

# **Men of the Void 1: Birthday Surprise**

## **Nia K. Foxx**

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## **Men of the Void 1: Birthday Surprise**

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**The Void.** Somewhere between heaven and hell, neither dead nor alive, lost souls wait for someone to need them -- their only hope, to prove they are worthy of a second chance. One chance to find love...

**Four unlikely friends** are destined to find themselves and love in their adult lives. Sierra, an African American, Casey, the bombshell blonde, and her Asian-American business partner Vicki Lin, and Naz, their friend from India, now a partner in a local law firm. Thrown together by fate in their childhood, they still get together for special occasions, like Sierra's 30th birthday.

Sierra is content with her neat, orderly life. Her career as a librarian fits her like a glove. She's happy among the stacks and periodicals. With her birthday just around the corner she suspects her friends are up to no good. She just never imagined their meddling would involve one kick-ass conjuring spell and an oh-so-handsome Highland warrior.

## Prologue

*It's no' lost what a friend gets*  
*-- Scottish proverb*

## Oregon

"So we're all set?" Casey asked for the third time.

Masking her annoyance, Vicki nodded.

"And your guy knows what time to be there?"

Vicki sighed. "You say 'my guy' like I'm dating him. According to the service, he knows to be there promptly at nine thirty."

"Good. I want to make sure there are no mistakes." Casey pushed herself out of the chair she'd just plopped into seconds earlier to begin another round of pacing.

"There won't be. These are highly paid professionals. The retainer alone should ensure that our little stud for hire will be leaning on Sierra's doorbell at the appropriate time."

"Damn, Vicki, not so loud," the blonde woman whispered, as if someone might eavesdrop on their discussion.

"Okay, Casey, you're losing it. There's no one in here but us. Hell, our last patient left thirty minutes ago and Tina clocked out as soon as it hit six. I'm pretty certain that if I yelled that we just bought our friend a certified A-One lay, no one would hear but us," she said, her volume increasing. Vicki choked back a laugh at the way her fair-skinned friend and business partner turned two shades of red in embarrassment.

"All right, *all right*, you made your damned point. I just hope he's worth the hell we're going to pay once this is all over." Casey moved across the room to stare out the window which overlooked their empty parking lot.

Behind her desk, Vicki snorted. "Girl, please. Sierra is about to get so royally fucked she'll be thanking us until her next birthday."

"Oh! I just thought of something." Casey whirled, her expression less worried than it had been all afternoon. In fact she was starting to look downright mischievous. "How in Sam-hell are we going to top this present next year?"

"Honey, if this man is as good as they say, I think we're in the clear for the next five years where birthday gifts are concerned." Vicki twisted a lock of long shimmering black hair between her fingers. The smile that lit her face was one of a woman who'd just successfully planned a major coup. In essence she had. After tonight Sierra Cessinger would owe her gratitude to her best friends, who'd shared every other milestone in her life. Sierra would no longer be able to complain about having never experienced the Big O with a man.

## Chapter One

*The seeking of one thing will find another*  
*-- Irish Proverb*

OCD. That's exactly what Casey, Vicki and Naz would murmur if they saw her re-dusting shelves she'd just polished thirty minutes earlier. Sierra looked around her immaculate apartment in satisfaction.

She liked her two-bedroom duplex. It fit her quiet organized lifestyle with its sparse furniture and functional arrangements. She used her living room for entertaining the select few of her inner circle. Keeping its décor to one sofa and two overstuffed chairs allowed her to fit a modestly equipped entertainment center in one corner. The slightly outdated electronics suited her needs just fine since she seldom watched television or listened to music.

Her friend Vicki Lin had threatened to take her to one of the electronic emporiums and bring her into the twenty-first century, kicking and screaming. Whenever the woman began talking about high definition screens and multi-disk players with surround sound Sierra's eyes glazed over. Well, she'd continue to dodge that bullet as long as humanly possible.

Her small dining room and cubicle-sized kitchen were decorated much the same way, only housing necessary amenities. Instead of a coffee maker she kept a percolator for brewing her caffeinated treats. A single dialed microwave, water dispensing fridge and newly installed dishwasher were the tiny space's tributes to modernity. Her bedroom, well, there was no point in going there. It served its purpose nicely each evening when she was ready to call an end to her day.

Sierra did have one room she'd splurged on, her second bedroom or 'pleasure palace' as Casey laughingly referred to it. The room was the larger of the two bedrooms

and she'd spent hours measuring and picking out just the right pieces of furniture to maximize the use of her space. Customized mahogany-colored shelves made of the sturdiest oak were built on two walls. The units housed several volumes representing her love of history, philosophy, poetry, mythology, and religion. The lower shelves were lined with an assortment of her favorite romance authors for those days when she wanted to escape reality. In front of the large picture window sat a custom-made work area adorned with a state-of-the-art computer, all-in-one printer and a nineteen-inch flat panel monitor.

A plush chaise lounge was her favorite decadence in the room, in the entire house for that matter. There she spent numerous hours losing herself in everything from Plato to Christine Feehan. Needless to say, she spent a majority of her time at home in that room and as much time as feasible on the chaise. She sighed, thinking about her new purchases, which lay waiting on that very lounge.

She'd allowed herself a birthday indulgence after work, ducking into an obscure little bookstore she must have passed a hundred times going to and from her job at the public library. She prided herself on knowing all the popular and little known book spots in the greater Portland area. If it hadn't been for a young boy throwing one hellacious tantrum at the store's entrance the store would have continued to go undiscovered. The embarrassed mother scooped up the wailing child and deposited him in a minivan parked a few feet away. The red light Sierra sat at had afforded her the opportunity to watch the entire scenario without envy.

*Reason number five thousand three hundred and sixty-four not to have children.* It wasn't that she didn't like kids. She just had no intention of joining the parental masses. Besides, she was happy with her status as aunt to one little Miss Lindy Lin, a very vivacious woman in training.

Sierra spotted the bold lettering emblazoned on the store's miniscule window, ***Book Exchange: The Gateway to Your Fantasies.*** Catchy. The minivan signaled to join the throng of other vehicles on their quests to parts unknown, and Sierra slipped easily into the vacated parking spot.

Man, had someone upstairs really liked her. After managing to get out of work a couple of hours early, she'd found her favorite Gershwin CD wedged next to the passenger seat of her car. She'd given up on it weeks ago and planned to purchase a new copy on the way home. Topping off this lucky day, she'd discovered a new bookstore.

"Happy birthday to me," she sang under her breath as she entered the tiny shop.

The stale scent of old books and patchouli oil assaulted her the moment she stepped over the threshold and descended the five steps into the ill-kempt bookshop. Normally the sight of clutter was an instant repellant for her but this afternoon she barely noticed. Her eyes were immediately drawn to the variety of books that lined shelves and sat stacked haphazardly about.

After several frustrating minutes of looking around she realized there was no rhyme or reason to the cataloging. She found books from various authors, categories, and subject matter all intermingled as if they belonged that way. The librarian in her cringed at the chaotic arrangement.

She chalked another one up to her birthday luck when her fingers landed on a pristine compilation of E. E. Cummings' poetry. She'd looked everywhere for that particular edition. Who knew that it would be waiting for her in a place she'd passed daily. She opened the front cover expecting to see a highly marked up price scribbled in the corner, only to find the book devoid of cost. Flipping through the first few pages and then to the back cover revealed nothing.

Deciding to see if her birthday luck was going to hold out, Sierra put on her most stoic librarian face and turned in search of the storeowner. The woman suddenly manifested inches away, causing Sierra to jump.

"Um..." Damn, why did she have to start off sounding so unsure? "It looks as if this book wasn't priced. Can you tell me how much it is?"

"Ah yes, prices." The woman bit her bottom lip absently for several seconds as she thought. "How does sixty dollars sound?"



*Like I'm being robbed*, Sierra bit back, choosing to say instead, "That's a bit much, don't you think?"

"Is it?" The woman smiled up at her, showing perfect teeth. For the first time Sierra took a really good look at the clerk. The woman really was quite striking. "I know what will make this worthwhile."

She twirled suddenly, squeezing between two rows of books, leaving Sierra no other choice but to follow.

"Here we are," the clerk announced, coming to a sudden halt. Sierra stumbled as she caught herself from nearly crashing into the woman's back. The clerk reached, with dainty fingers, for a leather-bound book just above her head. "What if I throw this in with your selection?" The clerk whirled around, thrusting the book on top of the thick volume of poetry.

*Good Lord, this woman is an accident waiting to happen, flitting around without any warning*, Sierra couldn't help but think. She looked down at the heavy text. "I don't know. What is it?" Already her eyes were taking in the aged leather binding. Except for the gold embossed symbol on the cover's center it was pretty nondescript.

The woman let out a childlike giggle. "Well, it's a book, obviously."

"I know that. I meant --" Full-fledged laughter had her looking up from the strange cover.

"You need to lighten up. I was just joking." The woman nodded as if responding to a silent question. "Yes, I think this book will do you some good."

"Now just wait a second, you don't know me from Eve," Sierra began but was interrupted by the clerk.

"What do you say I let you have both books for thirty dollars? That's fair, isn't it?"

Apparently it was fair enough to make her forget her reprimand because she'd promptly bought both books. Once her friends left that evening she was prepared to snuggle up on her lounge and delve into her new acquisitions.

At home, she gingerly placed each item on the chaise, fingering the emblem of the unknown book. She froze as unexpected warmth shot up her fingers, engulfing her hand and stretching up in a gentle caress to her arm. A hand. It definitely felt like a large hand was stroking her skin.

"Aye, she will do quite nicely," a disembodied voice said, filling the room.

The book slipped from her fingers, landing on the lounge with a thud. Sierra stared at it in stunned silence. There was no way in hell the book could have spoken to her. It was even less likely that someone had touched her arm. However, try as she might, she couldn't completely rid herself of the odd sensation.

The shrill sound of the doorbell brought her back to sharp reality.

Six thirty. Her girls were right on schedule.

"Happy birthday to you," the trio at the door greeted in song as soon as she opened it.

"Get in here." Sierra smiled, shaking her head at the loud women she'd known since her first day at Spencer Orphanage nearly twenty-five years ago.

"I think someone is afraid we're going to embarrass her," Naz said, stepping over the threshold and leading the other two women into the living room. "I might be just offended enough to take this gift back." She held up the perfectly decorated package that let Sierra know extra had been spent on wrapping. While her friend might be the best gift selector this side of the Mississippi, it didn't extend to her wrapping skills.

