



The Royal Chronicles 2:
Prince of Seduction
By
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For my husband and kids who are my world and put up with all my hours at the computer and my wild imagination. For my mom and dad for telling me to follow my dream. For my brothers who taught me what real gentlemen were. I miss you, Mark.

For all my friends who are there through thick and thin: Georgia, Mary, Robin, Robyn, Todd, and Michelle.

To the readers who take the time to visit my website and blog and give me endless hours of smiles with your wonderful emails, from the bottom of my heart, thank you. Your support means more to me than you'll ever know.

To Andrea for all the hard work you do and for encouraging me to take my stories to the outer limits of my imagination and beyond.

God Bless. Hugs!

Chapter One

*Southern Jamaica
Present Day*

“Here’s your room, ma’am,” the bellhop said as he opened Marin’s door.

She stepped inside and smiled at the brightly painted room and tiled floor. The king size four poster bed looked so good all she wanted to do was curl up on it and sleep. Instead, she followed the bellhop as he walked about the room telling her of the mini-fridge and the array of liquor at her disposal.

But when he pulled back the curtains and opened the sliding glass door, Marin sighed. Before her eyes was the magnificent Caribbean Ocean in all its glory just a few feet from her room. The white sand glistened in the sunlight, and the palm trees swayed in the breeze.

She inhaled the sea deeply and instantly felt her muscles relax.

“Does this meet with your approval?” the bellhop asked.

Marin turned and smiled at him. “Yes. This most definitely does.”

“If you need anything, my name is Paul,” he said and started for the door.

She went to reach for her purse to tip him before she remembered she was staying at the Whitehouse, a new Sandals resort where all the taxes and tips are included in the stay.

“By the way,” Paul said as he reached the door. “Your fiancé is two floors above you in the Honeymoon suite.”

“Thank you.”

Marin waited until the door closed behind the bellhop before she allowed her irritation to show. It hadn’t been her idea to come to Jamaica to be wed. That had been Johnny’s. He had wanted something different. And since her parents were dead and she had no other family, she didn’t have any argument other than the fact she really wanted to be married in a church.

Needless to say, Johnny won the argument.

She really wasn’t angry. It just wasn’t the wedding she had always dreamed about. But now that she was on Jamaica and feeling the urge to sink her feet in the sand and drift in the turquoise waters, she was glad he had talked her into this destination.

What she was angry about was the accommodations. Johnny had also managed to talk her into staying in different rooms until after the ceremony. Marin shook her head and unzipped her luggage.

Most men would be offended if the woman didn’t want to stay in the same room as them, but Johnny was...different. He had certain ideas about their relationship, their wedding, and their future. And if she were honest, she’d admit that not all of his ideas were as crazy as wanting separate rooms until after the wedding.

It was just for one night, she reminded herself. She had the rest of the day and the

night to herself before the wedding in the morning. And she was going to make full use of the time.

First, she was going to enjoy some of the sun, sand, and water as well as the ever flowing liquor and food, and then that afternoon she was going to get a massage and facial.

She hurriedly pulled off her clothes, feeling the draining effects of traveling leaving her as each piece of clothing hit the floor. Then she grabbed her black bikini and slipped it on. She chanced a look at herself in the mirror before grabbing her black wide brimmed hat and sunglasses and heading out her sliding glass door for the beach.

* * * *

Marin stretched her back as she pushed back the covers and padded to the window. She pulled back the drapes covering the sliding glass door and smiled at the morning sunshine.

As she worked out the kinks from doing too much kayaking, snorkeling, and swimming in one day, she went to answer the knock at the door.

“Good mornin’,” a beautiful Jamaican woman said as she entered the room with Marin’s wedding gown and veil. “Did you sleep well, ma’am.”

“I did,” Marin said and closed the door. “I had heard about these resorts before, and had I known how beautiful and fun they were I’d have been here sooner.”

The maid smiled. “I’m glad to hear you’re enjoying your time. I’m here to help you get ready for the weddin’.”

“Wonderful. I know exactly how I want my hair.”

The maid nodded. “Perfect. I’ll let you take a quick shower while I get the rest of your things as well as your bouquet.”

“I hope the calla lilies turned out okay,” Marin said as she grabbed her lingerie out of the drawer.

“Actually, ma’am, the bouquet you ordered are all roses. Red roses.”

“What?” Marin said as she straightened. “That’s what my fiancé wanted, but I specifically ordered white calla lilies and tulips.”

