Kerr nodded. "You have my word."

I put my hands on Kerr's shoulders and rubbed them. I couldn't wait any longer for sex. I needed it now. It wouldn't wait. I moved my hands down and pulled at his pants. He grabbed my wrists and pulled me around to face him. "Linnea, I will not do this with you, not now. I will not take you like this. Remember me and I will, but not until."

"What's wrong with her?" Gregory asked.

"Her maker is known for his strong sexual urges, and I believe that he has passed them on to her," Kerr said, looking down at me with lips so lovely that I tried to kiss them again, very unsuccessfully.

"So, you're saying that she not only drinks blood now, but also has the need for...?" Gregory asked, not finishing his sentence.

Kerr nodded. "I will leave you to say yer good-byes. Do not harm her, I am warning you. And, you," he looked at me, "do not draw blood from him. Am I clear?"

"Yes," I said. He walked backwards from the room and pulled the broken doors closed.

"I will be right here," Kerr said, more to Gregory, the magic-man, than to me.

I looked harder at Gregory and thought of how lovely his soft face was. He had never lost that young man charm and didn't look like he was out of his early twenties, but I was sure that he was much older than that. His silky blonde hair hung down and over his shoulders. He wasn't as muscular as Kerr, but almost as tall, and every inch of him looked toned and tight.

He took a step towards me and it was me who backed up this time. I wasn't sure if I should trust him, he'd already struck me down once, there was nothing stopping him from doing it again. His green eyes locked on me and I watched another tear fall down his cheek.

"Why do you weep?" I asked.

He did a partial laugh, partial sob and took another step to me, closing the distance between us in the process. He put his hand on my arm and caressed it gently. "You're so cold." I looked down at his hand and then back at his face. As hard as I tried to understand the attachment he had to me, I couldn't. I only knew that I wanted to not only be touched by him, but touch him as well.

"If I touch you, will you do your hurtful magic on me again?" I asked.

He let out a loud sob and pulled me to him. He buried my head in his warm chest and cried. I knew that I should have felt something, anything, but I didn't. My only thoughts were on sex, and I was too afraid of Gregory to ask for it. I knew that he held the power to kill me, and I didn't want to die. I looked towards the window and sensed that the sun would be rising soon. I knew, without having to be told, that I could no longer walk in the light.

"I must go, I need to feed and the sun will be up soon."

He pulled back from me and lifted his white shirt over his head. I gave him a puzzled look as he started to pull his pants off too. He tossed them aside and stood naked before me. I wanted to hold the length of him in my hand and to press my lips to it, but I was still afraid that he would hurt me, that this was some cruel joke on his part to lure me to my death.



Gregory pressed his body against mine and pulled my gown over my head. I didn't fight him. I wanted him to take me then and there. He put his warm hand on my stomach and I flinched. "No, I won't hurt you. I'm going to make sure that you do not conceive a child before you are back to yourself. Is that alright with you?"

I nodded and instantly felt a hot wave of his magic push through me. It rolled around my insides and pushed up and out my limbs. I cried out and tipped my head back. Gregory lifted me high in the air and I wrapped my legs around his waist. I pushed down hard on him, not giving him an opportunity to change his mind, and felt the full length of him slam into me. I screamed out, a cross between pleasure and pain.

The door to the room burst open and I knew without looking that Kerr was there. I could feel his anger, his pain, and his sorrow, but I didn't care. I'd given him a chance to feed this need I had, and he had declined. I pressed my lips to Gregory's and rode his body with a speed that I didn't know I possessed. I could feel the magic-man's power moving through me and I felt my own magic answer it. I screamed out and hissed as my orgasm seized me. My fangs flared and I wanted to strike Gregory's neck. I wanted to taste his warm, powerful blood in my mouth, but something held me back.

I felt his body tighten and knew that he released his hot cum deep within me. I arched my back and accepted all of him. The urge to draw his blood hit me again and I pushed myself off him and fell to the floor. He dropped down and tried to pick me up, but I could smell how fresh his blood would be and I wasn't strong enough to control my impulses yet. "Get away!"

"What?"

Kerr appeared next to me and lifted me into his arms. I didn't fight him. I just put my head against his shoulder as he walked towards the door. "Her demon wants to drink from you, but the woman we love is in there somewhere and she won't let it hurt you. Do not try to find her again, at least not for some time. You may be her undoing if you do, and I do not want to see the demon within her win."

Gregory said nothing as he covered me with a blanket. The tears running down his face told me that he loved me, I just didn't understand why.

## Chapter 22

"I'm bored," I said looking out at the city below. Philadelphia wasn't what I'd thought it would be. I'd had grand illusions of the new world and seeing it now made me feel like a fool. Kerr hadn't wanted to come at all, but I knew that if I came, so would he. I put my arm in his and pulled him to the window.

"Do you smell that? There are so many horrible people here. We could feed for months and still there'd be more to drink from," I said.

Valentino laughed and Kerr's arm flexed. The two hadn't gotten along once since I'd met them, and now ten years later, they were not showing any more signs of getting along. Valentino had received word from one of his higher ups that we were to go and explore the Americas to see if they were suitable for some of our older vampires to be transported to. Europe wasn't as safe as it had once been. Our kind had come under heavy attack by the forces of good in the last ten years.

Valentino came up behind me and put his arms around me. He pressed his body hard against mine so that I would notice how willing he was to take me where we stood. I rolled my eyes and rubbed Kerr's arm. Valentino leaned down and whispered in my ear. "I can smell your need for a fuck. I can give you that and so much more, Linnea."

"You have nothing that I want. The one I want still does not want me, so I will be heading out shortly to handle my little problem."

Valentino twisted my body to face him and did his best intimidating face. He didn't scare me. He could be ruthless, but so could I. "You forget that I am the one who made you. You are mine, and you share my weakness for sex. If you would just give in, we could satisfy both our needs. I am not an unattractive man, so why do you continue to push me away?"

I let out a laugh. "Oh, it's not your looks that I have a problem with, Valentino, it's your meal choices."

He rolled his eyes and let his tongue slide over his lips. "Not this again, Linnea. I am tired of your quest to save innocents and only feed from evil doers."

It was Kerr who spoke next. "You knew what she was when you made her, you could not of have thought that she'd give up her ways of tryin' to do good. It's her nature."

I waved my hands in the air and walked towards the door. "Enough with boring talk of days I have no memories of. I live for the moment, and right now the moment is telling me that I want to find a man. I have a burning between my legs that needs to be satisfied." I opened the door and started out.

"You claim that you have feelings for her, yet you let her whore around with any human she chooses," Valentino said to Kerr as I stepped out into the hallway.

I heard Kerr's deep voice and knew that he was close to striking Valentino. "It keeps her grounded—making love to the humans. If she sees them as something to be taken care of, caressed, and loved, then she does not fully turn into what we've become."

I left the two of them arguing and headed down to find my next snack. I didn't need blood. Kerr and I had found a group of men trying to rob a local merchant and they'd made a fine meal for the three of us. I did need sex--I always needed sex. I'd had so many human lovers back in Europe who kept me satisfied, but none that I wanted to keep. I was never really attracted to them to start with. I normally selected a man who I found to be handsome and used him for sex—most were only good for that, so it worked well.

I made my way to the crowded street. I had no worries about walking the streets alone in a big city at night. No, if anyone tried anything foolish it would be the last thing they ever did. The streets had been crowded since we'd arrived and now the masses were gathering around men who were shouting about the death of Benjamin Franklin. I tried to walk past a group. The men backed up and two slammed into me. They fell to the ground, I didn't. I had to fake stumbling just to keep their suspicions down. It wasn't everyday that a five foot seven woman knocks two burly men on their backsides just standing still.

I dropped down onto the cool brick and regretted it the minute I felt the water from the earlier rains soaking through my dress. Neither one of the

men seemed interested in my well-being—they were more interested in what one of the local loons was going on about. I pushed myself up and started to wipe my soiled dress off.

Strong arms grabbed me and ripped me off my feet. I was halfway down an alley before I was able to get my wits about me enough to fight back. I twisted and my body dropped to the ground. I looked up into my attacker's pale face and knew that he was like me—a vampire. His thin oval face and beady black eyes made me uncomfortable. I knew this brown-haired man from somewhere, but I couldn't place him. I knew that I didn't like him, but I didn't know why.

"Linnea, you're too late again," he said dryly.

"Too late for what?" I asked, unsure if he was mad or simply stupid. I leaned towards the latter of two.

"Come now my dear, let us not play games, it is I, Captain Corbin, as if you didn't know. You have been a worthy opponent all these years, but you will not be taking the wizard back with you, he belongs to my side now." His fangs flashed and his face twisted.

I smiled and let my fangs show. He stopped his show of power and stood very still. "And what, may I ask, side is it you are referring to, Captain Corbin?"

"No!" he shouted as he lunged at me. I sidestepped him and he fell flat on his face. "This cannot be. I bit you, my master gave me some of his power, he said that it would allow us to track you, not turn you."

I let out a loud laugh. "Oh, little man, I have no clue what you're talking about, but I can assure you that you had nothing to do with me being here today."

He rose quickly to his feet and tried to lunge at me again. He caught the side of my arm with his nails and ripped it open. I cried out, and pushed his body away from mine.

The air around us grew cold. Corbin tackled me to the ground and I brought my leg up fast to deflect him from me. I turned to get to my feet and he was suddenly on my back. I screamed out and felt like someone poked thousands of tiny icicles in me at one time. Corbin screamed out too, and rolled off of me. I turned and looked at him, he was covered in blood. I looked at my arms, expecting to see the same—I was fine. I

touched my face to be sure, but nothing was hurt on me. Another blast of icy wind blew past me and Corbin screamed out again.

I turned around and saw a man standing at the end of the alley. His brown eyes found me and he smiled. I drew in a deep breath when I saw his white teeth shining at me through his rose-colored lips. His creamy olive skin and long black curls told me that he was most likely Italian, and I liked Italians. He took a step towards me and I heard Corbin get to his feet and run away.

The tall muscular man came running towards me. He extended his hand out to me. "Are you alright?" He asked, his voice thick with an Italian accent. I was right about him. I nodded and took his hand. He pulled me to my feet and looked in the direction in which Corbin had run. "I am sorry for you. He has been following me since I arrived here. I would have stopped him earlier if I had known that he was such a threat. I just thought that he was another crazy vamp...." He stopped before he finished his sentence.

I took a deep breath in, this man was full of power and magic, but he was mortal. He reached out and touched my lip. He wiped it off and came away with blood on his hand. "We should get you cleaned up."

"What are you?" I asked.

"Do not worry, I would never hurt you." He pulled a piece of debris out of my hair and let it fall to the ground. "Mi chiamo Lucha," he said, and then shook his head. "Sorry, my name is Lucha. And you are?"

"Linnea."

He touched my hand and then looked down at me. "You are cold, like...."

"A vampire," I finished his thought for him, and smiled. "Don't worry I would never hurt you." I said smiling at up at him as I spun his promise back at him.

"This is lovely," I said looking around the large house. Lucha didn't seem that impressed with it. He shrugged and smiled.

"It is small compared to my home in Italy."

"Why are you here then?"

He nodded. "My father asked that I come to the new country to set up his business here as well. I have been here for close to a year now and am scheduled to return home within the next year."

I looked around at all the gold and fine silks and wondered what exactly Lucha's family business was. He led me into the dining area and I immediately noticed that he had no chairs around his large richly colored table. There was a vase full of flowers on it, and several books, but no chairs. I looked up at him. He watched me, grinning from ear to ear.

"I live alone, and never do I entertain. Come," he said, motioning me towards the large staircase.