"You know I'm never embarrassed by you." Sierra didn't try to mask the mock sarcasm in her voice as she embraced each woman in turn. "Is that Chinese I smell?"

"Of course! You know I would never forget." Casey winked.

So began the birthday ritual.

Sierra was certain she hadn't seen any of her friends in over a month. She talked to all of them once a week, but the get-togethers were becoming less frequent. Between Vicki and Casey's new pediatric practice, not to mention Vicki's active three-year-old daughter, Naz making partner in her law firm and Sierra's promotion at the library,

their window of opportunity to just hang out together had narrowed dramatically. Last year, Naz had broken with tradition when her boyfriend complained about wanting to spend the weekend alone with her. The friends didn't hide their pleasure when only a few weeks after the birthday incident Harry was kicked to the curb. Sierra'd never liked the jerk to begin with.

\* \* \*

"I'm stuffed," Sierra declared sometime later, setting her plate on the coffee table. They sat in her living room, catching up over the meal. Several empty cartons littered the low-slung table, a horrible reminder of their gluttonous appetites.

"Me too." Vicki sighed before plopping the remainder of an egg roll in her mouth.

"I'll just clean this mess up." Sierra made to rise.

"Oh no you don't," the other women protested in unison.

"Why don't you wallow in it for a while? We'll clean it up, I promise," Vicki added at her skeptical look.

"Naz, are you doing the alumni dinner for Spencer House?" Sierra asked as her friend poked through the white containers. The woman had the largest appetite she'd ever seen for someone so thin.

"That is coming up, huh?" she asked in between bites.

"Yup, I sent you all email reminders last night."

"I'm sorry. My stupid server is on the fritz at work so I have to access all of my messages remotely. Speaking of which, do you mind if I try and check from that cyborg you call a computer later?"

"Go ahead. So should I RSVP for you too?" Sierra wondered aloud.

"Of course. My mother would kill me if I didn't go."

"I know that's right," Casey chuckled.

Petra Singh had worked at Spencer House as program director for over thirty years, which was how Naz had become inducted into the group of orphaned girls. Now

retired in Hadrabad, India, the elder Singh made sure to send her yearly donations via her daughter.

"I'm surprised Mom hasn't called to remind me," she said absently.

"How is your mother?" Casey inquired.

"Good. She and Dad are enjoying being back in India. Although, in our last conversation she seemed to be missing her friends here. I wouldn't be surprised to hear her mentioning a visit soon."

"It's about time. Just remember I get first dibs on her," Vicki added.

Naz rolled her eyes. "Yeah I know. If you want she can stay with you the entire visit. That way I don't have to hear about what an old woman she's becoming and how someone her age should have more than one grandchild."

"Hey, you act like you're the only one who hears that speech. We all get an earful, thank you very much," Casey informed them.

"Which reminds me, the last time I spoke with her she wanted me to remind you all that her number is still the same, and that she spends a great deal of time at home." Naz gave each woman a stern look that was reminiscent of many they'd received from her mother over the years for their numerous indiscretions.

"Lindy and I already planned to call her this Sunday. She wants to thank Grandma Singh for the beautiful sari she sent," Vicki said with mock superiority.

"Hey, Naz, can you finish your grazing already? Sierra looks like she's about ready to explode over there," Casey said.

"I do not," the accused protested. "You just want to get to the presents."

Sierra shook her head at Casey's predictability. If there was a wrapped package within ten feet of her she had to know what was inside it. Sierra, admittedly, had OCD but they all had their own quirks which made them borderline for the disorder.

Her three friends made quick work disposing of the evidence of their meal, refusing to let the birthday girl help.

"Why don't you get the movie I brought out of my bag?" Vicki called from the kitchen.

Sierra spotted the hard-to-miss knapsack that doubled as an emergency kit and catch-all. Vicki's quirk was being prepared for any eventuality even if it meant toting a bag around the size of Australia.

*"Not Another Porn Movie,"* she read loud enough for the women to hear as they went about clearing their mess. "Tell me this isn't what I think it is."

Sierra heard whispers, followed by a series of giggles, but no one answered her directly. She shook her head at the three women. They seemed to have sex permanently imprinted on their brain and thought her a complete prude for not sharing in their deviance. Well, she'd show them that she wasn't as straitlaced as they accused her of being.

"Why is it so quiet in here?" Naz re-emerged first, carrying two glasses of red wine.

"Opening credits," Sierra explained, taking the offered glass before tucking her feet underneath her in the plush chair. "I fast forwarded through the corn-ball ads. No point in watching them when there's enough of that in the movie."

"Oh my God, she actually put it on," Vicki announced, her mouth agape as she came from the kitchen with Casey in tow.

"I thought we were doing presents next," Casey pouted, plopping on the sofa.

"We will later. Now shush, I haven't seen this one yet," Vicki ordered.

"You know, eventually, at the rate you're collecting them, you're going to need a locked cabinet for these," Sierra commented. "I don't want you corrupting my poor little niece."

"Hey, are you guys gonna talk or watch the film," Vicki complained.

Sierra couldn't believe Vicki was actually listening to the horrible dialogue. She gritted her teeth at the cheesy banter, wondering why they even bothered. Just when her thoughts began to drift, the wanna-be pretty boy on screen stripped off his T-shirt, revealing a physique that could only be honed from frequent visits to a gym.

*Not bad,* she thought, getting past the darker-than-natural tan that made him look almost orange. *Probably one of those rub-on jobs.* His brunette companion watched him

with lust-filled eyes, or the best she could muster while she reclined on the bed in her silky white panty and bra set. The camera switched back to the man as he pushed jeans over nonexistent hips. His cock flopped limply in front of him. Although flaccid, his potential was very much evident. The camera panned to a wide screen angle as the brunette eased across the bed on hands and knees, lying flat on her belly in front of her onscreen boyfriend.

The man groaned when she nearly swallowed his entire penis. *Damn, she's good*, Sierra couldn't help but think. The woman's blowjob proved to be just the right stimulus needed to have him at complete attention. She continued to suck him until he looked as if he were ready to explode right there. Which would have been a huge disappointment in Sierra's eyes.

"Now that's what I'm talking about!" Naz exclaimed. "Harry was barely pushing five inches."

Sierra made an appreciative sound as the woman in the film took in the man's impressive erection while he eased out of her mouth. He definitely had the package, and from his arrogant stance he knew it. He instructed his partner to lay back, which she did with the same slow sensuality. The man made quick work of sliding panties down her toned legs. She spread them wide to reveal an elongated pink clit that demanded attention. He obviously took instruction well because he dove in with relish. By the second stroke of his tongue Sierra could feel the twinge of heat stirring in her nether regions.

"Okay, this should be given to every guy on his eighteenth birthday," Casey practically drooled, but who could blame her. The oral action in front of them had Sierra shifting in her seat. The man lapped at his companion with all the fervor of someone who loved the taste of pussy. As much as Sierra tried to convince herself they were just acting, she doubted the pure ecstasy on the woman's face could be faked. His tongue seemed almost unreal as it jackhammered against her clit. The woman's moans and demands for more filled the room as she clutched the head of her relentless partner

between her wide-spread thighs. She came with a loud cry, as spasms appeared to rock her body. Sierra had never envied someone more.

For all of her outward façade of indifference, Sierra's body hummed with sexual energy. By the end of the hour and a half movie she was certain she'd need to excuse herself to change her creamy underwear.

"Well, that was something," Sierra began as she flicked the feature off with a remote.

"Yeah, and a reminder that I don't have anyone to unleash this pent up frustration on when I get home." Naz poured herself another glass of wine.

"That goes ditto for all of us," Sierra reminded her.

She didn't quite hear the mumbled comment from Vicki but caught the evil-eyed look Casey gave their friend before bursting out with, "Can we do gifts now?"

"Sure. Let me just run to the bathroom," Sierra added.

"I think I'm in the mood for another round of food," Vicki said.

"Well, if this is an intermission I guess I can just do a quick check of my messages." Naz stood.

\* \* \*

In the bathroom Sierra freshened up, discarding her moistened underwear in the laundry hamper. She hadn't been turned on like that in ages, had no reason to be. Unlike Vicki she wasn't an avid watcher of porn and as far as sexual encounters went hers were lacking in quality and quantity. Thirty years old and the only orgasms she'd ever experienced were self-induced. Although she was liberated enough to feel more than comfortable with that, it still didn't ease the desire to have a man penetrating her, instead of a vibrator, when she experienced the ultimate pleasure.

She eased her tan dress over her hips, feeling a bit naughty at being bare underneath the thigh high dress she wore for lounging about the house. She'd bought it on one of her shopping trips with Vicki but felt that the deep square neckline and thin straps were inappropriate attire for work. It was, in fact, the most daring outfit she owned. God, she *really* was turning into a dowdy old spinster.

## Chapter Two

*When all is not lost, all can be recovered*  
*-- Scottish proverb*

### The Void

"There must be some way out," the new arrival muttered, while squinting into the foggy expanse of space as if he could see into its mist.

"Trust me, all new arrivals think the same thing after they realize they're not dead. I thought it myself," a man attired in a 1930s zoot suit said to the newcomer's back, admiring the man's snazzy outfit. Hell, if this was how men dressed in the future he hoped his consort was in this era. When the new arrival took cautious steps into the foggy void the zoot-suited man shook his head. *He'll be back. They always came back. Where else can they go?*

He turned his attention to the scattered group of men. There were hundreds like him, from different time periods but all suffering the same fate for their past indiscretions while on earth. Womanizing. At least that was the crime for those in this realm of existence. Daily, one or two left while new ones arrived to take their place. Some stayed longer than others, depending on the severity of their indiscretions.

Those who'd been there a particularly long time were a brooding bunch, typically keeping to themselves deep in the murky fog. Apparently Divinity, the beautiful-voiced creature who cast them there, didn't discriminate. There were all races, nations, creeds and economic classes represented from various stages in human existence. She called The Void the Existing Plane. There, none experienced the normal human desires enjoyed by those on the Living Plane. In The Void one was left to reflect



on his past indiscretions. In essence it was a place to quietly atone for sins instead of doing it after the hour of final judgment when God handed out Its decree.