“I don’t think there’s time to change,” the maid said apologetically.

“No, I doubt there is,” Marin said as her anger grew. “Johnny knew exactly what he was doing.” She took a deep breath and gave the maid a smile. “This isn’t your fault. I apologize if I snapped at you.”

“No harm done, ma’am. Go take your shower and relax. A bride’s wedding day is very stressful. We’ll handle everything.”

But even with the hot water hitting her body, Marin couldn’t relax. If Johnny had gone behind her back and changed her bouquet, she was almost positive he did the same for the cake. And possibly the decorations, too.

She kept telling herself that it was little things and she shouldn’t be upset. But the truth was, she was extremely upset. She didn’t want to have an argument before the wedding--not that there would be time--but she also didn’t want to start their honeymoon off with an argument. Yet, she couldn’t let this go. She had to speak to Johnny about

this.

After turning off the water and climbing out of the tub to dry off, Marin wrapped the towel around her and another around her wet head then opened the door to her room. She turned the corner and saw her gown laid out on the bed with her veil and shoes beside it.

She had splurged on French lace lingerie for the wedding, and she was eager to put on the expensive silk finery. It was a sad state of affairs when a bride was more eager to put on her lingerie than her wedding gown.

Once she had the bra, panties, and garter belt fastened with her hose, she pulled on her robe and waited for the maid to return. As she waited, she gazed at her gown. It was a pretty gown, even though it wasn't the one she had always dreamed of having. Johnny had spotted the gown while picking out his tux and bought it.

He had been right, the gown did look great on. She had never bought a strapless gown before, and wouldn't have this time if Johnny hadn't gone on and on about how it looked on her.

Marin ran her hand down the silk gown. No beads, pearls, or lace adorned the gown. Its simplicity was charming and suited for their island wedding.

Laughter wafted through the screen on her sliding glass door drawing her attention. Marin, curious, walked to the screen and looked outside to see a couple walking down the beach arm in arm. Her white gown and long veil trailed in the breeze. The man had on a tux with his shirt unbuttoned at the collar and his tie hanging open. Suddenly, he lifted the woman in his arms and kissed her.

"Their ceremony just ended," the maid said as she walked up beside Marin.

"They're a lovely couple." Marin couldn't hide the wistfulness in her own voice.

The maid smiled and patted the chair she had set up. "Come and let's do your hair."

She sat in the chair by the opened window. Reggae music drifted over the sound of the birds and soft wind from the speakers hidden throughout the massive resort. She would never be able to listen to Reggae music again without thinking of Jamaica.

The maid began to comb her hair then.

Marin closed her eyes as her hair was being styled. She tried to quell the uneasy feelings within her, telling herself all brides feel the way she was. She had just about convinced herself when the maid announced she was finished.

Eager to see what the maid had accomplished with her hair, Marin rose and went to look in the full length mirror. Her dark locks had been swept away from her face to be gathered at the back of her head. Soft wisps of hair hung near her face and neck while the rest of her hair hung down her back in soft waves.

"I love it," she said to the maid. "Thank you so very much."

The maid beamed and gathered up her items. "Is there anything else you'd like, ma'am?"

"Just a few minutes alone."

"Of course. I'll be waiting outside your room when you're ready to go."

When the maid had left, Marin looked at herself one last time. "Marin Williams. Mrs. Johnny Williams. Johnny and Marin Williams."

She smiled to herself and hurried to apply her make-up. Johnny wanted her to go without, so she had compromised and just put on some bronzing powder, eye liner, mascara, and some lip gloss.

Once that was done, she stepped into her long, A-line shaped strapless wedding dress and zipped it up. She had refused to go barefoot as Johnny wanted and bought instead a gorgeous pair of satin stilettos. As she slipped her feet inside the shoes, excitement began to unfurl.

She grabbed the dangle pearl earrings and put them on, then reached for the pearl bracelet, the only two pieces of jewelry she had left of her mother's. "I sure wish you could be here, Mom," she said softly.

One more look in the full length mirror before she grabbed the bouquet of red roses and walked to the door. She opened it to find the maid waiting for her.

"Simply stunning," the maid said. "Follow me, Ms. Chapel."

With each step toward the wedding gazebo they had set up on the beach, Marin's anxiety and excitement mixed. She couldn't wait to start her life with Johnny and a family soon after. He might not want kids now, but she was sure he would change his mind.

She spotted the gazebo where the wedding would take place and saw all the red and white decorations that Johnny had wanted. It was a beautiful mix amid the turquoise waters and vivid blue of the sky. All the flowers were in place, as was the cake, the minister, and their witnesses.