As much as my body needed sex, I couldn't take it from him, it didn't feel right. He had been kind and he had a way about him that put him a step above the mortal men that I used to satisfy my needs with. No, Lucha did not fit that particular mold, problem was, I didn't know exactly what I felt for him. Intrigued maybe?

I climbed the staircase behind him, watching how his pants fit snugly around his lovely backside. The more I looked at his six foot tall frame, the more I was able to see beneath the richly dressed exterior to the muscular man that hid below. Lucha's strong body told me that he wasn't just a rich man's son, no, he was physically active as well, and that combination was hard to find. More often than not, I'd find myself sleeping with men who were thin and void of any real definition, only because they were rich and didn't bother with manual labor or working their muscles. After spending years with Kerr by my side, I craved a man who was toned and powerful. I craved Kerr, but he was untouchable. He'd made it very clear that he would not sleep with me.

Lucha opened the first door on the right for me and stood back. He lifted his arm and motioned for me to go in. I peeked around the corner and the room took my breath away. Its walls were a peach color, like none I'd ever seen before and the wall opposite the large bed was strikingly beautiful. Someone had painted a scene with a woman lying on a fainting sofa. Her naked backside showed, and every bit of her looked soft, and

exotic. Her arms reached upward and there was a ray of light coming from somewhere that the artist didn't show, but made you feel was heaven. I tried to see the woman's face. I wanted her to turn her head, as if she were truly there. Her long, wavy, dark brown hair that bordered on black was swept up, but just enough of it had fallen to avoid being able to see her facial features. It looked so vivid that I had to touch it to make sure that she really wasn't standing there. I looked at Lucha with my hand out and he nodded. I let my fingers slide gently over the masterpiece and could feel the love that had gone into it.

I turned to Lucha. "Did you do this?"

He smiled and nodded his head. "Yes, do you like it?"

"It's exquisite, it reminds me of Michelangelo."

"Yes," he said moving closer to me. "I was greatly inspired by him among others. I do not care so much for the way artists are painting now. I prefer this style." His hand moved over mine and I felt a rush of excitement go through my body. I wanted him and I could smell his desire for me, yet still I did not want to use him for my needs. I turned to leave him. I needed to feed the sexual beast within me, then, and only then, could I concentrate on Lucha.

"I have to leave now. Thank you for trusting me enough to show me this," I said, keeping my hand on his painting.

His fingers laced in mine and his body pressed against my back. I laid my head on his chest and closed my eyes. His large arms wrapped around me, and I wanted to stay in them forever. He was so warm, and there was something so amazing about him that I hated the thought that I had to leave him.

"Stay here with me."

I let out a small laugh. "Lucha, you know what I am."

"Yes, but why should that matter?" he asked moving his head down towards my neck. "If you wanted me dead, I would not be standing here now, right?"

I leaned forward and found that my body was now pinned between Lucha and his painting. "Lucha, please understand that I have to leave you. I need to feed before the sun rises."

He spread my arms out and pushed my body against his painting. I tried to keep from doing any damage to it, but Lucha pushed so hard that I was now pressed tightly to the wall. "Feed from me," he said, moving his hands to the top of my dress. I felt him unhooking it and turned my face towards him. His brown eyes held a hunger much like my own, he too needed sex.

"Lucha, I can't take from you."

"Consider my blood yours," he said, fully opening my dress.

"I not only require blood, I require...." I started to say sex, but he cut me off.

"I know that you need to have your body pleased, I could sense it on you in the alley. I also sensed your want to shield me, and for that, I am grateful. However, it is not necessary. My body craves yours too, as you do mine, and I have a hunger of my own that follows closely after I use my magic."

"Lucha, I can't...."

He ripped my dress down and I felt his warm hands moving over my hips. I looked back at him one more time, the soft glow of the oil lamp reflected off his olive skin and he looked like one of his paintings, perfect, and alive. I reached up and pulled my dress forward. It fell from my body.

Lucha drew a breath in and I heard him starting to remove his own clothes. I turned to help him, but he gently nudged my body back in place. I stared at the painting of the woman and the resemblance between she and I hit me. There were similarities, like the pale skin, and darker hair, and differences like she was a little bit curvier than me. I was envious of that.

Lucha's naked body pressed against mine. He turned my chin towards him and looked from the painting to me. "I have dreamt of you for many years, and now you are here. Visions of you have come to me in my sleep and I thought that I was going mad, but when I saw you tonight, I knew that we were meant to be."

What he said was so beautiful, and so out of the ordinary that I wanted to believe him—I did believe him. He pressed his body against mine and I felt the head of his cock move between my butt cheeks, making its way



home. I leaned forward, as much as I could, and his hand moved around and found my breasts. He caressed them and kneaded them as he pushed his body into mine. I cried out and my face pressed against his painting.

"Amore eternal," he whispered as he pulled my hips to him.

I cried out as his body drove into me harder. Lucha's size made it difficult for me to accept all of him, but it felt too good to have him stop. Each thrust into me sent my body slamming into the hard wall. My cheek throbbed and I knew that it would be bruised come morning. I also knew that Lucha was more than mortal if he was able to be this rough with me.

I pushed back and Lucha fell away from me. I spun around and pushed his body to the floor. I wanted sex and so did he, but it would be on my terms, not his. His brown eyes widened as I straddled his body. I grabbed his cock in my hand and held it steady as I eased myself over it. Lucha's mouth dropped open and I knew that he enjoyed this almost as much as I, maybe even more.

He tried to touch my body, but I pinned his arms back, and rode him hard and fast. Our bodies made slapping noises as the sweat from his body covered us. I laid myself down on his hard chest and continued to move my hips in a circular pattern. His arms wrapped around me and I let them. He cupped my butt and pushed my body down on him harder. I moved my lips to his neck and licked along a vein.

"Yes ... drink from me...." he said, his voice labored.

I let my fangs come down and I pushed them gently through his skin. His sweet, warm blood filled my mouth. I had never fed from an innocent before, and now knew why Valentino still did. Lucha tasted so pure, so good, that I had to make an effort to pull away to keep from taking too much. I didn't want to turn him, nor did I want to leave him sick or on the verge of death. I drew one last taste of him in and felt my orgasm hit. My body contracted and I milked Lucha as his hot cum exploded within me.

He held tight to me and I licked the tiny puncture wound on his neck, and watched it heal instantaneously. I tried to stand up, but he held me to him. "Do not go, stay with me here, forever."

I lifted my head and looked at him. His long black curls were spread out on the floor. I smiled and went to kiss his cheek. He turned his face to me and our lips met for the first time. His warm tongue moved into my mouth and I circled it with mine. Each swipe, each tug, made my body

grow warmer. I realized what he did and I pulled my mouth back from him.

"No love spells," I said narrowing my gaze on him.

His rose colored lips curved into a smile. "I am capable of doing such a thing, but I am not ... you are my amore eternal, and this is natural between us. It is meant to be." I felt him growing hard within me and knew that he spoke the truth. I leaned in to kiss him, and let my hips sway on him again.

## Chapter 24

I made my way down the crowded streets and back to the inn. My stomach was tight with fear over what Kerr would have to say about my disappearing act. I had spent four wonderful days with Lucha and had not notified Kerr to where I was. Lucha didn't want me to leave him, but I knew that Kerr would worry and I couldn't let him suffer. He could push me away forever, but I would still always care for him. Since the moment I'd awakened to find myself a vampire I had been drawn to Kerr, and I knew that I probably always would be. I still couldn't figure out why, and Kerr wouldn't tell me. At least now that I had Lucha, I had a chance at filling that void—that emptiness that had plagued me for so many years now.

I opened the door to my room and found it dark. I slid in and went to light the oil lamp. "Care to tell me where ye been, lass?" I jumped at the sound of Kerr's voice.

I let my eyes adjust to the pitch-blackness and saw Kerr's large frame sitting in the chair near my bed. Whatever was left of my heart hurt knowing that he was angry with me. I pushed these feelings down and stood tall. "You've been known to follow me before ... you tell me where I was."

There was a blur and then I felt Kerr's hands lifting me high in the air. "I do not appreciate you being so indifferent to my concern, and I did look for you when you didn't return by sunrise, and...."

I stopped him. "Kerr, you didn't go out into the light looking for me, did you?"

He turned his head slightly, and I knew this was a yes. I touched his face and it no longer felt smooth. "Oh, God, Kerr ... what have you done?" It was suddenly hard to breathe. I could think of nothing but Kerr, and his pain.

He set me down and I reached up to touch him again. He grabbed my wrists and brought my hands to his face. "You smell of another man."

"Of course I do, you know that I had to feed. You refuse me so I am forced to find replacements. It's been this way for many years now, why the sudden anger?"

He exhaled and pulled me closer to him. "I thought that I lost you, Linnea. When you did not return to me I assumed you lost—dead."

Kerr let go of my wrists and I put my arms around him. He winced and I pulled away. I lifted his loose shirt gently and touched his side carefully. The flesh there was burnt as well. I turned and went for the light. Even with my vampire eyes I could not clearly make out how bad he was with the absence of light.

"No," he said, grabbing my body and bringing it to him. "I'll not have ye remember me this way."

"Kerr, I can heal you, you just have to let me."

"Linnea, ye have an amazing gift to heal, but ye will only be able to heal me with yer body and I am not willin' to have it be like this for us ... I will heal on my own, it will just take time."

I was suddenly furious with him, and all he'd done was try and find me. He started for the door and I pushed my body in front of his, blocking his path in the process. "No, you wait one minute Bhreac...." I stopped, unsure why I'd just called him that.

He grabbed my arms and pushed my body against the wall. "Linnea, what did you just say?"

I shook my head. "I don't know ... I mean, I wanted to stop you from leaving me, and I shouted at you, but I called you Bhreac, instead of your name ... I didn't mean to...."

Kerr's lips came down hard on mine and I let myself go. I'd waited for years for him to touch me and now he finally was. I put my hands on his cheeks and felt the charred flesh beneath my hands. Tears welled up in my eyes and I dove at his mouth. I couldn't understand why he would go out into the light when he knew that it would kill him. Why would he do this to himself?

He pulled back slowly. "If you could only remember everything, then you'd know why, Linnea."

"Let me heal you, please. I can't lose you. I can't let you walk out on me. You're my best friend, my...." I searched for exactly what Kerr was to me, and then I said how I felt, "I love you, even though you don't love me, and I can't go on without you. I'm not asking you to make love to me, or to even care for me anymore than you already do, I'm just asking you not to leave me."

Kerr nodded slightly, and pulled my body to him. I knew that it hurt him to move, and I wondered how badly he was burnt. If he didn't let me help him he could end up having to spend years healing or worse yet, never heal at all. He kissed the top of my head and let go of me.

"I do not want to leave you either, lass, but I will not take you to bed for the sake of healin' myself. I'm not that type of a man, and...."

I could sense his hunger. He hadn't fed, most likely for days. He was dying, and he wasn't going to let me help him. The thought of losing Kerr pushed me over the edge. I raked my nails over my arms and felt my skin ripping. Kerr grabbed me and tried to get me to stop. I looked down at my wrists and willed them to open.

"Linnea, NO!"

"Drink," I said, thrusting my arms up at him. "You won't let me heal you with sex, then use my blood."

"I canna, I would drain you, and...."

"I'll drain myself, and if you don't take it then no one will be here that's strong enough to bring me back."

He grabbed hold of me and shook me. "Stop it now!"

I concentrated on making my blood flow faster. Kerr eased my body to the floor and brought my wrist to his mouth. He knew how stubborn I was and he knew that he had to save not only himself now, but me too. I felt his mouth close over my open cut. He sucked gently at first and then grew progressively bolder, taking deeper swigs from me. He was not only gaining my power from the blood, but Lucha's as well. I hadn't fed off anyone but him for days.