Apparently the Existing Plane held many chambers, each one designed for overindulgence in one form or another. He'd only encountered a handful unfortunate enough to have to spend time in multiple realms and he gave those few a wide berth. Although none of the realms' inhabitants were truly evil people that didn't make them any less dangerous.

Despite its sound, the Existing Plane was not a punishment, not really. Divinity had stepped into each of their lives and plucked them off a path of destruction that would have inevitably led to an eternity of damnation at death. Once it was explained why they were brought to The Void many counted themselves lucky. Well, eventually. The zoot-suited man shuddered at the alternative. He was perfectly content with doing his time right there.

The fog separated as one very familiar resident emerged from the haze. Several of the men nodded to the imposing figure that was Giric MacDumnall. As far as Zoot Suit knew, Giric was one of The Void's eldest members, having passed through several of the Plane's realms. The Highlander was said to have been a tòiseach, a warrior commander who'd participated in many ancient battles. To look at him none would contest the truth of the rumor. Next to his hulking six foot four inch frame Zoot Suit felt puny. The Scotsman lorded over the plane in his tartan, sword sheathed in a leather scabbard, his bare arms decorated with tattoos that snaked around his corded muscles. He wore manacles on each of his wrist that looked large enough for one to easily encompass both of the smaller man's arms.

"So, it is true?" A thickly accented black man questioned the approaching warrior without hesitation. Although not as broad-shouldered as Giric, the black man wasn't lacking in physical prowess. He stood a few inches taller than the Highlander and Zoot Suit was certain that, should a battle ever ensue, the two men would be evenly matched.

"Aye, 'tis true. The lass need only recite the words and I shall be free of this place."

Zoot Suit tried to remain inconspicuous as he eavesdropped on the conversation. It was obvious from the Scotsman's slip in dialect that he'd seen or heard something that affected him very deeply. Since his own arrival seventy-six years ago, he had observed the way the Highland warrior tried imitating the various current dialects of The Void's inhabitants, most likely in preparation for his potential release in modern times. However, whenever he became emotionally charged he lapsed into an indecipherable variation of English.

"Divinity is certain she will speak them?"

"She has assured me 'tis a certainty."

"Did she permit you a look at your consort, like the others before?"

Giric didn't answer for several seconds. "Aye."

"You wish to keep me in suspense, warrior?" Muzi asked with an almost grim determination. There were only two ways to leave The Void: complete your sentence and be returned to the time in which you were claimed, or be called out by one in need, your consort. Most men wished to be returned to their own period, especially as they were brought up to speed on the changing earth in the Living Plane.

Zoot Suit had heard Muzi Lindani, a Zulu warrior, nearly choked the life from a newcomer once who spoke of the fate of various "African" nations. If Giric hadn't been on hand to talk the furious African down he would have certainly strayed beyond even Divinity's intervention. Apparently even the magic of The Void couldn't dampen his rage at discovering the hundreds of years of murder, slavery and oppression inflicted on his kind.

"She looks to be a descendant of your nation," the Highlander began slowly as if recalling the woman's image. "A bonnie lass."

Muzi nodded. "That is good, but if you do not wish to go perhaps you can appeal to the sorceress to allow you your appointed time."

"No', I willna seek favors from that witch. I accept my fate. Besides, 'tis certain that I will reap great benefit from my consort's womanly curves." He frowned suddenly. "If this witch's curse has not unmanned me completely."

The Void shook in warning, causing several brave or very foolish men to look in Giric's direction, as he seemed to be the only one capable of getting that type of reaction out of Divinity.

"I speak only of enjoying my consort, witch. Calm yourself," Giric bellowed, looking up into the endless mist above them.

"'Tis with a heavy heart that I say fare thee well, my friend." Giric extended one arm.

"Perhaps this is only a brief parting," Muzi replied, grasping the man's bulky forearm in parting.

## Chapter Three

*All that is heard must not be believed.*

*-- Scottish proverb*

"Now can we do presents?" Casey sighed as soon as Sierra re-entered the living room.

"We gotta wait for Naz," Vicki answered in a tone meant to soothe an impatient child. Sierra reclaimed her position on the chair, glad to see that the television had been turned off.

"Oh. She'll be all damned day on that computer."

"No, I won't. I'm completely locked out," Naz complained with a frown.

Sierra's eyes widened when she saw what her friend held in her hand.

"What's that?" Vicki asked.

Naz dropped the book on the coffee table. "I found it on Sierra's lounge."

"Looks mysterious."

"I picked it up today at a new place I discovered."

"What exactly is it?" Naz inquired, her expression returning to some semblance of normalcy.

"I'm not sure." Sierra leaned closer to the table, almost afraid to touch the book again, her earlier memory coming back to her in a flash.

"Well, you won't know until you open it." She wasn't sure who spoke because at the same time she could have sworn she heard another voice, a vaguely familiar female one, urging her on.

She inhaled deeply, reaching for the book almost in slow motion. Her fingers touched the cover. Nothing. She flipped open the pages, disappointed to find the first

few blank. She delved further, until her fingers stopped on a handwritten page. The language was foreign. The script looked old, ancient, in fact.

"What does it say?"

Sierra's fingers traced the lettering. She was prepared to tell her friends that she hadn't the foggiest idea when, of their own accord, words burst forth from her mouth in a language that sounded as old as time itself. The lyrical words flowed from her, swirled around her. She couldn't stop them. She felt compelled to continue until just as quickly as the impromptu recital began, it stopped.

"What the hell did you just say?" Vicki asked.

"I don't..." she trailed off. The words hadn't come from her, not really. Sure, her mouth made the sounds but she felt more like a conduit, definitely not the source. Yet somehow the meaning was as clear to her as if it were written in English.

"It says, 'In this time and space, bring my consort to this place, to unlock the secret within me and walk with through the rest of my life's journey'."

"How beautiful," Naz sighed. "So it's some kind of book of poetry?"

"I don't think so," Sierra answered truthfully. As she completed her thought a thunderous rumble filled the room before everything went black.

"I have emergency candles in my bag," Vicki announced to the now silent room.

"Was that an earthquake?" Sierra asked, feeling the aftereffects in her bones.

"Not unless California just fell out from under us. The San Andreas Fault doesn't reach to Oregon," Naz assured them.

There was a flicker before the room was encased in the soft white glow of lights again.

"Probably some sort of power surge. I'll check..." Sierra's train of thought vanished as she watched one large hulk of a man step from the entry hall into her living room. "Oh... my... God!"

Casey was the next to see him, then Naz. Vicki twisted in her own chair and gasped.

Good Lord, the man's head was only a foot away from touching her ceiling. Thick auburn hair flowed just beyond his shoulders and he stared back at Sierra with the bluest eyes she'd ever seen. He looked rough, or as her romance books would say, untamed. Broad shoulders jutted out, flowing into thick arms and biceps. Tattoos swirled around each thick forearm. Was he wearing a kilt?

"Who are you and what are you doing in my house?" Sierra finally found her voice. Well, not quite her voice, more like Minnie Mouse's but it would do for now.

"I am Giric MacDumnall and I have come for ye." His gaze was unwavering as he pinned Sierra to the spot with his blue eyes.

"Me?"

"Aye. I will have your name, lass."

"My name?" Sierra repeated, trying to digest his request.

"Ye have the eyes of an intelligent woman. Please dunna tell me ye are daft." He looked genuinely concerned.

"My name is Sierra." She wasn't sure why she gave the information up. *Did he say daft? Stupid?* No, this man hadn't just broken into her house and called her stupid. "And my husband is a cop who'll be home any minute. So if I were you I'd high-tail my kilt-wearing butt out of here and back to wherever it is you came from," she added.

His eyes narrowed, setting off warning sirens in her head. Maybe she should have tried a more gentle method of persuasion. For all she knew the man could be some deranged wacko and the mere mention of law enforcement was the catalyst needed to set him off.

"I ken you must no' have a husband because I have been sent as your consort. Where can I find this Cop?"

Oh brother, he was loony. Probably imagined himself to be some old world Scottish lord. No... warrior, judging from his physique and tattoos.

"He's early," Vicki blurted out, shifting completely in her chair to get a better view of the stranger.

"I thought you requested a fireman," Casey didn't bother to whisper.

"Oh please. Look at him. Had I known they had him in their arsenal I might have requested his services for myself."

"Will someone please tell me what the hell is going on around here?" Sierra yelled, drawing the attention of everyone in the room, including the man. He had been temporarily distracted by the animated women but now his hard eyes refocused on her. Great.

"We got him for you. Surprise!" Vicki beamed, coming abruptly to her feet. "No need to thank me now, but from the looks of him you will in the morning."

"What?" Sierra stared at her friend in disbelief, trying to grasp her meaning.

"Wow, I'm impressed," Naz said, following the other two women's lead. "I expect the same in seven months."

"Only if you promise one for me too," Casey countered.

"Wait, where are you going?" Sierra gasped in panic as her friends grabbed up their bags and slid on discarded shoes.

"Trust me, if I thought you could stomach an audience I'd definitely stay around and watch." Vicki hoisted her knapsack on her shoulder.

Sierra shot a wary glance to the silent stranger then back to her friends who were attempting to file out of her duplex.

"Excuse us, big guy, but you're blocking the only exit," Casey said, patting him on the chest, her hand lingering a moment longer than necessary. With lightning-fast reflexes the man easily encircled her wrist.

"I am only here for my consort," he said firmly, without raising his voice.

"Of course you are, big fella," she agreed as he stepped aside to allow them passage.

Okay, maybe he wasn't too dangerous if he was letting them leave so easily, Sierra thought, springing from the seat that she'd seemed glued to moments earlier.

She tried to ignore the steel blue gaze that seemed fixated on her. "I need a word with my girlfriends," she provided as she attempted to follow in the women's footsteps.

"I canna permit that, lass." He blocked the opening.

Behind him she heard the sound of her front door opening. "Happy Birthday," the women chimed again before closing the door in their wake, leaving her very much alone with the sexiest, fiercest looking man she'd ever seen.

"Okay, you've had your joke. I get it, you guys set me up. Well, I'm done playing."

"I assure you, lass, I am no man to indulge in trivial games. Now tell me where I may find this Cop. If I must settle the matter of whose woman you are, let it be done quick, as the effects of The Void are wearing off me faster than expected."

"The Who? Wearing what?" She stared at him in confusion. "Okay, I admit, you look good in this whole Scottish getup and the accent is flawless, but tomorrow is officially my birthday and once you leave I think I may start it early."