The only person missing was Johnny.

Marin laughed as she approached the small group of people. "He was so worried about me being late that he's late."

Everyone chuckled, but ten minutes later, no one was laughing, least of all Marin. Paul, the bellhop that had seen them to their rooms the night before had been sent to find Johnny. When Marin spotted Paul walking toward them, his face grim, she knew what he would say before the words ever left his mouth.

"Mr. Williams checked out of the resort late last night," he said softly. His dark eyes held pity and remorse, both of which she couldn't handle at the moment.

What, her mind screamed? Johnny had left without any word to her? Not even the common decency to tell her that he was calling the wedding off, that he changed his mind, that he needed time? Nothing? What kind of lowlife person did that?

But she had her answer.

Johnny.

Marin didn't bother looking at the others. She knew their gaze would hold the same emotions that Paul's did, and if she was to make it to her room without breaking down, she had to leave immediately.

She took a step and felt her knees begin to give. She stopped and forced herself to breathe and focus. *I'll cry in the privacy of my own room, not so the others can pity me more.*

The resolve gave her the strength she needed to walk away from the gazebo to her room. The sidewalk seemed to stretch forever, and at one point, Marin wondered if she would ever find her room again.

When she finally came to her room, her hands shook as she tried to get the credit card like key to slide through. Once the light clicked green, she swung open the door and hurried inside. No sooner had the door closed than she fell back against it and slid to the floor as the tears finally came.

Chapter Two

Highlands of Scotland
1268

Elric sighed into the fading light of day as the sun streaked the sky a vivid purple, pink, and orange. Each hour that passed, each month he counted off, put him that much closer to failing his family and his father's kingdom, Drahcir.

The bloody curse that had been with his family for generations, generations that had managed to beat the curse and keep Drahcir and its people alive, but he had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach that he would fail.

He ran a hand down his face, feeling more tired and fatigued than he had in months. He longed to speak to his family, especially his brothers. Four siblings had never been closer than he and his brothers. They had shared everything growing up, which made it all the harder when it came time for each of them to leave on their eighteenth year.

How long had he searched for his mate? How many women had he sought, only to realize they weren't for him? How long had he been alone as he scoured Scotland for the woman who could save his kingdom?

And the answer to all questions was a resounding--too long.

He was tired of wandering, tired of searching faces, and most importantly, he was tired of fearing that he would fail. As he had often of late, he let out a string of curses that would curl a saint's toe and wished he could see his ancestor that had meddled in the affairs of the Fae and caused the curse.

Elric leaned against the side of the inn and crossed his arms. Fall had descended on the Highlands and the cool night air helped to soften his growing ire. He had no wish to go inside the inn, but he must. He had to find his mate and return with her before the fifth moon of the Harvest Year, or the curse would wipe out Drahcir and its people. All because his ancestor wanted to see if he could make a Fae princess fall in love with him.

Well, his ancestor had succeeded, but the fool hadn't stopped to think what would happen when the princess discovered he didn't love her. What she had done was put the curse not just on Elric's ancestor, but the entire Sinclair family.

He had asked his father once if the curse would ever end. Unfortunately, his father didn't have an answer, and Elric was afraid there wasn't one.

"I don't think you will find what you seek standing out here."

Elric slowly turned his head to see who had dared to interrupt his private musings. What he saw gave him pause. He straightened from the building and turned to face the man. Long flaxen hair that hung down the middle of the man's back and held away from his face by several rows of tiny braids, lifted gently in the wind. But it was his unusual shimmering blue eyes that alerted Elric he was standing before a Fae.

The Fae smiled. "I'm glad you know what I am. As for the who? You may call

me Aimery. I am commander of the Fae army and here to aid you.”

“Aid me? I didn’t think anyone was allowed to help us.”

Aimery smiled and crossed his arms over his chest. That’s when Elric noticed the Fae’s curious clothes. The tunic and pants, though typical of the time, were not made of the course wool or even the finer material of the gentry. The fabric was unlike anything Elric had ever seen or would ever see.

“I’m not supposed to help you,” Aimery said as though Elric wasn’t staring at his clothing. “However, drastic times call for drastic measures.”

“I don’t understand.”

Aimery sighed and let his arms fall to his side. “I know. Elric, you have searched for many years, and your time is running out. You should have found your mate by now.”