I brought my other hand up and ran it through Kerr's long hair. I tried to touch him longer, just be sure that he was safe, but I was too weak to keep my arm up. It dropped lazily to the floor and I closed my eyes, letting Kerr take me to the brink of death—or whatever it was that was past my current existence.

## Chapter 25

I swam in a sea of blood, a tiny red headed boy moved past me in the water. I tried to reach him, but I couldn't. His eyes opened and they were turquoise, like mine. I lunged for him and darkness swallowed me. I could hear Kerr calling for me and I wanted nothing more than to reach him.

My eyes flickered open and I found myself sitting in the bathtub, seated in Kerr's lap. I tried to pick my head up, but it felt too heavy to move. Kerr touched me lightly.

"Just rest, I've got you."

I glanced down at my arms and saw that they were healed. I pulled Kerr's hand up and looked at his smooth white skin. He was healed as well. He wrapped his arms around me and I smiled as he held me close to him. I couldn't remember a time that he and I had both been naked and this close together. He always kept such a distance from me that I didn't think I'd ever see the day come when we shared a bath together. It wasn't sexual—so much as it was comforting. Kerr felt like home to me.

"You kicked awake. Were you having a bad dream?" Kerr asked moving my hair to the side and snuggling his chin in the crook of my neck.

"Yes," I said snuggling back against him. He was warm and I guessed that the combination of the warm bath water and Lucha's blood did that for him.

"Care to tell me about it?"

"It was odd ... there was a small child, a boy, and we were swimming in a river of ... blood ... my eyes ... red hair, I heard your voice, and...."

His arms tightened around me. "Ah, Linnea, you're trying to come back to me too soon. It will come in time...."

The door to the bathroom burst open. I looked up to find Valentino standing there with his hand on his hip. His red attire made him look even more capable of causing harm than he normally did. His brown hair was pulled back tight from his face, and his eyes were narrow slits, focused on me.

"Where in the hell have you been? Kerr nearly perished looking for you, and I...." He stopped speaking and looked at the two of us in the tub. Kerr's arms wrapped around me tight, shielding my body from Valentino, which seemed silly since he'd seen me walking around naked many time before.

From the look on his face, Valentino hadn't seen Kerr and I naked together before, nor had he been expecting it now. His mouth dropped open and I committed the moment to memory. A little part of me enjoyed teasing Valentino. He was so sure of himself, and knew he was a ladies man that it felt nice to be able to refuse him and mean it. It wasn't hard to do, he was sexy, but he did nothing for me.

He looked at Kerr. "I need you to attend a charity event with Folco this evening. I thought that I would have to go, but now that you are healed, you can."

Kerr protested, but I touched his arm lightly. We didn't need to provoke Valentino any more than we already had. His temper was known to run high and I didn't want him going after Lucha to punish me, and that was a very Valentino thing to do. Kerr stroked my arm and put his mouth next to my ear. "I'll do this for you, I can sense yer concern for the mortal, and I will do all I can do to protect yer secret."

I turned to look back at him, but he held my body tight, not allowing me to turn around. After all these years with Kerr, I still wondered how he

could know my every thought and how he was able to see into the future. I didn't possess those gifts, and I'd taken his blood twice now.

Valentino stormed out of the room and I turned to Kerr. "Why is it that when I take the blood of another I gain his or her powers, but when I take yours, I don't?"

He shook his head. "I do not know, lass, but I believe that also has somethin' to do with why you can't remember the time before you were reborn as a vampire. The rest of us can remember our lives as a human with ease, you canna."

I stood, but he pulled me back to him. "Kerr, for a man who doesn't want to ever make love to me, you sure do know how to send mixed signals."

"Will you stay a bit more with me?" he asked.

"I'd stay with you forever. You have only but to ask."

## Chapter 26

"Where are you planning on going this evening?" Valentino asked as he entered my room.

"I really wish you would knock," I said snidely.

"And, I wish you would stop sneaking around like a whore in heat. I have told you before that I am here for you, and I will not leave you needing anyone else—unlike Kerr." He moved closer to me and put his hands on my shoulders.

I cringed under his touch and turned my head from him. "You smell like young blood, it makes my stomach turn. Have you been sucking the life out of innocent school teachers again? Or have you moved straight to the pupils?"

Valentino put his hands in the air, signifying that he didn't know what I was talking about. I knew better. He'd been feeding off the innocent again and he reeked of it. I was tired of arguing with him about it. I could feel the sun setting, and I'd promised Lucha that I'd met him at sunset. We'd been seeing each other in secret for the past two months now and I loved it. Kerr knew, of course, but he hadn't said a word to Valentino, in fact it had been his suggestion that I keep Lucha a secret to start with.

I was still debating on telling Kerr about Corbin and his men. They had already made three attempts to turn Lucha since I'd known him. The last one had been the worst. They had attacked while we were making love. I was left to fend them off, naked and alone. I'd even had to resort to flying, which took a lot out of me. I killed several of Corbin's men and kept Lucha safe, but the fight seemed more personal lately.

I stood slowly and Valentino pushed his body against mine. His eyes rolled back in his head and he licked his lips. "I can smell your moist cunt...." I put my hand to his lips and cut him off.

"I'm going now. I won't be back until dawn, do not wait for me, and tell Kerr that I will see him later."

I hated leaving a message with Valentino, but Kerr had been taking over affairs and had been spending the last few nights out in the city making plans and overseeing the needs of the old ones. I wasn't allowed to go. He dealt with mortals, and the majority of them didn't believe that a woman had any business out of the kitchen.

I walked past Valentino and he grabbed my arm tightly. "Ouch, you're hurting me."

His eyes blazed to black and he pressed his mouth onto mine. I pushed on his face to get him off of me, but he was too strong. His tongue pressed into my mouth and I bit down on it. Valentino jerked his face back from me and smiled. The blood ran down his chin and he wiped it with his fingers. He pressed his fingers into my mouth and forced me to accept his blood. I bit down again and he yanked away from me. I moved backwards and tried to avoid his reach, but I wasn't fast enough. He struck out with his power and knocked me into the wall. My head hit first and then my shoulders and back. Pain shot through my body as my vision blurred temporarily.

He charged at me again and I struck out at his face. His head jerked to the side, but when he looked back at me he smiled. I'd forgotten what a



sadistic bastard Valentino could be and now I was only exciting him. He grabbed my chin and squeezed it tight, while he pressed his body against mine. I could feel him loosening his trousers. He wouldn't be foolish enough to kiss me again, but he didn't need my mouth for what he had in mind.

He grabbed a handful of my dress and ripped it open. My breast fell out and he grabbed hold of it hard. I cried out as his fangs struck it, digging deep into my tender flesh. I kicked out at him and clawed at his face, but I was no match for him, he'd fed off the blood of innocent youths tonight, and that made him powerful.

Valentino pinned my body back as he sucked blood from my breast. His hands moved down and he started to pull my dress up. I thought of Kerr, and screamed out for him. Valentino laughed as he pulled his face away from me. "I sent him away tonight, because I wanted a piece of you for myself. You are mine, Linnea. I created you and I have rights to you. It is the way it has always been and it is time that you paid your dues to your master—me."

I lashed out at him with all the power I had and it pushed his body away from mine long enough for me to run for the door. I threw it open and found Lucha standing there smiling. "Linnea, I wanted to surprise you. I thought that I would...." His eyes darted down at my torn dress and bleeding breast.

He reached out and touched my chin. I winced in pain. Valentino had squeezed so hard that I was already starting to bruise. I heard Valentino call my name and turned to see him staring at Lucha. I pushed Lucha back and yelled at him to go. I slammed the door closed and pressed my body against them.

"Is that who you have been going to every night since we arrived?" Valentino threw his head back and laughed. "Oh, Linnea, I would have thought you would have grown tired of a mortal by now. You never kept any others around longer than a few fucks. What makes this one so special?"

He lunged at me, his feet never touched the floor as his body hit mine and we broke through the door. He yanked my skirt up and I kicked my legs wildly to keep him from entering me. He yanked my hair back and forced my face up to him. "Fuck me or I will kill your human."

I stopped moving and lay still. I couldn't let him hurt Lucha. I nodded as the tears fell down my face. An icy blast of wind hit me. I felt Lucha's power as he drove the razor sharp magic out at Valentino—the same magic he'd used on Corbin. I screamed at him to stop, but he wouldn't. I wanted him to run far away. Valentino would see him dead for this. He wasn't one to forgive or forget.

Lucha moved to me and kicked Valentino off me. He yanked me to my feet and I fought to break his hold on me. He looked down at me, his brown eyes full of confusion. "He'll kill you, Lucha! Go, go far away from here!"

Lucha smiled and lifted his arms into the air. "I will kill him and put an end to this."

Valentino got to his knees and laughed. "Tell him what will happen if he kills me, Linnea."

I closed my eyes and let my head fall. "Lucha, if you kill him then I may die as well. He is my sire, and I am only ten years dead."

Lucha's arms dropped to his sides. He looked at Valentino and then me. "No, Linnea, this cannot be. He cannot be allowed to hurt you."

"Go, Lucha! He won't kill me, but he'll kill you without a second thought."

"You would give this man your body to protect me?" Lucha asked, sounding hurt. He had a hard time understanding my reasoning for this, and he wasn't the only one. The thought of having Lucha turned into one of us not only turned my stomach, it terrified me. I felt like I'd been through losing someone like this before and I couldn't do it again.

I looked up at him. "I have fallen in love with you, Lucha, and I can't allow you to be hurt. Now, go, please!"

I looked at Valentino and saw something dark—evil move across his face. He didn't think that I loved Lucha and hearing me say it had infuriated him. Lucha would die before the night was over, unless I distracted Valentino. I rushed towards him and stopped in front of him. I looked into his dark eyes and held my head up high.

"I am yours for the taking. You are my sire, my master, and I was wrong to deny you what you have a right to—my body."

Lucha gasped and Valentino looked down at me and smiled. "Oh, I will fuck you soon enough, but not until I kill him."

I put my hands up and touched his face. I felt the tears streaming down my cheeks now and tried to stop them. "Please, Valentino, I beg you to leave Lucha out of this. He will go and I will not see him again, I swear to you, just let him live."

Valentino's face twisted into a sinister smile. He looked over my shoulder at Lucha and laughed softly. "I will let him leave here tonight and live, but he must stay and watch me pleasure myself with your body, first."

"You will not touch her!" Lucha shouted.

Valentino lifted his hand and I heard Lucha cry out. I knew that Valentino had just cut him open, but I couldn't run to him, it would cost him his life. I stood on my tiptoes and pressed my mouth to Valentino's. I caught him off guard and he staggered backwards at first, before steadying himself. I moved in closer to him and put my arms around him. "I am yours. All I ask is that you leave Lucha alone."

"What about Kerr?" he asked.

"Kerr?"

"Yes, Linnea, I want you to tell Kerr to leave. He will listen to you. Submit to my demands and I shall allow your young lover to live a long and healthy life."

I thought about what he asked. I couldn't send Kerr away, but I wouldn't let Lucha die either. I turned quickly to Lucha and screamed at him to run. He didn't move. Valentino sent a wave of power crashing through me that knocked me to the floor. I tried to breathe, but it hurt. I pushed up in an attempt to stand and felt Valentino's boot ram into my side.

Lucha came running at Valentino and tried to knock him away from me. Valentino sent him flying into the wall with ease, and then dropped down next to me. I looked at Lucha and saw that there was a trail of blood behind him on the wall. The impact had split his head open. I reached out for him, and Valentino twisted my arm back behind me. I felt it snap a second before I felt the pain shooting through it.