He didn't budge, just continued to stare like he was absorbing everything about her.

"Look, I'm sure you were well compensated for this gag, but it's over now. Got it? Now if you'll just leave..." She attempted her best stern librarian tone, the one that worked on unruly teenagers bent on being as obnoxious as possible. But this was no teenager. The hardness reflected in his ice-blue eyes let her know she'd need something more convincing than firm speech.

Instinctively she took a step back. Her phone and a very heavy African fertility statue were across the room. At the moment she'd give anything to have either in her hand.

"I think not, woman." One arm reached out, snaking around her slender waist to rein her in.

"Oommph." The sound escaped at the impact of being forced against his hard body. *And good Lord what a body*, she thought as hands that had gone up on reflex now registered the solid form underneath them.

"'Tis the last time I will request the whereabouts of this man who claims to be your husband."



*Whereabouts of who?* her brain asked, more interested in finding out if he felt this strong all over. "I don't have a husband," she admitted distractedly. How did one go about sneaking a free feel without their subject knowing they were being accosted, she wondered.

The pregnant silence that followed had her redirecting her attention from the plaid covering his chest. She ventured a cautious look up at him, finding it difficult given their proximity and his enormous stature.

"You wish to play me false, woman?" His brows furrowed, reminding her of an upset child.

Lord, why did his hybridized speech have to sound so adorable? She doubted anyone would ever use that adjective to describe him. "I just wanted to scare you." She realized how ridiculous that must sound to someone like him. She had the distinct impression that very few things scared him.

He snorted at her comment, his hold loosening just enough to allow her extra breathing space and little else. Time seemed to come to a slow stop in his arms.

"Hey, what are you doing?" she protested but made no attempt to move when his free hand reached for the carefully secured braids she'd arranged in a neat bun atop her head. Near waist length, the black micros tumbled around her.

"Beautiful."

She didn't doubt he meant the comment, especially since he made no attempt to hide the increasingly evident cock stirring against her belly.

Sierra was in a silent state of awe over the prominent erection and her predicament. She resisted the urge to test if the already large outline had reached maximum potential. She was so distracted that the shrill sound of the phone ringing had her practically jumping out of her skin. Giric had a similar reaction. One moment she was being held in his arms, the next she found herself thrust behind him. The large sword was immediately unsheathed and poised for battle. The combination of his fluid action, tall frame and low ceiling brought several chunks of plaster falling around them. Even from her vantage point he looked every bit a warrior.

"What is that accursed noise?" he asked as the phone completed its last cycle before her answering machine picked up.

"You've reached Sierra..." the message began, causing the kilt-clad man to tense even more before turning to her in an eerily slow motion.

"'Tis your voice." It sounded like an accusation. His narrowing eyes had her taking retreating steps. "Are ye a witch?" His brogue became thicker.

"No. A librarian." If she found his inquiry odd she wasn't about to question him now, not when he pinned her with a look that left little doubt that he knew exactly what to do with that very authentic looking sword. Her mouth went suddenly dry.

"It's just an answering machine," she found herself quickly explaining, although she was uncertain why. Sure most people nowadays had voicemail, but she hadn't seen the financial practicality for the monthly expense. Now she wondered if her frugality was about to get her a spot on the ten o'clock news. The headline flashed before her eyes: *Librarian killed because of her outdated answering machine.*

"People leave you a message when you miss their phone call," she explained further when he maintained his stance.

As if on cue, Vicki's voice came through, filling her apartment. "Hey. Either you're really pissed at us, or you're just very preoccupied at the moment. I hope it's the latter. Anyway, by the time you get this I'm sure you'll have figured out that your house guest is a true *professional* who came highly recommended by... well, let's just say by a friend. I hope you enjoy him." She heard her other two friends in the background chiming in their encouragement. "Oh, and I expect play-by-play details," she snickered before ending the call.

"Are they witches?" Giric questioned, not taking his eyes from her.

Sierra could only shake her head this time as the implication of her friend's words sank in. They hadn't hired him to play a joke on her. He'd been hired to have sex with her.

She gasped aloud, watching the man visibly relax. Everything was crystal clear now. He was a *professional*, from his period costume and speech to his odd reactions.

She was supposed to be seduced by a Highland rogue. Embarrassed heat rose from the very tips of her toes. Did her girls really think she was that pathetic that she couldn't get herself laid if she really wanted to? Her eyes drank in the man who now stood a few feet away. Okay, so maybe she couldn't have caught the attention of someone like him normally. Dear Lord, they'd hired a male prostitute for her, a very expensive one from the looks of him.

"There is no reason for ye to fear me, lass. Witch or nay, ye are still my consort," he said, propping his massive sword against the wall.

There was that damned word again. He must be using it to mean client, she thought.

"There is much I need to learn about this modern time. Come and show me your wee keep." His voice sounded gentle as he reached out with one hand, making no further move to advance on her.

She stared at his offering, knowing that if she took his hand she would be agreeing to give in to this fantasy world he was creating, one in which she was to be thoroughly ravished by a man from the past. She doubted her friends would get much of a refund on their money even if she refused him, but it would serve them right if she did.

Several locks of hair had fallen over his shoulders and Sierra grudgingly admitted that he was quite sexy. Would it be so wrong to, just this one time, do something completely out of the ordinary, something so totally beyond her? In the morning, her life would return to normal. She'd sleep in, have a late breakfast and just lounge about. That was tomorrow, this was now.

## Chapter Four

*A good beginning makes a good ending*  
*-- English proverb*

Her hand felt tiny slipping into his, but everything about him made her feel small and oh so womanly.

"Um... what would you like to see first?" she ventured, playing along with the fantasy he was creating. For the next hour she walked him around her home showing him everything from the kitchen and all its appliances to the bathroom shower. True to character he curiously soaked everything up like a thirteenth century Highlander thrust into the twenty-first century. She giggled when he insisted on trying everything for himself after she gave him the requested demonstration. He took his role completely to heart, she thought, watching him in amazement as he went through the pretense of discovery. He'd diligently asked about the purposes of every "new" thing, nodding his understanding or grunting when her explanation didn't seem to suffice.

There was just one last thing to show him and her mouth went dry at the idea.

"This," she began, pushing the door open, "is my bedroom." He didn't hesitate as he stepped into the sparsely decorated room before her, nor did he hide his interest in the small room as his eyes landed on her queen-sized bed.

Sierra bit her bottom lip, wondering how in heaven he would fit comfortably in the thing.

"Um... that is an alarm clock." She pointed out the digital device on a bedside table, wanting to divert his attention. "It's used for telling time and waking someone up on time in the morning."

"There is not much else in this room save your wee bed, Sierra." His baritone voice dropped an octave and she realized that it was the first time he'd used her name since his arrival.

"There's a dresser for storing clothes and other personal items," she instructed.

"I believe you said that was also the purpose of a closet," he reminded.

"Yes, but sometimes extra space is needed."

He nodded, dismissing the topic. "I believe I can learn the rest at a later time, eh, lass?"

Giric moved with quiet ease. *Surprising for a man his size*, she thought as he came to stand behind her. Her heart caught in her throat from the heat radiating off his body. For several long seconds he did nothing at all and Sierra wondered if there was something wrong. He pushed her braids around the front of her body, exposing her neck. She felt his hot breath before the gentle nuzzling of his mouth. His tongue darted out to draw circles on the exposed flesh.

*How did he know?* she thought. Her legs became instantly weak from the simple action. Giric's arm snaked around her, acting as an anchor as he pulled her back into him. He suckled her neck none too gently, eliciting a groan that seemed to start at her core.

"It has been hundreds of years since I've lain with a woman. I will try to be gentle," he murmured into her neck.

Did she want gentle? Hell, she didn't care so long as she had him.

Brazenly she turned in his arms. "Whichever way you like," she said softly, loving the feel of being in his arms again. His erection was back in full force and he made certain she knew it. Lips fell on hers in a heavy, possessive kiss that didn't leave any doubt as to how he would dominate her body. Sierra found herself groaning into his mouth as he lifted her several inches off the ground, pushing her up against a nearby wall. Instinctively she wrapped her legs around his waist. The short skirt hiked up past her thighs as Giric ground his covered cock into her bare mons. The friction was delicious and Sierra didn't hesitate to participate by gyrating her hips as best she could.

Neither cared that she was soaking his costume with her female juices, each bent on pushing the bounds of pleasure. Giric shoved her dress up over her hips, giving him access to her firm backside which he grabbed with one hand, bracing the other against the wall behind her. His tongue plundered her mouth, swirling with her own in a dance as old as time itself.

Sierra cried out when he sought the hollow of her neck again and their grinding pushed her close to an early climax. Her body coiled in response, pussy throbbing, contracting even more as her orgasm pushed ever closer. She tried to hold on, wanted to prolong the feeling, but the tension in her demanded release. She came in a series of contractions meant to suck him dry if he'd been inside of her. Almost of its own volition her body sagged against the wall.

"Remove the dress," Giric demanded as he let her slide gently to her feet.

She didn't hesitate, complying with his request, pulling the cotton garment over her head in one fluid motion.

"By the gods, woman." He stepped back to get a full view of her.

Encouraged by his response she reached to unfasten her bra from behind, letting her remaining garment fall to the floor.

"I don't think it's fair that I'm the only one naked in this room," she found herself saying, just as eager to get a full look at his naked form.

Giric's answer was to remove the wide belt at his waist, letting it drop to the floor with a thud. He held her gaze as, piece by piece, he revealed himself. When he was finally done Sierra could only stare at him in silent appreciation. To describe him as perfect would have been the understatement of the year. Although she noted several remnants of scars across his chest, it only served to enhance his dangerous Highland appeal. Her eyes drifted over a muscled chest, down defined abs that could easily be counted, down further to what had to be the pride of Scotland. Sierra's heart pounded loudly in her chest and her body began to warm again just from the sight of him.

Without preamble Giric had her in his arms once more. Eager limbs wrapped around his body while he carried her and she welcomed the gentle prodding of his cock

at the entrance of her damp sheath. He ate up the small distance to the bed in seconds, depositing her in its center. Sierra couldn't believe how much she wanted this man, a stranger. Yet she would give anything to have him inside of her at that moment.

"What about protection?"

He didn't miss a beat. "Ye will never have to worry about your safety with me, lass."

Was that supposed to be ancient Highlander for "I have condoms"?