“I know.” Elric knew he should show the Fae more respect, but he wasn’t telling Elric anything he didn’t already know.

“You haven’t found her because she isn’t here.”

Elric felt as if someone had knocked his feet out from underneath him. “What do you mean she isn’t here?”

“Exactly that. Your mate is not in this time.”

He closed his eyes and leaned back against the inn. Of all the things he thought could go wrong to hinder him, this hadn’t been one of them. He had been as certain as the sunrise that their mates were in Scotland, they just had to find them.

“Where in time is she?” Elric managed to croak out as he opened his eyes to gaze at Aimery.

“Many years into the future.”

“Then I have failed since I cannot reach her.”

Aimery laughed. “That’s where I come in.”

Elric looked sideways at the Fae. “Why are you helping me?”

“Because when someone or something meddles, I like to make sure things are righted as they should be.”

“Are you going to bring her here?”

Aimery shook his head. “Nay, Elric. You will go to her. It will be up to you to convince her to leave behind her world and travel back in time.”

Elric swallowed hard. He had known it wouldn’t be easy to persuade his mate to return with him to his secret and hidden kingdom, but now he had the added pressure of convincing her to leave her time behind.

He looked Aimery in the eye and nodded. “When do I leave?”

“Now. We cannot waste any more time,” Aimery said as he turned on his heel and began to walk out of the tiny village. “Your mate traveled to Scotland and is only visiting for a short while.”

“Do you know anything else of her?” Elric asked. He knew better than to ask Aimery to describe her. It was up to Elric to determine who his soul mate was.

“Aye.”

When Aimery didn’t say more Elric realized he could ask all the questions he wanted, but the Fae commander wouldn’t share any more with him. He was fine with it

though, after all, Elric was known for his seduction.

Chapter Three

*Present Day Scotland**Three months later*

Marin clapped along to the bagpipes as a group of local women danced a Highland jig. A smile pulled at her lips as she watched the villagers laughing and dancing.

“Now aren’t you glad you came?” Rhonda asked, a knowing smile on her cute heart-shaped face.

Marin laughed as her friend was grabbed by a passing man and pulled into the throng of dancers. Rhonda’s short red curls bounced as she followed the movements of the others.

Rhonda had been at the airport waiting as soon as Marin had returned to Houston from Jamaica. No words were needed between the two women as Marin walked into her friend’s arms and let her tears flow. Rhonda had been a rock for Marin. Had it not been for her, Marin didn’t know how she would have survived the past couple of months.

“Good afternoon, lass,” a handsome Scot said as he walked by.

Marin let her eyes roam over the tall man. His blonde hair was cut short and spiked on top, and his face was tanned, suggesting he spent a lot of time outdoors. The dark tartan of his kilt complimented his rugged features.

“He’s interested,” Rhonda said as she returned to Marin’s side.

“But I’m not.”

Rhonda rolled her eyes and sighed. “You aren’t still pining for that loser, Johnny, are you?”

Marin laughed. “Not in the least, but that doesn’t mean I’m ready to find another man.”

“Sweetie,” Rhonda said as she wrapped her arm around Marin’s shoulders. “No one said you had to have a relationship. Have a little fun with the handsome Scot with an accent that makes my knees weak.”

“Maybe you should be the one having a little fun with him.” Marin tried to smile, but the fact was, she didn’t want to be around men, at least not men that were near her age. Old men with wrinkles and infants were about all she could tolerate for the time being.

Rhonda squeezed her shoulders. “You’re going to turn into a man-hater.”

This time Marin rolled her eyes as she turned her head to look at her best friend. “You know me better than that.”

“I know.” Rhonda dropped her arm and looked at the ground. “I should have gone with you.”

Marin had repeatedly told Rhonda that she didn’t hold it against her friend that work had prevented her from accompanying her and Johnny to Jamaica. It wasn’t Rhonda’s fault she worked for the largest private investigative company in Houston and landed a huge client two days before Marin left for Jamaica.

But Rhonda's job had allowed her to find Johnny for Marin. The weasel hadn't planned on marrying Marin in Jamaica. It seemed that a week before he had accepted a job in St. Louis and boxed everything up and shipped it. As soon as they had arrived in Jamaica, he had turned around and went back to the airport to take a return flight to the states.

The funny thing was, Marin wasn't angry about it. She knew she should be, but maybe she was just too numb to feel anything.

"I need another ale," she said suddenly.

"Want me to get it?" Rhonda asked.