"I have killed your human, and now I will have my way with you, and kill you too," Valentino said as he tore my dress from my body. I tried to

move, but he had me pinned to the floor and used his body as leverage against my broken arm. He moved his body over mine and raked his nails across my back. "That was for loving a human."

He forced my legs open and pushed harder on my broken arm. His elbow dug deep into my rib cage and I felt something snapping. Sharp pains went through my body and I felt blood rising up in my throat. I spit and knew that he'd punctured my lung. "That is for loving Kerr, and this is for denying me all these years." He kicked my legs open wide.

There was a rush of wind and then Valentino's body's was peeled from my back. "Lucha," I said as I lifted my head. I had to blink twice to make out the tall slender figure before me. Long waves of yellow hair fell around me. When I saw the pale skin and amber eyes I knew it was Folco. He tried to cover me with what remained of my dress, and looked behind him.

"Valentino is gone, you are safe now."

"What the...?" I heard Kerr's deep voice, and turned my head to see him. He took one look at me and then at Folco. Something in his face changed and he charged at Folco.

"NO!" I screamed out, coughing and spitting up even more blood in the process.

Kerr stopped dead in his tracks and dropped down next to me. Folco finished covering me with my dress and backed away. He was old, and strong, but nowhere near as strong as Kerr when he was angry.

Kerr touched my back and his blue eyes found me. He looked towards Lucha and shook his head. "Did he take liberties with you?"

I shook my head. "No ... Lucha tried to stop him ... Valenti...." It was hard for me to get the words out. My lungs were tight, and the pain was great.

Kerr's face turned red, and his jaw tightened. "Did Valentino," he exhaled, "force himself on you?"

"Almost ... Folco came, and stopped ... he's gone now." I looked at Lucha and saw his hand twitch. "Lucha's alive."

Kerr went to Lucha's side and closed his eyes. "Linnea, he will not survive the night. He may not survive the next few moments."

I heard Lucha stir. "Lin-nea...."

"She is safe, you can rest now," Kerr said softly to him.

"No," I cried out and tried to push myself up and off the floor. Kerr looked at me and shook his head. "No, Kerr, I will be next to Lucha when he dies ... help me, or I will crawl."

Kerr rushed to me and picked me up in his arms. I could feel my body starting to mend itself. I knew that the cuts on my back would heal first. They were the least harmful. Kerr moved his hand lightly over my twisted arm and I could see the rage behind his blue eyes. He would kill Valentino if he ever saw him again, I was sure of that. His fingers ran over my arm again. "Are you in great pain, Linnea?"

I tried to put on a happy face, but I didn't think he bought it. I gave up and told him the truth. "Yes, that ... Valentino did that because of my love for Lucha." Kerr's body stiffened as he sat down with me on the floor. He drew me into his lap. I touched his face and coughed up more blood. His large hand came to my mouth and he wiped it away.

"I think you have broken ribs, and a...."

I touched Kerr's hand. "I know."

"Why would he do this to you? Valentino worships you, and has always wanted you," Folco said softly from the other side of the room.

"I made him a deal to let Lucha live," I said, meeting Kerr's eyes. He knew with my one look what I had used as bargaining tool, and shook his head slightly. "He agreed, but then he told me to send Kerr away." His hand took mine and he started to rock me gently. "I couldn't do it. I could agree to never see Lucha again as long as I knew he was safe, but I couldn't have you out of my life, Kerr."

"Valentino knew that if she would not send you away then you would surely kill him for harming her. It was better for him to rape her and then kill her and he knew it," Folco said. His words hit home, because they were true. Valentino would have raped me, then killed me.

Lucha moved and I turned my body to him. Kerr eased me down next to him and I ran my fingers through his long black curls. My hand came away covered in his blood and I started to cry. His brown eyes flickered open and looked at me.

"Don't die, Lucha, please...." I begged. Kerr tightened his grip on me, and I cried harder. "Lucha, I can offer immortality. I can make you into what I am. Do you want this?"

Lucha swallowed hard and nodded his head slightly. "Yes."

## Chapter 27

I opened my eyes and found Kerr sitting in a chair next to the bed. He looked at the painting on the wall, the one that Lucha had done of the girl. He'd been fascinated with it since I'd made him and Folco bring us to Lucha's home. I didn't want to risk Valentino showing up again, and I thought that Lucha would feel more comfortable in his own surroundings. I had also considered that Lucha wouldn't remember me, and I hoped that the painting would help if I needed it to.

"That's you," Kerr said again. He'd been repeating that over and over again at random times since we'd arrived two days ago. When I'd left to feed last night, Kerr had been standing before the wall, touching the outline of the woman gently.

I looked at him now, and I reached my hand out and put it on his leg. He leaned forward and brushed my hair back from my face. He smiled and pulled a handful of my hair up. "It is still damp, from yer bath."

I nodded. My hair always took a long time to dry. Kerr dropped my hair and looked past me at Lucha's sleeping body. "Do you love him?"

I nodded again, afraid to say it aloud to Kerr. He looked down at me. "Then why did you sire him? He may not like what he's become."

I sat up and didn't bother covering my bare breasts from Kerr. I leaned over and stroked Lucha's cool back. He'd been resting soundly since I sired him, and would hopefully be waking sometime throughout the night. "It's hard for me to talk about this with you," I said to Kerr.

"Try," he answered back.

"There is something about Lucha that drew me to him. At first it was his size, and shape, it's a lot like yours you know," I added trying to bring my point home. "I liked that he has power too, it made it easier for him to understand me, but it wasn't until I saw the painting and he told me that he'd had dreams of my coming that I felt like he filled a void. I've had this empty hole in me since before I can even remember, and Lucha made that go away. It sounds silly to say, but he reminds of someone I once knew—someone that I believe I loved very much."

I turned and looked at Kerr. A single tear fell down his cheek. Lucha stirred and Kerr stood. We weren't sure what Lucha would awaken as, so we had to be prepared for the worst. I turned him slowly to me, and his eyes fluttered open. They swirled from brown to black and back again. He blinked and then tried to sit up.

"Linnea...?"

I exhaled and moved closer to him. He remembered me, and that meant that he would be fine. I touched his torso lightly. "Do you understand what has happened?" I asked.

Lucha tipped his head back and then looked up at me with his fangs erect. "I am one of you now." His voice held no regret, no anger.

"I will leave the two of you for a bit. Call me when yer ready to take him hunting. I do not think that it's wise for you to go alone with him. He was strong enough to fight Valentino off of you ... even for a just a moment ... we have no idea how strong he may be now."

"I will get you, I promise, and thank you," I said to Kerr as he walked out of the room.

Lucha stretched his body out, and smiled up at me. "I feel more alive now than before. I can hear things and smell things that I never dreamt possible."

I smiled. "What do you smell?"

He pulled my body over him and brought my lips to his. "I can smell that you are ready to receive me."

I let out a small laugh. It was true. I was ready to accept him. I was damp and my body ached for his touch, but he needed to feed first. I kissed his lips, intending for it to be chaste, but he grabbed my body and barrel rolled me over onto my back. He pushed my legs open with his knee and stopped just before entering me. His eyes were pure black and that meant that his demon was at the surface, not him.

Lucha blinked and brown flashed through. "Say yes, Linnea."

It took a great deal of strength for him to fight his way up and ask my permission to enter me, and I couldn't deny him that. I didn't want to deny him. "Yes, Lucha."

He drove himself into me hard and I cried out. Each thrust was harder than the one before it. Lucha now possessed the strength of at least twenty men and every ounce of that was being used to grind my body into the bed. I felt Lucha's fangs pierce my neck and I tipped my head back, allowing him better access to me. Each suck was followed by his body thrusting into mine. I screamed out as my orgasm ripped through me.

Lucha pulled his mouth from me and licked the wound just like I'd done to him so many times before. I touched his back. "Did you finish?"

He laughed and buried his face in my neck. "It makes me happy to hear that you were too preoccupied with pleasure to notice that I ended as well."

I pulled him close to me and hugged him tight. I'd been so afraid that he either wouldn't remember me or would hate me for what he'd become. "We need to get dressed and get Kerr. You still need to have a full feeding."

Lucha didn't show any signs of moving. He was still deep within me when he spoke again. "Tell me about this, Kerr?"

"He's a vampire, too. Umm, he is my closest friend, and...."

"Do you love him?"

I started to say no, but stopped. "Yes, I do."



Lucha nodded, and pulled out of me. I thought that I'd upset him, but then he brought his hips back down against me, driving the full length of his erect cock back into me. I wrapped my legs around him and let him make love to me again and again until we could go no more.

"Amore eternal," he said softly in his native tongue.

Yes, I thought to myself, now you truly are my eternal love.

## Chapter 28

I leaned back against the fence of Lucha's family home and rubbed his back. He didn't look at me, and I understood why. He was still crying over the loss of his father. We'd traveled together now for over fifty years, never once aging. Lucha had asked me to meet his father shortly after he'd been turned, and I had been reluctant at first, but not as reluctant as Kerr about letting me go. His hands were full with business in America and he couldn't break away, at the time, to join us. He trusted Lucha with me though, and let me leave without a fight.

The first time I had met Contro Delerno, Lucha's father, I had been surprised by how young he appeared to be. He had been in his late forties at the time, but didn't look much over thirty. He looked like he could be Lucha's twin. Both had the same dark sexy eyes and hair, and bodies that made any woman burn with need. Contro was about two inches shorter than Lucha and had tiny lines around his eyes. Those were the only differences I saw.

I didn't think that Lucha would tell his father that he was now a creature of the night. I had been wrong. He had already written his father telling him about meeting me and what I was. He'd also informed him that he'd dreamt that he would soon be joining me, and that he would visit once he knew it was safe.

Contro had opened his home and his heart to me. I loved him like he was my own family, and in some strange way, I think he was. Lucha and I had been inseparable since the moment I'd met him. I had heard rumors from other vampires that we were like a married couple, and that to harm one

was to harm all. Somehow Kerr had fallen into this mix. He'd come to Europe two years after us, and joined us here, at Lucha's family home. He and Contro had gotten along well. The two had spent many nights playing chess. I used to love coming down the stairs to hear Lucha playing piano, Contro playing his flute, and Kerr singing softly.

Lucha shook his head. "How can we be so powerful, yet unable to stop suffering?"

"He did not suffer long," I said, trying to be as comforting as I could.

"Thank you for that, Linnea. I was unable to do what he asked."

I wasn't sure what to say. Contro had begged Lucha to end his life. We could sense the terrible illness eating away at his insides for years now, but we'd never been able to convince Contro to let us sire him. Lucha would never have forgiven himself if he had made his father a vampire against his wishes. He wasn't able to honor Contro's request to die either, and Kerr was gone, checking on a lead about Valentino, so that left only me.

I had taken Contro's pale, old hand and brought it to my face. He smiled up at me and nodded. His hair had gone white some ten years earlier and was now thin, but still long. I had swept it out of his face and kissed his cheek. He'd wiped the tears from my face and told me that he loved me, and was happy that his son had found me. He also told me how very much I reminded him of Lucha's mother who had died when Lucha was just a baby, and that made me cry harder.

Lucha stayed at my back as I moved my body over Contro's. I put my lips to his ear and told him that I loved him too, before gently sinking my fangs into his neck. I drew the poisoned blood from his body and drank it down, it would not hurt me, nor did I care if it would have. I wanted to end Contro's pain. I used my power to bespell him, so that he was not only numb to my bite, but would also be in a state of nirvana during his last few seconds on this earth. The last word he uttered as he lifted his hand to my face was Lucha's mother's name, Elsa.