"It's just that I didn't see anything."

"'Tis not the time for talking, lass. Ye needn't worry about your safety. 'Tis me job to protect ye."

A professional, that's what Vicki said. Giric could probably don a condom before she could blink.

He spread her legs wide, his eyes drinking their fill of her exposed sex. She nearly cried out in protest when he kneeled on the ground instead of joining her on the bed.

"Not yet," he said as if reading her mind, using her ankles to draw her closer.

Sierra thought she would die a slow death when he began massaging the folds protecting her clit.

"You're so wet for me." He spread her lips, using one finger to begin a slow twirling on the dark pink nub.

"Oh!" She arched against him. It wasn't long before his head dipped between her thighs, his tongue darting out to apply firm pressure where his finger had just been. Her fingers twined in his hair while he ravaged her clit mercilessly. His tongue swirled and delved, lips sucked until she was one giant nerve ending. One finger slipped inside of her now dripping core and she arched off the bed.

"More," she begged, feeling the beginnings of the tension building inside her again. Giric gave her one last long stroke of his tongue before joining her on the bed. Sierra lay weakly while he readjusted her, trying her hardest not to beg him. If he didn't end the torment soon she was certain she'd just take what she wanted, no, *needed*.

Giric wedged between her thighs, spreading her wide before bending over her body to give her breasts equal attention from his expert mouth. He alternated between breasts, plucking one dark, turgid nipple with his teeth then the next until she was writhing underneath him, her body near spasms.

"Please, I'll do anything," she implored in complete submission.

"Mayhap later." He dropped down to give her a long slow kiss. She could smell the musky scent of herself on him which only heightened her aroused state. His hands slipped under her hips before he sank into her with one long slow thrust. He had the largest cock she'd ever had the pleasure of experiencing and it filled her to capacity, stretching her walls beyond belief. He ended the kiss when he finally settled completely inside of her.

"You're so tight, lass, perfect for me. I willna ever get enough of you." She didn't have a chance to try and decipher his words or meaning, because at that moment he withdrew then drove in again. Each withdrawal and thrust pushed her until all she could do was feel. He started a steady rhythm which Sierra quickly picked up on. Her body had already reached critical mass and her impending orgasm burst forth. She tightened, clenched, and contracted until finally she exploded. Her suctioning pussy beckoned him to join her. His slow pounding gave way to more hurried strokes. Her core continued to spasm around his thick penis as the final waves of her orgasm washed over her.

She stared up into the heated intensity of his gaze, her body continuing to take every wonderful inch of him inside her. When his orgasm hit, he thrust into her one last time, exploding so deeply within her she was certain that she could feel his seed filling her womb. Not once did he take his eyes off her.

"After all this time I cannot believe the Fates have given you to me," Giric mumbled as he tucked her into his arms.

So that was what great sex felt like, she thought as she settled into his embrace. Man had she been gypped all those years. Fingers rubbed through the fuzz covering his



chest as she enjoyed the sound of his steady heartbeat. She would be content to lie there all night.

"Lass, I must warn ye against stroking me, lest I believe ye are ready for more."

She smiled, enjoying his brogue. His stomach growled loudly, penetrating the brief silence. Sierra laughed out loud. "I think the only thing your body might be craving is some food."

She gasped when she found herself on her back with Giric nestled between her thighs again. "Ye question my prowess?"

The expression on his face made her want to laugh more but the reawakening cock between her legs was no joking matter.

"I just thought you might be hungry..." She moaned aloud as he pushed his semi-erect cock into her.

"You will find that all of my appetites are gluttonous."

She could feel him growing inside of her slick walls, her channel stretching to accommodate every inch.

He bent over her, securing strong arms behind her back and raising their bodies until she straddled his waist. The movement had him lodged so deep within her it took her breath away.

"Hold on," he instructed, hands going to her round ass so that he could pump her over his swollen cock. Sierra buried her head in his neck, biting her lower lip to keep from screaming her pleasure in his ear.

Never before had she experienced so much bliss. Under his tutelage, she rode them both to a climax that left her limp.

"Have ye fallen asleep, lass?" he asked after several moments. Her cheek rested on his shoulder as her breathing finally calmed.

"No," she mumbled into his shoulder, although she made no attempt to open her closed eyes.

"I believe I need to find a way to revive you."

"You're killing me," she moaned, trying to put up a proper protest.

Giric couldn't hold back the smile at his woman's reaction. Although he could have easily taken her again he realized that she wasn't used to such rigorous activities, and the centuries of inactivity left his appetite bottomless. When he'd entered her the first time her tightness had nearly undone him, making him feel like an untried youth having his first tumble with a woman. He'd been with many women, which was one of his reasons for incarceration in The Void, but none had made him come alive the way Sierra did. *Is this a part of the sorceress's doing?* he wondered.

When he'd stepped out of the main hall of her tiny keep and had seen her for the first time, he was in awe of her beauty. Although she'd been seated he knew that she was tall by the long dark legs that crossed in front of her. She was slender in build with breasts ample enough to please the most avid connoisseur. His gaze lingered on her full lips and he knew he had to taste them, regardless of the other three women there. At first sight, she seemed to regard him with a mixture of fear, curiosity and appreciation before her expression turned to outrage.

Before entering The Void he'd only heard tales of the dark skinned peoples. He'd never imagined that his consort would be of that race. Until Divinity allowed him to glimpse her for the first time it never crossed his mind she would be anything other than a Scottish lass, even if she were a Lowlander. He couldn't say that he was disappointed, not in the least. In fact, he looked forward to their future together. Another surprise for Giric was how easily she'd accepted him, that was, after her initial shock. From all that he'd heard about modern women he'd expected more resistance. He had been prepared to have to bend her to his will.

As she acquainted him with the new inventions of the time, he'd made a mental list of things that needed to be done, the first of which would be securing them a larger keep. In his time he'd amassed wealth of his own to add to an already substantial inheritance, but when the witch had taken him he'd only had a few coins in his carrying pouch which were probably worthless now. He wondered if all people of this time lived in such close places with small antechambers. He would have to remember to ask her what manner of work men did to earn coin in this age. From the brief look at the picture

box it didn't look like there was much use for warriors in this period. The few men he saw looked closer to girls on the brink of womanhood.

He carried her tired body to the bathing room, eager to try the modern invention called the shower. Sierra had demonstrated earlier how the thing worked, instructing him on how to attain the perfect balance of cold and hot. In his time a bath, let alone a heated one, was a luxury, but she'd informed him that it was something that people in this modern era did daily. When he stepped underneath the warm spray Giric was certain that he was experiencing his own slice of heaven. No wonder people indulged themselves daily, he thought, enjoying the steady stream.

After Sierra groggily explained the functions of a LooFa and body wash he took his time giving her a slow bath that had him fighting for control over his growing arousal. He took the opportunity to explore every part of her body, paying particular attention to her round ass, which he'd only had the pleasure of touching earlier. When he was done he first dried Sierra then himself with the towels she indicated. *Such luxuries*, he thought, wiping them off with the downy softness.

"Rest here while I find us something to eat, lass," he said, laying her down on the bed, still mussed from their earlier escapades.

"No, I'm fine," she protested, pushing herself to her feet. An appreciative groan slipped out as he watched her walk naked to her closet. He secured the large towel around his waist, conscious of the tenting in the front of the cloth. His erection swelled further at the sight of her slipping into a ruby-colored robe. Before he knew what he was doing, Giric closed the small space between them. Taking her in his arms he gave her a kiss that, when he pulled away, left her staring up at him with glazed eyes.

"Now let us eat before I have you again," he said in a thick voice.

\* \* \*

Sierra stared after the tall man who, not thirty minutes earlier, had her writhing in the most intense ecstasy she'd ever experienced. Her head still swam from his touch. The kiss he'd just given her was enough to knock her socks off, if she'd been wearing any. She took a calming breath before following behind him to the kitchen. There she

saw Giric staring into her refrigerator looking as baffled as if he were looking into the inner workings of the Hubble telescope.

"See anything in there you'd like?"

"I'm not sure," he mumbled, closing the door and diverting all his attention back to her in a way that made her feel like *she* was on the menu.

"Why don't you let me take care of this?"

She filled two plates with leftover Chinese food and poured them both a glass of wine. She was aware that Giric silently watched her while he leaned against the stove, taking up much needed space in the narrow kitchen.

"Would you mind taking these to the living room?" She handed him the two plates, not leaving him much option. In reality, she needed some space from his very dominant presence to regain some of the composure she'd lost since his sudden arrival in her life. To buy herself some time she sliced two pieces of Mile High chocolate cake she'd picked up that afternoon on a whim. At the time, she thought it would be her one physical indulgence of the weekend. Boy, had she been wrong.

Sierra entered the room to find Giric sitting cross-legged on her floor, eyeing the assortment of Chinese food oddly. His towel gaped over one thick fur-covered thigh but managed to stay closed.

"So is Giric your real name or just your... um... stage one?" she began after several moments of watching him sample the food on his plate with tentative bites. He ignored the utensils altogether, instead choosing to use his large fingers. Watching the man eat was a lesson in erotica. He sucked his fingers, making deep contented sounds as if he were tasting the various flavors for the first time. His sounds of enjoyment made her own mouth moisten, among other regions.

"Stage name? I'm no' sure what you mean, lass, but Giric is the name given me by me ma and da at birth."

Of course, he would need to keep with the Highlander routine. She hated to admit how much it disappointed her to know that come morning he would be gone and she wouldn't even have basic information on the man.

"I know it may seem a little late to broach the subject but I noticed you didn't use protection. I can only hope your... um... employer has you tested regularly."

His brows furrowed. "My employer?"

Maybe that wasn't the right term, but she couldn't bring herself to use the word pimp. "Yeah, you know, the person who sent you here."

"Aye, Divinity."

*Divinity, huh?* "Yes. I'm sure she has you tested for everything regularly."

Giric snorted. "I have been tested more than I care to remember, but 'twas necessary in order to be with you."

After her failed attempt at making conversation, Sierra contented herself with finishing her food in silence and replenishing Giric's plate when he made short work of devouring his first one. By refill number three, Sierra had to become creative, going with the leftover chili she'd made the night before, and several slices of cheese and crackers.

"I thank ye, lass, for taking such good care of my appetites," he said after polishing off the large bowl with enthusiasm. "All of them."