I shook the thoughts of Contro's passing from my head and turned to walk away from Lucha. I was sure that my presence only served to remind him of how his father had died. He grabbed my wrist and spun me around to him. His eyes were bloodshot and tinted red.

"Do not think that I am angry with you, little one. I love you, and I love what you did for him. He died seeing my mother before him, and you loved him almost as much as I did, what more could I ask for?" His head dropped down and he pulled me close to him. "Lift your magic and have a child with me."

I pulled back from Lucha and gave him a puzzled look. He'd never brought up having a family before. "Lucha, you know not what you say right now. Your grief is speaking for you. We do not lead lives that a child would be welcome in."

"That is not true, Linnea. I have wanted a family with you since we met. Lift the spell and allow me to plant my seed in you, and to watch it grow, and live. Let us have something around us instead of all this death."

I touched his cheek. "If only it were that easy. It's not my magic that keeps my womb clean. It's the magic-man, Gregory. He knew me before I became what you see before you now, and he gave me this gift in the hopes that one day I would return to him, alive again."

Lucha let out a laugh and turned from me. "We are a lot of things, Linnea, but alive is not one of them. If you do not wish to have a family with me, then just say so. You do not have to lie. Just tell me that you would prefer to create life with Kerr, and I will let it be. I have sensed that your love for him is deeper than your love of me. If you would prefer to let him fuck you every night, you have only but to say it and it will be so. I will not continue to stand by and not make my feelings known. Leave me now, I do not wish to look upon you any further this evening."

I jerked back from him. I felt like I'd been slapped. I would have questioned where his anger came from, but I knew. Contro's death would forever be associated with me, no matter what Lucha said. My love for Lucha was great, so great that I had stopped feeding my need for sex off humans the moment I met him. He had fulfilled my every need, and I thought he always would. I turned and walked away from him, and he didn't try and stop me. I ran hard towards the village and didn't look back. I would not stand there and exchange hurtful words when his father wasn't even buried yet.

## Chapter 29

I leaned against the wall of the tiny tavern and tried to stop the pain that built in my chest. I wondered how Lucha held up and had thought about going back for the burial, but I wasn't sure I'd be welcome there. I glanced around to get a better grip on my surroundings. I was at least eight villages from Lucha's and I still didn't feel like it was far enough. I was dirty and tired. I'd been sleeping in barns and hiding under hay during the daylight. It was beneath me, but so was begging Lucha to forgive me, when I truly believed that I'd done nothing wrong.

I needed a bath and a place to sleep that wasn't crawling with mice. I tipped my head back and felt the air around me change. I knew a vampire when I sensed one. "What do you want?"

"I sensed another near here, and I came to see who it was. I have to admit that after our last meeting I was a bit surprised to learn that you had fallen to our side. From the smell of you it is not going so well." A polished British accent said close to my ear.

I opened my eyes and looked into Corbin's face. I wasn't scared of him. I didn't care what he did to me. In fact, part of me hoped that he would end this existence for me. "If you've come to kill me, get it over with."

"Is it true what they say about you?" he asked.

I shrugged. "Depends, on what they're saying."

"They say that you have no memories of when you were alive."

I nodded. "Yeah, it's true then."

Corbin let out a long laugh. Obviously, he found it more amusing than me. I didn't much care about it anymore. He touched my cheek and I didn't flinch. "Let us get you cleaned up. An alley is no place for you to be."

"Why clean me up? You've only tried to kill me in the past. You don't need me clean for that."

"That is true ... however ... much has changed now, Linnea. We now fight on the same side."

## Chapter 30

Corbin came in and took his boots off. He'd been out most of the night, again, searching for what he called potentials. After several weeks with him, I stopped questioning him about what he did and just smiled at him. We weren't close, yet not quite strangers. He had held true to his word and had seen to my needs and I his. Although, not the ones he hoped for. I had taken over care of the new vampires he brought in. So many of them possessed magic, strengths, and other supernatural abilities as humans that Corbin had a hard time keeping them in line.

It was easy for me. If they got out of line I simply used my power and showed them who was in charge. I had had one get a little rougher than I'd have liked, but I had dealt with him promptly. I reached up and rubbed my shoulder. The new vampire had slammed me into the wall and I was still sore from it.

"Are you hurt?" Corbin asked, coming closer to me.

"I'll be fine." I turned and looked up at him. "Tell me why you sire so many men."

He smiled and tossed his gloves aside. "Have you ever sired anyone?"

I thought about Lucha and Camille, and nodded. Lucha had been wise choice, but Camille had been all wrong. I should have known better than to bring her over. Lucha and I had been at a ball together and I caught wind of her and her accomplices' plan to murder Lucha, and steal his money. They had no idea that he was already dead, and that played to our advantage. Lucha and I had made love surrounded by the dead evildoers, while Camille laid there dying—watching us, and begging for her life. I brought her over as a gift to Lucha, to keep him satisfied. His hunger for sex was even stronger than mine and I worried that I would not always be able to fill it. He had refused to accept her, claiming to want only me.

Camille was a bad seed to start with, and she'd not changed. Kerr had been furious with me for siring her. She had tried to seduce him so many times that I'd lost count over the years. We had parted ways with her and I had not seen her since. Every now and then I thought that I could feel her near, but she was never brave enough to show herself.

I wondered if Lucha would turn her away now that I was gone. He would need to feed his hunger for sex. Mine threatened to consume me. I would have to take a lover soon or risk going mad.

Corbin sat down in the chair and pulled his knife out. He liked to sit and clean his fingernails with it. He was odd, but I got used to him. "I take it from your lack of response that you regret your decision to sire who you did."

I nodded. "Yes, one of them at least, and what about you, do you have any regrets?"

"Ah, as a matter of fact I do. There is but one. He was powerful, and I had been sent to find him. I not only found him, but I found a powerful woman who had been sent to protect him. She and I did not see eye to eye," he looked at me as he said this, "and many things had happened that I can never take back or do over again."

I turned towards him, suddenly very interested in what he had to say. "Like what?"

"I cannot be sure, but I believe she may have been with child when I tried to kill her."

I sat in silence and listened to Corbin speak. It seemed important to him that he get to tell me this. He told me about siring the man as the woman was forced to watch. I wasn't sure what to say to him, because I wasn't sure what sort of response he looked for—it felt almost like he sought absolution. He wasn't bragging about what he'd done, but he wasn't mourning either.

"Have you nothing to offer?" he asked.

"I do, but you won't like what I have to say."

He laughed a little. "No, I suppose that I won't, go ahead."

"You feed from the innocent. I can smell them on you the minute you walk in the door, yet here you sit seeming upset by events that happened a century ago. I'm not sure what to make of you, Corbin. One minute you are a monster, and the next you are kind."

He rose slowly and came towards me, his knife still in hand. I glanced down at it and looked into his eyes. Something clicked in me and I jumped to my feet and moved back from him. He looked down at the knife and then back at me. He dropped it on the floor and put his hands up.

"Linnea, I mean you no harm." I saw his lips move and knew what he said, yet I heard his voice in my head screaming other words. I heard, hold his head still, I've never seen a human with this much strength, imagine how powerful he will be soon, and I saw Corbin standing before someone who was on his knees, I tried to see the man's face, but I blocked it out. I ran my hands down my stomach and knew that I'd just lost the baby that I had been carrying in my womb and that the man on his knees before Corbin was my husband.

Corbin took another step to me and I screamed out. "You murdered him, and my baby!"

I pushed the table over and ran for the door. Corbin was on me in an instant. He grabbed my arms and held them behind my back. I waited for his fangs to sink into me, but they didn't.

"I cannot change the past, Linnea. I would take it all back if I could," he whispered in my ear. He let go of me and I ran out the door. I didn't look back. I couldn't.

## Chapter 31

I stood outside the gates to Lucha's home and watched from a distance. I had started to go in, but had stopped when I saw Lucha leaving. He should have sensed me, maybe he did, but he never looked in my direction as he rode away on his horse. I closed my eyes briefly and saw the horrors unfold before me again. I tried again to see my husband's face

or to hear his voice, but I couldn't. The pain in my stomach felt real and I fell on my knees.

"Linnea?"

I opened my eyes and looked up to find Kerr standing near me. His white shirt blew slightly in the breeze, but his red hair held tight in its tie. "Lass, are ye hurt?"

"No ... yes ... not physically."

Kerr moved down next to me and touched my shoulder. "I looked for you, but I couldn't find you anywhere. I came back here hopin' that you'd come home."

The very mention of home made me cry. "I had to go. Lucha told me to leave."

"Lucha was upset about his father. He didn't want you to go. He and I have searched the countryside for you. He's gone off again to look for you. He's not eaten or slept since you've gone. I had to force me own blood down him, for fear he'd die of missin' you." He put his arms around me and pulled me to my feet. "Where have you been?"

"I've been with another vampire, helping him with his newly sired ones."

Kerr walked with me up to the house. He led me up the stairs and to the bathroom. I stood as he undressed me slowly. When I was naked I stood and ran my hands over my lower stomach. Kerr stood behind me and put his hand on mine.

"Linnea, what's the matter?"

I turned my body and pressed it tight to him. His arms wrapped around me and I laughed through my tears. I needed sex and comforting, and here I was in the arms of Kerr, the last man on earth who would give me either. "Lucha asked me to have a child with him before I left."

Kerr's arms tightened around me. "I know. He told me what he said. He's sorry that he said those hurtful things to you."

"Lucha was right," I pushed my body closer to his. "I could have lifted the spell all these years, but I didn't. I hid behind the magic-man's gift, and...."



"And, what?"

I couldn't look up at Kerr. I didn't want to see the rejection on his face when I said what needed to be said. "I do love you, and I used to long for you to tell me that you felt the same way. I can't help the way I feel, Kerr. I tried not to, I tried to just love Lucha, and I do love him, but still...."

Kerr didn't push me away like I thought he would. "You said used to want me to feel the same way, what's changed yer mind?"

"I had a family once, or almost did. I was robbed of it in the early stages. I lost the child I carried, and I lost my husband. I didn't want to leave him, but something—someone was there pulling me away from him. He made me go, Kerr ... why did the man who swore to love me always, make me go?"

"Because he knew that he'd see you again," he said, so sure of himself that I had to turn and look at him. I was about to ask how he knew this when the face I'd been trying so hard to see became clear--Kerr.

I hit him hard in the chest over and over again screaming at the top of my lungs. He grabbed my arms and pulled me to him. "Why didn't you tell me about us? Why?"

"I could have told you everything and you still would not have remembered me. What good would it have done you to walk a hundred years by my side with the guilt of not feeling the same for me as I do for you?"

He drew me into his arms and I smacked his face hard, but he didn't let go of me. "Aye, I deserved that. It was my magic that stripped you of yer memories to begin with, and my lack of control that left you one of us."

"I didn't hit you because of that," I said, glaring at him.

"Oh?"

"I hit you for not understanding that I've loved you all these years, memories or no memories, Kerr ... I have always wanted you, yet you forced me to take strangers to my bed."

"Aye, I did, but you have Lucha now because of that, and you canna tell me that you don't love 'em."

He was right, as much as I hated him for keeping this from me, he had a point. Lucha wouldn't be in my life if it weren't for Kerr's secret. "I don't know if I should hug you or beat you, Bhreac Kerr Laochailan of the MacLachlainn clan."

Kerr pulled me closer to him and put his lips to mine. "Well, I think I've got somethin' better in mind."

I couldn't keep the surprise off my face. I was so used to being turned down by Kerr that I wasn't sure how to read him. "Are you telling me that you want to...?"