"No problem." She attempted a small smile before picking up their mess and making for the solitude of the kitchen. As if on automatic pilot she rinsed and loaded dishes in the dishwasher. Feeling suddenly bereft she rested her head on a wall. She needed to get a grip on reality. Giric was nothing more than a hired cock who would be out of her life soon. She couldn't take it personally if he didn't want to open up to her. Hell, in his business, and with his skills, he probably had women ready to stalk him at the first chance.

"Are you all right, Sierra?" Giric's baritone voice startled her, but she couldn't bring herself to turn around.

"Yeah, just a little tired."

"Come to bed, lass."

"In a minute." Maybe she should just ask him to leave now. Why wait until tomorrow?

Sierra felt him behind her before he actually reached out to touch her. She sighed as he stroked her braided hair gently.

"Speak to me, lass, what ails ye?"

"Nothing, I'll be out in a minute." She just wanted him to go away, but wouldn't say the words.

"Speak to me, lass." He turned her to face him and Sierra was lost as she looked up into his piercing eyes.

"Kiss me, Giric, even if it's the last time," she begged. When he would have spoken she reached between them to cradle his heavy member through the towel. She heard his swift intake of breath before his mouth fell heavily on hers. Sierra yielded to the demanding kiss with equal enthusiasm, groaning as he loosened her belt, slipping a hand inside her dangling robe. She moaned into his mouth when he palmed a firm breast, thumb twirling around its stiff nipple.

She could barely recognize the wanton she'd become in such a short time span. Without thought she tugged at the soft cloth around his waist until it dropped in a heap on the floor.

Giric's protest quickly turned to sounds of pleasure when she dropped on her haunches in front of him, cupping his erection in her hand before swallowing his cock. She stared up at him as he braced himself against the wall, hooded eyes watching her in return. Sierra couldn't believe how completely exciting it was to have him watching her swallow his veined cock. Her pussy practically dripped from the thrill of it. His length almost reached the back of her throat and she welcomed every inch. Her head bobbed as she slurped around his stiff member. One large hand reached down to tangle in her dark braids.

"Enough," he moaned, giving the thick strands a gentle tug when her mouth sank over him one last time.

"Didn't you like that?" she questioned innocently as she stood. Giric's answer was to press her into the wall. Sierra licked her bottom lip expectantly.

"Ye know I did, lass." His eyes clouded over with lust. "Mayhap I should show ye just how much." As he spoke hands reached under her buttocks, lifting her completely off her feet and onto the counter at their side. Giric pushed her thighs wide, pulling her forward on the counter's edge until his cock pressed firmly against her moist core.

Sierra's heart raced at having him pressed so intimately against her. She tried to ease forward and impale herself on his length but found Giric holding her at bay.

"Tell me what you want." His voice was almost guttural.

"I want you, Giric," she pleaded, and was rewarded with the tip of his cock sinking into her. She clenched him tightly, savoring the teasing and hoping he would give her more.

"You have me, lass. Is there something else ye be after?" To her disappointment he slid his wet tip out of her.

Sierra cried out her objection. "Please fuck me!"

"Aye, is this what ye be wanting?" He pushed his way into her with one swift thrust, burying himself balls deep inside her.

"Yes," Sierra moaned, her nails raking the hard muscles in his shoulders. "More." She arched her back, presenting her breasts as an offering.

He gave a low possessive growl before sucking one dark nipple in his mouth. Sierra's cunt tightened around him at the overwhelming sensations. His tongue flicked over the nipple several times before he turned to pay equal respect to the other, already puckered companion. His cock continued to plunder her slick pussy and she tried her best to hold on to the sublime feeling. She knew her battle to stave off her orgasm was a losing one. Already her body was purring completely, her sheath contracting around him, her juices flowing from her.

"I'm coming," she cried out just as the orgasm racked her body, causing her to spasm around him.

He groaned against one breast as her inner walls convulsed. He plunged deeper, harder and faster inside her as he nipped at her over-sensitized nipples. Giric's hold on

her waist tightened and Sierra knew he was close to his own release. The rapid fluttering in her heated core didn't have a chance to subside before her second orgasm took hold, echoing throughout her entire body until she cried out her climax. Giric thrust into her one final time before emptying his seed into her pulsating body.

For several moments they remained in the same position with him kissing between her sweat-soaked breasts.

"Tell me, my love, what made you so sad?" he asked, pulling her into an erect sitting position without dislodging his thick, but sated penis. Sierra felt the spent cock jumping periodically inside of her as if it had a mind of its own.

"It's not important." When he looked as if he would insist, she added, "Really, I'm fine, just a little tired."

He hesitated before nodding his understanding, and Sierra was happy that the subject was dropped. How foolish would it be for her to admit that the thought of him leaving was painful? He would think her a psychopath or at the least a very pathetic and lonely woman.

"Wrap your legs around my waist," he instructed.

She giggled at that. "I'm not that tired."

"But ye will be," he promised thickly.



## Chapter Five

*"I have no other but a woman's reason:  
I think him so, because I think him so."  
-- Shakespeare, The Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Sierra stretched her stiff limbs and registered her mistake as soon as a dull ache shot through her ill used muscles. She groaned into her pillow but couldn't prevent the smile from spreading across her face at the cause of her discomfort. She stretched an arm tentatively across the expanse of her bed, unable to prevent the disappointment that settled over her at encountering empty space.

"What did you expect?" she mumbled into the pillow. He'd been paid to do a job, one that he'd performed very well, and that was it. If she'd had the stamina, Sierra was certain he would've definitely gone all night. Heat began to hum in the most intimate regions of her body as she thought back to all he'd done to her yesterday. Death could surely come at any moment and find her very happy in the knowledge that she'd finally scored some major ass.

She peeked around her pillow at her bedside clock which blazed the late morning hour. Even on a Saturday it wasn't her custom to sleep so late, another indicator of how well she was serviced the night before. Sierra would bet money that Vicki was probably sitting by the phone in anticipation of her call. Well, she'd just have to wait because she wasn't ready to share her memories with anyone at the moment. She sank back into the comfort of her cotton sheets, enjoying the feel against her naked skin while savoring playbacks from the night before.

She yelped, startled from her reverie by a loud crashing sound followed by several roared expletives. "What the hell?"

He couldn't still be here, she thought, already bounding from her bed. She spotted the discarded kilt on the floor in the same place it had been forgotten the night before and her heart soared. Hurriedly pulling a nightshirt from the dresser drawer, Sierra tugged the garment over her head as she stepped into the hall.

Why would he still be here?

"Giric?" she called out tentatively seconds before stepping into the kitchen. Any other time the sight in front of her would have been enough to have her yelling at the responsible party but not today.

A naked Giric stood glaring at the items on the counter as if he were plotting their deaths, which was pretty funny since the damaged carton of eggs, dented can of spinach and war torn package of drumsticks were no more alive than the knife that protruded from the spinach can's aluminum center. Littered on the counter, and at Giric's feet, were several pots and pans that once hung neatly in an overhead holder. She stared at what was left of the handy storage device that dangled precariously from a couple of sagging bolts. "What happened in here?"

"Ach, I dinna mean to wake ye."

"I was already up," she dismissed.

"I only gave a wee tug to one of the metal cooking pots and this is the result."

She eyed the food items and wondered what the rest of the story was, but couldn't bring herself to ask, not while she was certain she would burst out into laughter at his comical exploits. Her heart warmed at the thought of him trying to surprise her with breakfast in bed. "Why don't you go put something on while I clean this up?"

The relief on his face nearly blinded her. "Are ye certain?"

Sierra shook her head at his retreating backside after he'd stopped to give her a kiss that held a promise of things to come. She glanced up again at the pot and pan holder. *What is he still doing here?* she wondered again, unable to quell the excitement bubbling in her belly.

The phone's shrill ring filled her living room, spilling over to the adjacent kitchen before she could ponder the question more. "Hello?"

"Thank God! I was so worried," Vicki launched without preamble.

"Worried? It's okay. I'm actually not upset --"

"So he didn't do anything to you?"

"Not anything that I didn't want done." Sierra beamed.

The pregnant pause that followed left Sierra wondering if the call were disconnected.

"Are you telling me you slept with him?" Vicki screeched. Sierra pulled the phone away from her ear, cringing at the sound. She didn't think a human could possibly make such a high-pitched noise.

"I wouldn't quite call what we did sleeping, although that did come eventually," she finally answered when the harsh noise coming from the other end of the phone stopped. "That is what you hired him for, to show your tight-assed friend how to loosen up."

"Yes, but that's just it, I didn't hire him. You had sex with the wrong guy."

Seconds ticked by while Sierra digested what was being said. When she opened her mouth to speak nothing came out.

"I got a call not ten minutes ago explaining that the person I hired couldn't make it because he was home sick."

"Well, if he's not..." she finally managed before trailing off. The reality of the situation washed over her like a frigid Oregon rain. "Who the hell is that in my bedroom?" Sierra hissed in a whisper.

"Your bedroom? You mean he's there with you now?"

"Yes." She threw a cautious look at the hall, half expecting to see Giric, or whoever the hell he was, wielding that treacherous looking sword he had brought with him. No doubt to hack her up into little pieces when he was done having his fun.

"Get out now. I'm calling the police on my other phone."

"I'm in a night shirt."

"Well, if you don't want to be a dead black girl in a night shirt, I suggest you hightail your ass out of there this very moment! I'll be there soon, too."

Sierra barely registered her friend's last statement as she clicked the phone off, padding on tip toes through her living room and down the short hall that led to her front door. She sighed in relief as she passed the longer hall that led to her bedroom and found it empty. Quickly, quietly, she unlatched the dead bolt on her door, teeth sinking into her bottom lip as the lock clicked loudly. The knob felt cold underneath her heated hand as it easily turned. She swallowed her triumph when the door was pushed from her grasp.

"What are you doing, Sierra?"

*Damn*, she muttered silently. He'd been nonviolent up until now, so she'd have to be careful not to set him off. What were her options?

"Oh, I was... uh... just going to check the mail," she answered lamely without turning. "The woman comes early on Saturdays."

"Is this *mail* important enough for you to present yourself in your current state of undress to strangers?"

"My what?" She looked down at the nightgown, which barely cleared the tops of her thighs.

"I dunna wish any other to see my woman attired this way." His voice was thick and she felt him move in closely behind her. "Despite your women's liberation, I willna share my consort." She could feel the heat of his breath against her ear.

*Consort*. She vaguely remembered him using the word before. Now she felt like it held some great significance she should understand.

"I guess you're right. The mail can wait, but I'm famished." She turned slowly, pinning a smile on her face. If she thought her little announcement would have him clearing space for her to pass she was sadly mistaken. Instead she pressed her backside firmly against the door to gain some semblance of personal space.

She was glad that he'd put his kilt back on. When the police arrived they wouldn't be hauling out some naked guy for all her neighbors to see.

"I'm sure you must be hungry too," she added when it looked as if he wouldn't budge. She made the mistake of staring up into eyes that looked blue gray this morning.

"I hunger for a number of things. Would you like to hear how they rank in importance?"

"No," she blurted too quickly. "I mean, after last night I doubt if I'd be of much use to you without nourishment." She just needed to buy herself some time. Vicki would have certainly called the police by now and be en route herself. She would have to keep the crazy man busy until help arrived. She tensed as the pad of one thumb traced her bottom lip. Giric must have noticed the nearly imperceptible clinching of muscle because his brows bunched together in a deep frown. Without a word he stepped aside, allowing her room to pass.

In the kitchen, Sierra picked up the remaining pans and went about rewrapping the frozen chicken. She was very aware of Giric observing her every movement as if searching her body language.

*Talk to him. You can't let him get freaked out,* she reminded herself as she pulled out a pack of turkey bacon and bread.

"What exactly is a consort?" She tried to sound conversational as she went about mixing eggs and seasoning in a bowl. Normally she would have chopped up vegetables and other items for an omelet, but he didn't know that.

"A wife," he stated simply.

"Wife?" She swallowed hard and added cooking spray to a pan before putting the bacon on a low heat. Any minute the police should be banging on her door.

"Yes." He leaned against one counter, effectively blocking her exit with his long legs.

She laughed nervously, "Doesn't that usually call for some kind of ceremony?"

"Usually, but ours is not a normal circumstance. It is not important since you uttered the words calling me forth, but if you need to have a ceremony before clergy I'm not opposed to that."

Okay, maybe this wasn't the right direction to be going with him in conversation.

"And what words do you think I 'uttered' to call you forth?" she found herself asking. Where the hell were the friggin' cops?

"The words created by Divinity to help consorts find one another. You recited them from the black book, did you not?"

"No," she denied immediately, taking a step back.

"Nay? Ye deny calling me from The Void?" He stood to his full height, looking intimidating as hell and very perturbed.

"That is to say, yes, I read from that book, but in no way did it conjure you up. And there is no way in hell that I'm married to you."

"Aye, lass, ye are my consort which verra much makes ye my wife." His accent seemed to thicken with each word he spoke.

"You and I both know that isn't how it's done," she tried to rationalize.

"I thought it too good to be true when ye accepted me so easily," he seemed to say to himself. "Tell me, Sierra, who did ye believe me to be when ye took me to your bed yestereve?"

*Yestereve?*

"I thought you were... I mean, I assumed that my friend Vicki hired you."

His brows furrowed further until the two blended.

"You know, to have sex..." She didn't get a chance to finish her sentence.

"Ye thought I be a whore?" he bellowed to her chagrin.

"It was a simple mistake," she found herself explaining quickly.

"What kind of future is this where a woman need hire a man to bed her?" he yelled to the ceiling or at least that's what it appeared to her.

Okay, this was not going well at all. Where the hell were the...

The rapid knocking at her door had Sierra breathing a sigh of relief. It was about damned time.

"This is the police," a male voice announced from the other side of the door. "We have a report of a domestic disturbance here. Can you please open up?"

"We should get that," she encouraged while he stood there muttering incoherently, probably some type of schizophrenic tirade. Great, he would go off the deep end right now.

"Giric," she called to gain his attention. "Someone is at the door."

He stared back at her, his jaw clenching. Even upset he was gorgeous. She shook her head to remove the thought from it. "They would like to come in," she added gently.

Another series of knocks, followed by, "Ma'am, are you all right in there? Can you please open up the door so that we may follow up on this report?"

"See. They're not going to go away until we open the door."

"Aye, but 'tis a quick discussion we will have. There is much to be said betwixt us."

She nodded, knowing that once the police got their hands on him, she wouldn't have to worry about his craziness anymore. A twinge of regret stabbed at her as Sierra watched Giric answer his fate. She waited until she heard the door open before following him.

"Sir, we have a report of a domestic incident. Where is Ms. Cessinger?"

"I'm right here, officers," Sierra announced, calmly stepping through the kitchen's narrow archway.

"Ach, woman, I warned ye about presenting yourself dressed this way," Giric growled, pushing her behind him with one arm before she could get a good look at her rescuers.

"Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to step aside and allow the lady by."

"'Tis certain I am that ye would like to look your fill at me wife, but I willna allow it."

Good lord, the big lummoX was gonna get himself killed if he kept this Highlander act up. As skilled as she thought he might be with that sword, she doubted if he could get to it quick enough to defend himself. Not to mention that it was no defense against bullets.

"Officers, I don't think this man is dangerous, just delusional..."

"My God, Giric, is that you?" Sierra heard someone else ask from behind him. She couldn't be certain who the owner of the voice was.

*What the hell?*

"Dagnus, be that really ye?"

"Yes. My God, I never thought I would ever see you again. When did you get here?"

"Just yestereve. 'Tis a sight for sore eyes, ye are."

"And the woman behind you?" the other man asked.

"My consort."

"I see. Well, that explains a lot."

What the hell were they going on about? She hadn't heard anything that would explain diddly. Her efforts to get around Giric were blocked again by a restraining hand on her wrist pulling her near the wall, allowing him to continue to act as a shield.

"So I take it you know this gentleman?" It was the officer who'd first announced their presence.

"Yes, and I can vouch for him. Trust me when I say he's the last person who would do this lady harm. He's just a little old fashioned."

*Try a Neanderthal*, she added silently. Perhaps this was some type of subterfuge on their part. Calm down the hulking man and pull her to safety.

"Are you sure about this one?" The first officer didn't sound completely convinced.

"Absolutely."

"Wagner to base," she heard the man say, followed by a static response. "This is a false alarm. MacNamara and I will fill out a report later."

"Hey, wait a second. You can't just leave without taking him," she protested.

"Has this man injured you in any way?" asked the man identified as MacNamara.

"Well, no," she answered honestly.



"Did this man spend the night with you, ma'am?"

"Dagnus..." Giric warned.

"I'm sorry, old friend, but I have to ask." He mumbled something in that gibberish she'd heard Giric speaking in the kitchen. Dammit, it wasn't incoherent babble. Listening to the back and forth between the two it suddenly dawned on her that the guttural sounds were most likely Gaelic or something close to it.

"Ma'am, did this man, Giric MacDumnall, spend the night here?" the officer repeated in English.

"Well, yes, but..."

"And he didn't harm or force you to do anything?"

"No, but..."

"Thank you. Giric, here is my card. My home number is on the back. The wife and I would love to have you and your wife over for dinner."

"I'm not --" Her denial was interrupted by a sudden cry.

"Oh my God, where is she?" Sierra heard the sound of clicking heels hurry up her walkway as Vicki called out. "That's him, officers, the man who broke in and attacked my friend. Where is she?"

"Right here," Sierra muttered from behind the wall that was Giric's back.

"Well, why aren't you doing something? Shouldn't you be arresting him? Oh my God, he's holding her hostage. Is this some kind of a standoff?"

Sierra couldn't stop herself from rolling her eyes at her friend's dramatic words.

Giric said something else in the foreign language.

"Apparently you misunderstood the situation, ma'am. Why don't we leave the couple in peace. If they don't see to whatever's burning we'll have the fire department out here next."

Vicki wasn't giving up that easy. "You can't just leave her with that lunatic!"

"Good day, Giric. I'll see to your wife's friend."

"Thank ye. Her screeching was starting to give me a headache."

That was it! Sierra sighed heavily as the door closed, leaving her alone again with Giric MacDumnall. What didn't make sense was why the other officer was so easily convinced of Giric's absurd story. She wondered what they exchanged in their secret language.

"Perhaps ye should finish with our breakfast. We can talk while we eat."

## Chapter Six

*I say unto you, wisdom is the seed whereby the tree of knowledge flourishes.*  
*-- Tos of Samothrace*

Sierra made certain to set the plates at opposite ends of her tiny dining table although the thing was not large enough to afford them any real space. Giric's long legs rested next to hers but that barely registered with her now as she listened to the fantastical tale he offered up as an explanation.

"And that police officer, Dagnus MacNamara, was in this Void with you?"

"Aye."

*More likely they shared a room in one of the state's mental institutions, she told herself.*  
"All right, say I believe you. What now?"

He leaned forward on the table, bracing his elbows on the wooden surface, fingers lacing together. The look in his eyes held a distinct challenge. "We continue with our life together as husband and wife."

"But what if I don't want a husband?" Sierra put out there. "I mean, don't I get some sort of say so in this?"

"It is the will of the Divine. Have I done anything to displease ye, lass?"

*Other than turn out to be some crazy Scottish man.* "No, but that doesn't mean I want to marry you."

"You would prefer to have your friend hire other men to bed you instead of have me as a husband?"

"About that, it's not like it happens often. This was the first time."

"And it be the last," he stated definitively.

"You can bet your last dollar on that," she muttered under her breath.

"I would like you to show me more of your modern world. From what I've seen on your television and by the way Dagnus was dressed I should buy clothing more presentable to this time period."

She quirked a brow. "And I suppose this Divinity person was nice enough to drop you off with some cash?" Perfect. If she could see his wallet and ID card, she'd take him right to his front door.

Sierra watched as he removed a black pouch from his kilt. He turned the bag upside down, letting several gold coins fall from its inside. "Will this be enough to properly attire me until I am able to find a way to make extra coin?"

She stared at the gold in disbelief, reaching for one of the heavy pieces of metal. This couldn't be the real thing. All in all, there were twenty pieces spread out on her table. "Oh my God," she gasped, unable to believe her eyes.

"Are you all right, woman?"

This couldn't be real, none of it. Highlanders didn't just get transported through time and dropped on unsuspecting women's doorsteps. "I don't think so. Tell me these are fakes, that this is all some huge joke."

"I dunna indulge much in falsehood, even for fun, Sierra," he answered calmly.

"Then you won't mind if we take these to be appraised?"