"I told you when you awoke as a creature of the night that I would not take you to my bed until you could remember who and what I was to you."

I wanted to let him take me then and there, but there was one thing that stopped me--Lucha. I put my forehead against Kerr's and let out a long sigh. "I can't hurt Lucha."

"I understand." He put me down and I grabbed onto his neck and wrapped my arms around him.

"No, Kerr, I want you, I always have, but I should tell Lucha first, before anything happens between us."

He smiled and for the first time in a very long time, it went all the way to his blazing royal blue eyes. "When he gets back from meetin' with Camille we can sit him down and I'll explain it all to him."

I felt my chest grow heavy. "I thought you said that he looked for me?"

"Aye, Camille sent word that she'd seen you and requested that only Lucha come."

"Did she now?"

Kerr rolled his eyes slightly. "Come on now, Valkyrie, you canna control everything. Yer about to tell the man that you remember yer past, and...."

I stopped him. "What did you just call me?" It sounded a little like Valerie to me, but I was sure that wasn't what he said.

Kerr let out a long breath. "So, you don't remember all of it, huh? I called you a Valkyrie, but that's not important now, what is important is that you at least remember us—what we had together."

I closed my eyes and thought of him making love to me, and I thought of the way we said our ceremonious handfasting vows in a man's kitchen. Kerr laughed softly and I knew that he scanned my thoughts. I was fine with that. I looked into his blue eyes and knew that I couldn't wait for him any longer. We had spent countless decades walking side by side with this overwhelming amount of sexual tension between us, and now I knew why.

"Bhreac Kerr Laochailan of the MacLachlainn clan, take me to bed now."

"Aye," he said, laughing softly as he carried me into the house.

## Chapter 32

Kerr touched my arm and smiled. "Yer shakin'."

"I'm nervous."

"Why are you nervous? We've done this before." His voice was so calm and his accent so much thicker than it normally was. I noticed that whenever he let himself go he reverted back to his old ways, and I loved that about him.

"Kerr, we haven't done this in so long."

He let out a laugh. "Well, if that's all yer worried about then consider the fact that I've not done it all since you."

My eyes just about bulged out of my head. It had been over a hundred years since we'd been lovers and that meant that Kerr had abstained a very long time. "No, I don't believe you."

"Believe it, Valkyrie. I swore an oath to you to have you and no other, and I, unlike you, was able to remember it. I'm not blaming you."

"But Kerr, we died, so technically you owed me nothing in the way of a commitment. Plus, we aren't exactly human anymore, so we aren't bound to their rules."

"Aye, that is true, we are no longer married, we never even signed any documentation. It was just the two of us promisin' to love one another. I do not think even by human laws it was binding, but I could not bring myself to touch another. Every time I tried, I thought of you and I could not go through with it. I came so very close, so many times, but my love for you was too great to...."

I pulled away from him fast. "Oh God, Kerr ... you must think I'm a horrible person for all the men I've taken over the years." I stood. I was ashamed of myself and wanted to be dressed and away from him.

His arm wrapped around my waist and he pulled me to him. "No, you'll not be getting away from me again. Yer right, once I died all bets were off, and I'm not sayin' that I held you to them. You couldn't remember a thing about yer past, and even if you could, you'd thought I was dead and gone. You were to marry another man right before you were brought over, and I understood that." He seemed to reflect for a moment. "I made my choice to stay behind, Linnea, and you canna be held responsible for that."

He moved to kiss me and I turned my head. "Does this feel a little wrong to you?"

He nodded. "Aye, as much as I hate to admit it, I like Lucha and don't want to hurt him."

"I can't stop loving him, Kerr. I need you to understand that I can't shut my feelings off for him now, even though I can remember bits and pieces of what we were."

"I don't expect you to stop lovin' him. He's been good to you—for you for many years now. He loves you with all his heart, and I can't expect you to be able to walk away from him, but I ask that you try and open yer heart to me too." Kerr's words hit home and I thought about the horrible situation I was now faced with. I hoped that Lucha wouldn't make me choose between he and Kerr.

I sensed Lucha coming and so did Kerr. He let me up and I smoothed my dress down. I was happy that we hadn't actually gotten to doing anything

other than talking. I wouldn't have wanted Lucha to find out about us this way. Kerr held my hand as I climbed out of his bed.

"Let's see how his mood is before we spring this on him," he said.

I nodded and followed him out and down the staircase. I stopped dead in my tracks when I saw him kissing Camille. Kerr ran into the back of me and had to grab hold of me to keep me from falling down the staircase. Lucha turned and looked up, his eyes met mine and he jerked away from Camille.

I looked at the tiny blonde woman who stood before me and wanted to rip her throat out. She had lured him to her with the intent of seducing him and it had worked. Kerr touched my shoulder. I stiffened, and turned around. I pushed past him and went towards my room, the room I'd shared with Lucha for so many years and slammed the door shut behind me. I ran towards my wardrobe and pulled my clothing out. I couldn't stay here with him, I wouldn't. I had no reason to be jealous. I had Kerr now, right? Yet I was.

The door opened and I expected to see Kerr there, instead I found Lucha. He looked at me and then at the clothes on the floor and tipped his head back. That was typical of him, he loved to try and stretch his stress away. "I'm sorry that I'm such a burden, Lucha. I'll go."

"Little one, do not do this," Lucha said.

I rounded on him and he took a step back. "Don't call me that. I'm not your little one, and I'm not your amore eternal. I never was. You could have picked anyone but her and I would have understood...." I turned and slammed my fist into the wall, leaving a large hole in the process. I looked back at Lucha and smiled. "Look, now you can paint a picture of her here and claim that it was meant to be."

He tried to touch me, but I batted his hand away. "Go, Lucha! Go to her, now. What were your words ... oh, yes, I do not wish to look upon you any further tonight."

"Linnea, please you are not being reasonable."

"Oh, then by all means enlighten me, Lucha. How should I react to the fact that you had sex with Camille? You did have sex with her, didn't you?"

He looked away and let his eyes close slightly, answering my question without words. "I am sorry, Linnea, I...."

"No, don't be sorry. Be happy that I didn't take you up on the offer to start a family. That would have at least made you feel guilty about Camille, maybe."

"You know how our hunger is. I held off all these weeks waiting for you, trying to find you ... I...."

"Save me your sob story, Lucha. You were the one who told me to go! You were the one who wasn't man enough to help your own father so you turned on me when I did!"

Lucha was on me in an instant. His hand wrapped around my throat, and he lifted me high off the ground. His brown eyes swirled to black and I knew that he'd let his demon loose on me, and probably had wanted to since the night I'd helped his father die. His fingernails dug deep into me and I felt them break my skin. I kicked out hard and caught him in the side. He dropped me to the floor and pushed my body to the ground.

"How could you not come back? I needed you here by my side. I know what I said was wrong, but I did not mean any of it. I needed you here, Linnea, and you were gone."

"Get off of me!" I pushed him hard and he fell backwards. I stood and watched as Lucha seemed to be pulled by strings up. I gasped at his show of brazen power, and knew that if it came down to it, he could kill me if he wanted to.

He smiled and let out a small laugh. "Camille was right. She said that you try to keep my powers down, that you are afraid that I am stronger than you."

I looked at him like he'd sprouted a second head. "Why in the hell would you believe one word she says, Lucha? She's a liar."

"Perhaps or...?" He jumped in front of me and let a blast of his power out. Icy waves of sharp glass-like magic hit me. I screamed and fell backwards. I brought my hands to my face and held it tight, feeling how damaged I really was. He had ripped my skin to bits with just a thought, and now stood over me. He put his hand in my hair and pulled my head back to face him.

My hands fell away from my face and I looked up at him for the first time ever with fear in my eyes. He stumbled back from me and looked down at his hands. He shook his head and fell to his knees. "Linnea, what have I done?"

I knew what had happened, Camille. She was like a poisonous snake, beautiful to look at, but deadly. The power she had developed was that of seduction and to cloud minds. Apparently, Lucha had fallen victim to both.

"Linnea, I never meant to hurt you, and I did not mean to share a bed with her." He crawled towards me and I dropped back and moved away from him. Lucha had made his point, he was more powerful than me, I didn't need a repeat performance.

He lifted his arm towards me and I screamed out, afraid that he was going to send more of his power at me. The bedroom door opened. Kerr and Camille appeared in it. Kerr looked at me and I turned my head away from him. He rushed to my side and tried to turn my chin to him, but I refused to move.

"Look at me, Linnea." I shook my head no. "What has happened to you?"

"She got what she deserved. That whore used Lucha and refused to let him use his full powers," Camille said snidely.

"Get out of my home, Camille, and never come back. You did this to me. You made me turn on Linnea."

Camille let out a laugh. "Oh, do not fool yourself, lover, I am not fully to blame for this. You harbored much resentment for her, I just tapped into it. She is not the woman that you make her out to be. She is not perfect, and she will break your heart. Believe me, Lucha ... you will come crawling back to me."

I turned my face to Camille and let my magic loose on her. She screamed out as I pushed my power against her chest. I felt my magic seep through her body and wrap around her heart. I had the power to kill her with just a blink of my eye and I had to talk myself out of doing it.

Neither Kerr nor Lucha tried to stop me. In fact they both seemed a little disappointed when I released her from my magic. She looked up at Lucha, her green eyes held fury. "How could you do nothing to help me, after what we just shared?"

"Get out, you mean nothing to me," Lucha said, his voice cold.

Camille, the unblemished one, staggered towards the door and screamed out that we would regret doing this to her. She was probably right, but I didn't care. I was already second-guessing my decision not to end her life when I had the chance.

Kerr leaned over and touched my face. He looked up at Lucha and I could feel his rage. "How could you harm our Linnea?"

"No, Kerr," I said, softly. "Let's just go."

Lucha moved forward and Kerr stood tall. "Do not go, I beg you."

"Linnea?" Kerr asked my permission to use force. I shook my head no.

"Tell him," I said softly.

"Tell me what?" Lucha asked.

Kerr cleared his throat and started to speak. "Before I was brought over I was married and expecting a child. The child was murdered while still in my wife's stomach, and I was sired, but my wife was safe, at least temporarily." Kerr took a step back towards me. I put my hand up and let him pull me into his arms. I buried my face in his chest, still unwilling to let either of them see me look this way. It would heal, but it would take a little time. Kerr wrapped his arm around me tight and stroked my hair. "I have walked next to that woman for over a hundred years now, watching her love others and not remember me, and now she has found her way back to me."

"Kerr, this is wonderful news. Why do you look so somber?" Lucha asked.

I turned my face to Lucha and he gasped. He tried to come to me, but I moved in closer to Kerr, and he stopped. "While I was away I met a man, he jarred my memory of when I was alive, and I remembered Kerr...."

"You and Kerr were ... you were his...?" Lucha stumbled over every word.

Kerr pulled me to his neck. I bit down lightly and took a few sips of his powerful blood. I kissed the wound closed and he pulled me back from him. His eyes hardened when he saw my face. I felt it starting to heal and



Kerr stopped looking like he wanted to kill Lucha—at least for the moment. "You didn't tell me that a man jarred yer memory."

I nodded. "Yes, the same man that tried to attack Lucha when I first met him. I ran into him a few villages over and was hungry, tired, and in need a bath. He took me in, in exchange for my help with his newly turned vampires."

"Linnea, he is an evil man," Lucha said, sounding so disappointed in me.

"My choices were limited, Lucha. I had no money with me, and being a woman, traveling alone I was subject to many advances and...."

He put his hand up. "I am sorry. I did not think of that before I spoke. You are well now and that is all that matters."

I nodded and put my head against Kerr's shoulder. "I'm tired, and haven't been able to sleep sound in days. I need a bath and some rest."

Lucha nodded. "Of course, I will prepare a bath for you ... if Kerr does not mind." He added the last bit, just to keep Kerr from snapping, I think.

"Linnea has made it clear to me that she may remember me now, but she will not stop loving you," Kerr said sounding less than thrilled with the thought.

"Linnea," Lucha said and walked towards me.

I put my hand up. "No, Lucha, I'm hurt by what you did. Not only did you sleep with Camille, you turned on me. We can blame Camille for that all we want, but she's right you know, a little piece of you must hate me to do what you did, and to have allowed yourself to be so easily manipulated by her."

Kerr tried to hug me, but I moved away. I looked them both in the face and let my feelings out. "You lied to me for too many years, Kerr." I looked at Lucha. "I have no desire to be comforted by a man who blames me for his father's death. When you come to terms with what I did for Contro then and only then will things be fine. If you aren't able to understand why I helped him, then there's no reason for us to be together. I will leave tomorrow night. I will require a small amount of money to see me safely away from here."

"Linnea, we just found each other again," Kerr said, looking hurt.

"No, Kerr, I found you the day I died and became what I am now. You chose to keep this from me. I had a right to know. Instead, you left me loving you and never once feeling like the love was returned. I slept with hundreds upon hundreds of men because you refused to help me. You don't do that to someone you claim to love, Kerr. How many men did I have to kill to keep from being injured myself? Do you remember, or do you like to pretend that never happened? Yes, I found Lucha because of your resistance to me, but look at what Lucha is now. He's dead, as are we! So don't stand there and make me feel bad for this. You had over a hundred years to tell me the truth and it took the demon who stole the lives from my womb to open my eyes."

Kerr perked up and grabbed my arm. "Linnea, you didn't sleep with the man who did this to us, did you?"

I smiled. "As if it matters to you, you passed me around to so many men that I've lost count of them. At least once I found Lucha he never asked me to do that. He loved me too much to force me out to feed my hunger on strangers ... at least he did until I..."

Lucha moved towards me. "Linnea, I know that you did what had to be done—with my father. He was in so much pain, and I could not end it for him, I know that..."

"I hear you saying that you forgive me and that you understand, but I heard you mutter those same words on the night I ended his suffering. You said them right before you cast me out of your life, and went to Camille for support." I stormed out of the room and headed down to one of the extra bedrooms.

## Chapter 33

I ran a brush through my long wet hair and stared at my reflection in the mirror. My turquoise eyes looked as tired as I felt. My face was smooth and held no signs of Lucha's outburst, but I'd carry the pain of it in my heart always. I loved his father too, and that's why I'd helped him.

There was a knock on the door and I tried to ignore it. The door opened and Kerr poked his head in. I shot him a nasty look, but he entered all the same. "What do you want?"

He shut the door behind him. "I've come to tell you that Lucha's not takin' the news of yer leavin' very well. He just left."

"Humph, looks like Camille's gotten her wish."

"Oh, Linnea, you don't know where he's gone off to. You can't go makin' him guilty of somethin' he may not be doin'."

"Well, aren't you suddenly the voice of reason." I spat my words out, and turned back to the mirror.

"You wait one minute, woman. I'll take yer abuse when I know it's warranted, but yer not about to get away with what yer pullin'." Kerr stormed across the room at me and snatched me up by my waist. He spun me around in his arms and brought his lips down on mine.

I fought back at first, but when his tongue found mine, I was lost in him. His large hands ran up my back, pushing my nightgown up along the way. He walked our bodies towards the bed, and crawled with me still attached to him. Our mouths never separated as we went. Every bit of my body was tight with the anticipation of Kerr's touch.

I wanted to be strong and stand my ground. I made an effort to push him off me, and he countered with pulling my nightgown up and running my nipples between his fingertips. He wasn't playing fair. He knew that I'd wanted him to touch me for over a century, and he knew that once he started I wouldn't be able to resist him.

I pulled on his shirt. He leaned up and took it off. His large, muscular chest was now exposed to me. I ran my fingers up and through the tiny red hairs on his body. He reached down and pulled my nightgown over my head. My hair twisted in it and Kerr laughed softly as he unwound it. It fell in long waves around us.

He took a deep breath in and moved down my body, planting kisses as he went. He opened my legs, and moved his face down. I felt his cool breath blow out on the patch of dark hair between my legs. His fingers opened me to him and his long tongue slid into me. I cried out and reached for him, grabbing his long hair, and holding him to me. He inched his tongue in and out of me and varied little licks over my clit. I had to make an

effort not to pull too hard on his head as my legs tightened and my orgasm moved through me. Kerr continued to lick and move his tongue in and out of me, causing my legs to shake uncontrollably, before finally closing on his head—like a vice.

He pulled back from me and laughed as he wiped his chin off on his shirt. He tossed it aside and started to undo his pants. I crawled to my knees and eased my hands down the front of his pants. I'd waited for so long for him to let me do this, that now my hands shook from excitement. His hands cupped my head gently as I brought him out and placed the head of his cock in my mouth. We both made strange noises; his, a sound of relief, and mine a sound of triumph for finally having my Kerr.

He tasted so good, so earthy and alive, even though he'd been dead longer than me. I ran my mouth over him and took all of him in that I could. I moved my head faster and Kerr pulled me back from him. I looked up and saw his face. I knew that he wouldn't last long this way, especially not after abstaining for so many years.

I lay back on the bed and opened myself wide to him. He moved over me and hovered above me for just a moment before sliding into me. Lucha was long and wide, but Kerr was unbelievably large. I bit down on my lower lip hard to try and balance the mix of pleasure and pain. Kerr's blue eyes found me and he leaned down and licked the blood from my lip.

His body slammed down on me harder. He thrusts were so great that he moved me up the bed with each one. I pulled up on his shoulders and lifted my head as his body hit mine. Animal noises came from the both of us and my eyes rolled back in my head each time another orgasm hit me. It felt so good to have Kerr in me. We were one now—as it was meant to be.

The air around us grew cool and I opened my eyes to find Lucha standing at the foot of the bed, his eyes wide, and the hurt evident on his face. Kerr continued to slam his body deeper into mine. I clutched at his shoulders and whispered in his ear. "Kerr ... Lucha is ... here...." Each word was hard to get out between the burning, pleasurable sensations he gave me between my legs.

Kerr slammed harder into me and his back arched as I felt him releasing within me. His eyes were closed and his face was slack. He now wore a look of sheer abandonment. His release was long, and his body shook as he finished. He tried to move, but his arms were stiff from pleasure, as was the rest of his body.

"Ah, Valkyrie, I've never stopped loving you," Kerr said softly as he rolled to the side.

He tried to pull me into his arms, but I didn't move. My eyes went to Lucha. He hadn't moved a muscle. He seemed planted there. I wasn't sure if it was shock or anger, but whatever it was made my chest hurt.

Cold air rushed up and around us. I put my hand out. "Lucha, don't!"

Lucha turned his head to side and I saw the incredible restraint he had. He turned and stormed out of the room. I tried to run after him, but Kerr pulled me back to him. "Let him go, Linnea. Our time is short, and I want to hold ye longer before ye go."

"Kerr, you can come with me. I was angry and said hurtful things. I'm not sure if Lucha will still want me here, but I don't really want to go."

"I know you don't, but whether Lucha or I like it or not, you'll be leavin' us soon, for a very long time, and I do not know if you will ever see us the same way again."

I turned to Kerr and tried to understand what he said. He'd always had a way of seeing the future, but he rarely let any of us in on it. I tried to pull away from him, but he put his body over mine and pinned me to the bed.

"Kerr, Lucha's dangerous when he loses his temper."

Kerr nodded. "I know, but I'll ask you this only once, and if you still want to go, I'll not try and stop you, but what if I told you that this would be the last time you and I see each other for a very long time?"

"Are you leaving me?" I asked, suddenly feeling like my entire world crumbled around me.

Kerr opened my legs with his knee and started to ease himself into me. "No, Linnea, it's not me who's goin' away, and for the first time in my life, I can't see what will be. I just know that I'll see you again, only you won't be a creature of the night, and I'm askin' you to give me this night, because it may very well be the last I ever have with you."

"Kerr...?"

He pushed into me, and silenced me. "I ask that you trust me, Valkyrie."

"I do," I said, as he continued our lovemaking.

## Chapter 34

I paced near the living room windows, waiting for signs of Lucha. He hadn't returned home last night and I was worried about him. I needed to see him, touch him, and know that he was okay. I would never stop loving him, Kerr or no Kerr.

Kerr had gone looking for him as soon as the sun set. He acted strange before he left, hugging me tight, and repeating over and over how much he loved me and always would. His odd behavior had left me a bit on edge, and having no idea where Lucha was didn't help.

There was a knock on the door and I ran to it, not caring if it was death himself waiting with a stake, so long as he had word on Lucha. I flung the door open and was shocked to see Camille standing there. Her blonde hair was a mess and her green eyes were wide.

"Linnea, come quick, it's Lucha. He's gone mad and is slaughtering innocents in the village."

I dropped our past issues and ran behind her towards her horse. We mounted and I held tight to her waist, not caring that I hated her. My thoughts were on Lucha, and on the innocent people whose lives were now lost because of his anger with me. We rode hard and fast all the way to the tiny village.

I dismounted, followed closely behind by Camille, and looked around at the burning village. I tried to make sense of what I saw. How could Lucha do this? How could he burn humans alive? I heard the faint cries of a baby and I turned to Camille. "I will go for the child, you try and stop Lucha. I'll be right there."

She smiled up at me, and I found that odd. I left her standing by her horse and ran in the direction of the cries. I kicked the broken front door down and ran into the small home. There was no sign of any adults, but I did find a tiny child, around the age of six, and already gone. I felt sick to my stomach when I saw what had been done. I never knew Lucha was capable of this kind of rage.

The baby cried again and I ran towards the back of the house. I pushed through the smoke that came in the window and found the tiny infant in the bottom dresser drawer. I lifted him into my arms and brought his tiny face to mine, trying to comfort him.

"Put the child down," a male voice said from behind me.

I could feel his power pushing all around me and feared that if he struck out at me, he'd kill the baby too. I kissed its tiny head and set it back down. I tried to turn around, but something cold pierced through my body. I looked down and saw the end of a sword sticking out of my chest. I fell forward and onto my knees. I put my hands over the end of the sword and held it tight.

Strong hands turned me around and the room seemed to spin for a minute before I was able to make out the tall, blonde, magic-man, Gregory. I tried to think, but my head felt light, almost like it could float away at any moment.

"Valerie, I didn't know it was you." he said. He looked around the tiny house and his eyes went to the dead girl. "What have you done? How could you do this? How could you hurt the innocent?"

I looked around. I wasn't sure what he was talking about. I hadn't done anything. "I came ... I came to stop Lucha." I knew that my time here had ended and I could feel the tiny baby's life slipping away. The smoke filled his lungs. I touched the ground and called upon mother earth to help me. I pulled on every bit of power that I had and I pushed it out with the thought of breathing life into all that surrounded me. The room shook and the smoke cleared. I screamed out as my pierced heart started to beat.

I looked up, and summoned the wind to me. I pushed it against myself and the sword started to shake as it pulled back through me. The magic-man grabbed it, trying to stop it. "No, Valerie, once it's out, you die!" He cried out as the blade pulled through his hands and sliced them open. His blood mixed with mine and I used his power to cast the sword free of my body.