"I dunna know of what you speak." He looked truly perplexed.

"I know somewhere we can go to find out the authenticity and value of these. If you're telling me the truth then I will know for sure."

"Aye, if that is what you need to finally lay this to rest, let us go."

\* \* \*

"Is there not anything in this modern world made for normal sized people," Giric groused from his very compact seat in her car. Sierra bit back a smile. He'd done nothing but complain from the time they left her duplex. Well, even before that, when he saw her dressed in jeans and a fitted blouse. She stood arguing with him for a good ten minutes about her clothes before he grudgingly agreed to her outfit, once she added a lightweight button-up sweater that hung just below her buttocks. Sierra asserted

herself when he insisted that she button the garment up, informing him that this was a part of the modern world he would have to become accustomed to if he intended to stay.

"There! What is that called?" Giric yelled as she eased them from the highway. He'd become eerily silent when she pulled into the fast moving weekend traffic.

She looked to the large vehicle he pointed to. "It's a Hummer."

"That is what I want us to drive. Surely it is large enough to provide more room than this."

This time she didn't hold back her laugh.

\* \* \*

She wasn't laughing now as the jeweler handed her a very expensive looking card. "This is the person you want to talk to if you're interested in selling those coins. He'll be very excited to talk with you."

"Thank you." Giric accepted the man's outstretched hand while Sierra digested what he'd just told her. Just one of the things was worth thousands of dollars.

"How many coins will we need to exchange for the Hummer?" Giric asked, holding the glass door open for her. Outside the streets seemed to buzz with excitement.

"You could buy multiple Hummers with that coin," she provided numbly.

"Really? Perhaps I should use one to buy clothing."

"Um, why don't I do that instead? You can pay me back later," she continued when he would have protested.

Was Giric really a thirteenth-century Highland warrior as he'd explained, taken in his prime to atone for sins that were about to lead him down a path of damnation? Dear God. If that were true then his friend Dagnus was from the nineteenth century. Hell, there were probably hundreds of others out there. She looked around them curiously only to find several eyes on Giric. Some women were so bold as to openly stare and gesture at him as if she weren't walking next to him. She had to admit he

made a very impressive sight, his massive body fully adorned in traditional clothing from a long ago period.

"Ye were correct about the dress of women in this time, Sierra," Giric observed. A twinge of jealousy shot through her as she wondered which of the admiring women had caught his eye.

"'Tis sad they canna ever measure up to my wife," he added, taking her hand in his own. Sierra's pulse raced at the contact.

"Here we are. I'm sure we can find something in here to fit you," she said, stopping in front of a store that claimed to sell big and tall clothing and shoes for men.

Close to an hour later they emerged from the store with Giric sporting one of his many new outfits. Stylishly loose fitting jeans, a white tee with a black button up top and black boots that he insisted on having. Damn, he looked just as sexy in modern clothes as he did in his kilt. Sierra found a permanent smile on her face as Giric took in everything around him like a... well, like a thirteenth-century Highlander. He refused to relinquish his hold on her hand even as they drove from one destination to the next. Several times she found him drawing her into the circle of his arms to give her gentle kisses or whisper one form of compliment or another in her ear.

God help her but if he kept this up she *would* agree to be his wife, personal sex slave or anything else he could come up with. As they finished up their meal at an outdoor cafe Giric toyed with her fingers absently across the table. "I think we should go home now, Sierra."

"Are you sure? There's so much more to see. What about..."

"Do you wish to be taken right here?" The combination of his serious tone and the heated look in his gaze had her blushing. Why did the mere thought of him pushing between her thighs in front of others have her ready to cream her panties?

"Let's go," she agreed after fishing through her purse for money to pay the bill.

\* \* \*

"I'll have to explain it to you later, Vicki, but trust me, you won't believe me when I tell you."

“Why can’t you tell me now? What’s going on? Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine.” As fine as one could be draped over the shoulder of one very horny Highlander. She landed on her bed with a bounce, giggling as Giric unhooked the buttons of her jeans before tugging them off her hips. “Really, I have to hang up, now.”

“Too late,” Giric growled, taking the phone from her hand, tossing it to the floor with a thud. Sierra hoped Vicki hung up before she heard something she shouldn’t, but wouldn’t place any wagers on it.

## Epilogue

*Marriage is a mirror in which one sees a reflection of oneself.*

*-- J.S. Bach*

"Exactly what year were you taken?" Sierra questioned, enjoying the gentle rise and fall of Giric's chest beneath her head. If they never moved from that bed she would be happy.

"'Twas the winter of 1252, and we were to lay siege on an enemy's keep. My men and I were just beddin' down for the night."

Sierra listened quietly as he explained the atmosphere before the siege, an evening feast, tales of valor to pump up the men, plus alcohol and women aplenty. As curious as she was, she didn't dare ask how many willing lasses wanted to ensure their leader had the proper send off. Too much ale found him slipping away from their makeshift camp to answer the call of nature. One moment he was in the forest and the next The Void.

"Did you leave any family behind?" Sierra couldn't help but wonder. He couldn't be more than thirty-five when he was taken and for a thirteenth-century Scotsman that was well into middle age, more than enough time to have a family or two.

There were several silent moments before he continued, "No one of importance. I had a wife five years before bein' taken to The Void. She was a young lass, so full of life. She fell ill with fever while pregnant and did not awaken one morn."

"I'm sorry, Giric." She pulled back to raise herself on one elbow. The look in his eyes wasn't easily translated.

"'Twas a long time ago, lass. My life now is here with ye."



They'd just met the day before and the thought of becoming involved in a permanent relationship should have been a completely moot point, but somehow they felt right, or at least right enough to see where things would go.

"What was The Void like?"

"Big. Lonely in spite of the others trapped in the realm."

"Seven hundred and fifty plus years is a long time for atonement."

"Let's just say that I wasna... what is the term... a boy scout?" A lopsided grin spread across his face.

"Somehow I didn't peg you as one, but from what I've read about the history of Scotland there wasn't many options. Obviously you have some redeeming qualities if Divinity saw fit to release you from The Void."

"Mayhap but you shouldna minimize my sins so easily. The keep that we were laying siege on the next day belonged to my father. Ian MacDurmott."

"But you said your name is MacDumnall."

"The MacDumnalls are my mother's clan, my clan. My mother was merely a kitchen servant in his home, captured in one of my father's campaigns. When he found out she was pregnant he put her out in the midst of one of the coldest winters to keep his wife happy. After I was born she took me back to him."

Sierra kept quiet to allow him to tell the story of his life.

"He took me in, but sent my mother away. I would learn growing up that it wasna some grand, noble gesture of paternity. He had but one son and I was bein' reared as a decoy for him. We were only a few months apart and looked very similar. Fortunately for me, I inherited my height from my mother's clan and outlived my usefulness no sooner than we sprouted our first whiskers.

"My father took great pleasure in telling me how he really felt, not that it was a surprise since he reminded me every day that I was nothing more than a bastard spawn who could belong to any number of his men. He also felt the need to recount how he'd stolen my mother from the MacDurmotts and defiled her nightly until her belly was swollen with me. He laughed over puttin' her out in the winter so that we both could

die. Apparently when she returned with me in hand and he saw the resemblance between myself and his real son he devised his plan.”

Sierra gasped at the cruelty he must have endured growing up and how that could shape a person.

“I left before he could have me killed or put me out, and eventually found my way to the MacDumnalls. ’Tis a good thing I dinna expect to be welcomed with open arms.”

Sierra bit back her sorrow at hearing how a teenaged Giric was later rejected by his own mother and ostracized by most members of her clan. He’d had one important champion from the moment he came to the MacDumnalls, his grandfather. Lucky for him, under his grandfather’s protection none would dare to harm the young MacDumnall but Giric didn’t take his position for granted, instead taking the opportunity to learn all he could. He dove into combat training, spent hours learning to read and nights learning the tales of past battles.

By the time he’d turned twenty he’d earned the respect and allegiance of his clan, which only grew as he participated and eventually led his men on many successful campaigns. He wouldn’t have another encounter with the MacDurmotts until years later when a courier came with a letter from Ian MacDurmott himself apprising him of the death of his brother. The letter instructed Giric to return to MacDurmott land and pledge his allegiance or risk the wrath of the clan befalling him and any under his protection. Giric had promptly dismissed the letter with little regard.

“Mayhap I shouldna have underestimated the old bastard. I planned a siege on his keep after learning that he was the one responsible for Alayna’s illness. He’d taken me wife and child away because I ignored his arrogant demand.”

“Oh my God, Giric, I can’t imagine having gone through all of that. I thought growing up in an orphanage was rough but it was nothing compared to what you endured.”

“Anyone fool hearted enough to abandon you dinna deserve you in the first place.”

Sierra shrugged. "I'm just grateful she gave me life and had enough consideration to leave me with my grandparents."

"What happened to them?" Giric asked, tucking a stray braid behind her ears.

Sierra still remembered how the elderly couple doted on her over the five years of her life. Of the other kids at the orphanage she'd been one of the lucky ones.

"They were old. My mom was their miracle baby, I suppose, because my grandmother was almost forty when they had her. My grandfather passed first of a heart attack. Nana lived for another year. I thought my mother would come for me once she found out about their deaths. I held on to that fantasy for years."

"It seems that Divinity in her wisdom has brought two orphans together." Giric pulled her to lie half atop his body, staring up with the most sincere blue eyes she'd ever seen. "I promise, Sierra MacDumnall, that I will do my best to make you happy for all of our days."

"And I you, Giric MacDumnall."

"Happy birthday, lass."

"Thank you. I'd almost forgotten."

"Is there anything special ye'd like to do today?"

Her answer was immediate. "There's no other place I'd rather be."

## **Nia K. Foxx**

Nia K. Foxx is the proud mother of three beautiful, very active children, all under ten years of age. They currently reside in a picturesque, small town burg of Michigan, where they enjoy biking, swimming, fairs and traveling in their minivan. Ms. Foxx holds a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz, in International Politics and Literature. She began an interest in writing romantic stories at the age of twelve, trying her hand at erotica only recently. Ms. Foxx has written several unpublished novellas and novels, mostly writing for her own enjoyment until now. Nia loves to communicate with other readers of erotic romance and encourages anyone to email her at [nia@niafoxx.com](mailto:nia@niafoxx.com) or read free excerpts on her website at: <http://www.niafoxx.com>