He grabbed the back of my head and guided me gently to the floor. As our blood mixed, I remembered all that I'd lost over the years. I remembered everything about Kerr, and everything about Gregory. I touched his smooth face and tried to smile. "Thank you for freeing me Gregorios. Your dreams were right. I should not have doubted you. I'm sorry that I left you. I loved you, so...."

"Val, no, don't you come back to me and then die." He pulled me to him and hugged me tight.

"I've got go, Gregory. I have to make amends for what I caused to happen here. I'll be back, a friend told me so, and you'll have something to do with it."

I tried to reach for him, but the darkness swallowed me as my body gave out. I began my descent into hell.

THE END

Unedited Excerpt from *Misfit in Middle America* by Mandy M. Roth

## Chapter 1

I turned and looked at Jonathon Williams. I'd known him since I'd come to North Maple Ridge ten years earlier. I never dreamt that accepting the job of Chief of Police in a tiny, rural Midwest community would amount to this. If Jonathon's brother, Robert, hadn't been a witness to the crime, I'm not sure I'd have believed the body was Jonathon's.

The boy had grown into a man before my eyes. It seemed like only yesterday that he was coming over to build a fort with my son, Justin. I could still hear the two of them smacking sticks together, pretending to be defending the universe from the evil invaders.

Jonathon had been two weeks shy of his nineteenth birthday when he died. His life had been senselessly cut short, and it was my job to figure out who did it. I cursed silently to myself as I walked back to my jeep. Some days I really hated my job.

"Chief, do you need to see anything else, or can we bag 'em up?"



I turned and looked at Officer Braun. He was new to police work. He'd only been in it a year now. The pay here was decent, but he could have done much better in the city. His father had been an officer with our department, and that meant something. Braun looked a little green. I couldn't say I blamed him. The prospect of bagging up a body that's in pieces will make the best of men fall to their knees. This wasn't our first, and I feared it wouldn't be our last, so I nodded my head for him to finish up. Might as well learn to handle it now, I thought to myself as I walked away.

I opened my jeep door to head to the Williams' house to inform them of their son's death. Robert would need their support now, and I was pretty sure Mr. Williams would be able to offer it. Mrs. Williams, on the other hand, would more than likely be too distraught over the loss of her oldest boy to be much good to Robert. The boy had managed to survive a brutal attack and make it to the highway to flag down help. The paramedics were amazed that he was doing as well as he was. He'd lost a ton of blood. If he survived the night, it'd be a miracle.

"Excuse me, Chief Sisel, can I ask you a few questions?" I heard Beth Murray's voice before I saw her. I thought about jumping in my jeep and driving off, but that would only add to the hysteria. The last thing I wanted to do was be cornered by her. Beth was the town's lead reporter. Come to think of it, she was the town's only reporter.

She'd been born and raised here, and she knew everyone. I knew that she had gone to some fancy college on the east coast for a while, but after graduation, she headed home. I wasn't a native here, but I knew the area's appeal. I also knew that in Beth's world I didn't exist. I was a primary source for fact verification and that was it. If the town had had automated police records I was sure she'd never bother to speak to me, she'd skip me and look it up herself.

"You can ask. Doesn't mean I'll answer."

"I'd expect nothing less, Chief," she said, smiling. "I've learned to lower my expectations when dealing with you." I wasn't sure if she was being serious or not.

I watched her coming towards me with her blue jeans and tan sweater on. My eyes scanned the length of her body. I wished that she'd wear clothes that fit her better. I'd accidentally seen her once wearing a tiny black bikini. She was sun bathing in her backyard, and I had responded to a call about a missing dog. I leaned over the fence to see if he'd run that way

and found Beth lying there with the strings undone, leaving her pink nipples partially exposed to me. I could still remember the curve that her hip took, and the way her navel wanted to poke out, but didn't. Maybe if she showed off her figure a little bit more it'd hide that the fact that she had some serious personality quirks. I doubted it though.

By the looks of her now, she'd been awakened out of a deep sleep to try to get the scoop. I had to laugh when I saw tiny wisps of her blonde hair come loose from its hair tie. During the day, she was always so put-together, but in the middle of the night, she was as real as the rest of us. That was good to know, although I had fantasized many a night that she slept in tiny black silk panties with a garter belt and fish net hose, but hey, what guy didn't think about that?

Beth was nine years my junior, but that didn't stop me from thinking about her—obsessing to be exact. Karen, my wife, had been gone since Justin was three. She said that we'd married too young, and that she needed her freedom. I agree we did marry too young. We were both just eighteen when she got pregnant. She saw it as the end of our lives. I viewed it as the beginning. It was hard for the first couple of years.

I'd enrolled at the Academy and was taking classes all day and working security at night. When I wasn't at school I was working. It was hard for us, but I knew it'd be better on us in the long run. Two weeks after I started my first police job, Karen walked out on me. She dropped Justin off at the sitter's and I hadn't seen her since. Now, Justin was about to turn eighteen and getting ready to graduate, and I was Chief of Police. Maybe it had been for the best that she'd left.

As I watched Beth come closer to me, I wondered why I wasn't dating more. I wasn't old by anyone's standards. I'd just turned thirty-six and had a better build than most of my son's friends. Still, I didn't feel right dating. Karen was gone, and I didn't love her anymore, but I'd never gotten a divorce. At least I hadn't yet. It hadn't seemed important to me. My job consumed most of my time, and Justin was too high a priority to make room for a woman. I wasn't a monk either. I'd had sex since Karen walked out on me, but I'd never had a relationship. Until Beth, I never thought that I wanted one. Something about that feisty little blonde made me want to force her to commit.

My mind raced back to a week earlier when I'd run into the city for a seminar. It was a two-day planned event that left me having to get a hotel room for the night. A few of us had decided to go to a bar for a drink. I ended up meeting a hot little number whose boyfriend was out of town

for the weekend. I could still feel her lips around my cock. She was one of those women with extra full lips. The kind that make you wonder what sort of work she had done to achieve such perfection.

She spent most of the night on her knees making remarks about how 'gifted' I was. I grinned thinking about it. She'd been one of the rare few who begged me to come all over her face. I did, of course.

I tried to exchange names and numbers with her, but she'd been the one to insist on not doing it. Turns out her boyfriend was really a husband and she was just looking for a good time. I wasn't into being a home wrecker, and it had been eating at me since I'd returned home. I should have been pleased to finally get some action. I'd been on a two-year dry spell. It was hard to find someone willing to have a one-night stand in North Maple Ridge. The town was small, and I didn't need my character to come under assassination for banging the local women. Besides, I'd had my eye on one local since I'd arrived, and I wasn't even sure she knew my first name.

Beth shot me an odd look. I forgot that I was still staring at her. I looked away quickly and tried to pretend that I hadn't been ogling her. She stumbled right in front of me, and I reached my hands out to catch her. I felt her toned arms in my hands, she moved slightly, leaving my fingers resting on her full breasts. I drew a breath in and let my eyelids fall lazily closed. It was all I could do to keep from going instantly hard. The last thing I needed was to sprout a full erection while her body was pressed against mine. The woman already had a low enough opinion of me. I didn't need to add to it any.

"Damn, why can't these things happen near flat land?" she said under her breath, looking away from me and to the crime scene.

"Well, those of us with hearts wish they wouldn't happen at all."

She looked up at me. I knew what she meant, yet I put her in the hot seat. I could tell I'd caught her off guard. Damn. I hadn't wanted to make it any harder to be around her. It already seemed like the battle lines were drawn the moment we laid eyes on each other. It was her job to try to pry information out of me, and mine to keep everyone's private matters just that, private.

Beth pulled her body away from my grip a little slower than I would have expected. The edge of my mouth curved upwards. I wasn't grinning so

much as I was sneering. I had to shake it off. I didn't want to be that guy, the one that creeps women out.

I did my best to push the thoughts of fucking Beth out of my head and looked around the scene. We had the place lit pretty well, considering it was in the middle of nowhere and at night, but it wasn't the same as daylight. I could clearly make out what was going on, and my men had things under control. Beth let out a small noise when she saw one of the blood soaked sheets laying over a piece of the body. I turned to make sure she was okay. I didn't need anyone else throwing up all over my crime scene. The artificial light reflected off her eyes. I knew from sneaking peeks at her during a town meeting that her eyes were blue. I wondered if she ever bothered to notice mine. I had my doubts.

Beth seemed to live an active social life. She was definitely different from me in that respect. I'd seen her around town with her new boyfriend. He was one of those guys who like to look like they pumped gas for a living. Somehow, he'd managed to make the grunge look work for him. I'd never gotten onto that bandwagon. I liked people to know that I showered and cared what I looked like. This guy that Beth had been shacking up with was from the city and more than likely a musician of some kind. No, I didn't measure up in that area. I couldn't carry a tune to save my life. I could carry her if need be, though. My six-foot tall body was fit. Running every day saw to that, but I'd never seemed to be able to catch her eye. Sure, I managed to catch enough backlash from her to keep me up at night, but that was it.

"So what do we have?" she asked.

I looked over at the area marked off with yellow tape. What we had was a set of murders. Three to be exact. They were all related, without a doubt. We had some psycho running around, tearing the youth of our community to bits --that's what we had. I didn't think it wise to put it in those terms, so I softened it up a bit.

"We have another one."

Her eyebrow rose. "Another one? You mean, like Becca and Christian?"

I nodded my head and thought of Becca Townsend and Christian Martin. They had been the first two murder victims. Three weeks ago, we'd found Becca's body near the edge of the river. She had been in the same state as Jonathon—decapitated, disemboweled, and then mauled. It was still up in

the air if she'd been raped. There wasn't a lot of her left, and we'd had thunderstorms blow through the area the night she was killed.

A week after that, Christian's body was found further out in the woods. He'd just been accepted to State College with a full ride for football. He was the Martin's only child, and the last I knew, they were planning on moving closer to the college. Guess that wouldn't be necessary now. I hadn't spoken with them since I delivered the news of their son's death. I'm sure they blamed me for it happening. No, I hadn't been the one to commit the act, but I had been the one who neglected to catch the murderer after Becca's death.

Three gruesome murders in three short weeks had drawn the attention of the Feds. I'd received a call from them yesterday, letting me know that they'd be sending some men down. I welcomed the help, and was happy to see more resources coming in. I think my positive tone had caught them off-guard.

"Who was it?" Beth asked.

I frowned at her. She knew I couldn't release that until the next of kin was notified. She looked over at Braun kneeling in the bushes throwing up.

"It's bad then?" she asked. I looked down at her and wanted to shake her. Hell yeah, it was bad. One of the three worst crime scenes I'd ever seen. It wasn't her fault. "Off the record," she said, looking worried.

Now that was one I hadn't heard from her before. Beth liked to be the one who kept the town up to date. Promising to stay off the record was a big step for her.

"One of the Williams boys," I said.

She grabbed her mouth as a tiny gasp came out. I'd forgotten that her mother was a Williams. That made the boys her cousins. I reached out my hand to her. She moved past it and seized hold of my waist. Her hands slid up my back and she pulled on me tightly. I stood there, too shocked to hug her back, with my arms out in the air. I looked like I was being held up. I'd waited for ages to get her this close to me and then just stood there looking like Deputy Doolittle.

"Oh God, Adam. Aunt Maggie, does she know yet?"

I had to swallow. In all the years I'd known Beth, she'd only ever called me Chief Sisel. Hearing my name on her lips was magical, in lieu of the events surrounding the last few weeks.

"No. I'm on my way over to tell her and John now."

"I'm coming, too," she said as she ran around to the other side of my jeep. I didn't have the heart to turn her away. They were her family, and if she was promising to keep this off the record, then it was fine by me. Besides, having her close wasn't turning out to be altogether that bad.

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