Marin noticed her friend and the hunky Scot eyeing each other. "I think I can handle it," she said, then laughed when she realized Rhonda wasn't even listening to her.

She walked to the "bar" they had set up outside. Though the festival was outside and most of the natives had on just a thin long sleeve shirt and pants or kilt, Marin had a thick wool sweater she had bought the day before and a jacket. And she was still cold. The temperature was quite different from the hot, humid weather of southeast Texas.

With a smile, she paid the bartender for the ale, then turned around to look for Rhonda. She wasn't surprised to see her friend talking to the handsome Scot. Marin looked around the quaint little town and the ruins of a great castle high up on the hill overlooking the town.

History had never been a subject she enjoyed, but she found herself intrigued with the ruins and the ancient people of Scotland. The more she stared at the ruins, the more she found herself drawn to them. She didn't hesitate when she found herself walking toward them for a closer inspection.

* * * *

Elric didn't know what to expect when Aimery said they would travel through time, but he wasn't prepared for being hurled through a dark space with sound so loud he thought he might never hear again. He didn't question Aimery when the Fae told him to keep his eyes closed.

And as soon as it started, it stopped.

"Open your eyes," he heard Aimery say from beside him.

Elric slowly opened his eyes, expecting to still be tumbling head over heels as he was sure he had been just moments ago, yet he stood still and straight.

"Look through the doorway."

Still a little disoriented, Elric did as Aimery commanded and found himself looking through what seemed to be an oval entry way that shimmered like the waters of a loch. Except these waters were clear, and as he gazed through it he found himself watching several groups of people celebrating.

"You're in the year 2007," Aimery explained. "The Scots of this time still wear kilts and celebrate the Scottish heritage, so you should fit in well."

Elric swallowed and grasped his sword. "They may be wearing a kilt, but they don't have any weapons."

"Many things have changed. You should leave your sword with me, but I'm

afraid you might need it.”

It was something in Aimery’s voice that caught his attention. “Need it for what?”

“The Tnarg’s.”

Elric’s entire body shuddered. “They’re real?”

“Very much so. They attacked Lucian as he tried to return to Drahcir.”

“You spoke to Lucian? Why didn’t you say so?”

“You didn’t ask,” Aimery reminded him with a small smile. The smile dropped suddenly. “Be vigilant. If I knew your mate was in another time, chances are, the Tnargs do as well.”

Elric nodded and stepped toward the shimmering wall of water only to have Aimery stop him with a hand on his shoulder.

“When you and your mate are ready to leave, return to this spot. The doorway will be hidden, but if you know what you are looking for, you will be able to use it. Don’t step through unless you have your mate for I cannot take you back to her world again.”

With a deep breath, Elric regarded Aimery for a moment. “Thank you for helping me and my family.”

“Just return with your mate, Elric,” Aimery said.

Without another word, Elric stepped through the doorway. He anticipated being drenched, but it was as if the water wasn’t there, only a mirage.

He scanned the crowded valley below as he tried to get a feel for the time. Bagpipes sounded around him as a group of people danced and sang. Another group was crowded around different make shift shops as they hawked their wares. The last group was near a structure that sold only liquids, and if Elric knew anything about his countrymen, he knew they were drinking ale.

A smile pulled at his lips. A large tankard of ale sound delicious, but he wanted to look around the area first. No one seemed to have noticed that he appeared out of nowhere, and he wanted it kept that way. Aimery had been right. Most of the men wore kilts, but it was the women that surprised him. Gone were the gowns that molded to their curves, and in its place were thick shirts that hung limply on their forms and tight pants that gave a hint to the backsides.

Elric had always been kidded by his brothers that he was a traditionalists, and in this case, he was. He didn’t like the clothes worn by the women and hoped his mate wore something less...distasteful.

People nodded and smiled as he passed them. He hoped that Aimery brought him to the town in which his mate was so that he didn’t have to travel this Scotland in search of her. But he wasn’t taking any chances. He would search the festival first and then if he didn’t find her, he would search the surrounding villages.

As he passed a tall Scotsman with blonde hair that he had cut too short on top and a woman with short red curls, he noticed how both stared at him. He gave him a nod of hello and continued on but felt their stares long after he had passed them.

It didn’t take him long to walk around the festival and search the women. None were his mate. The disappointment that welled up inside threatened to choke him. He breathed in the Highland air and lifted his face to the sky. The sun broke through the

thick clouds and gave some warmth to the ever increasing chill.

Elric found his gaze drawn to the old ruins of a castle. "What has this time come to if they let a castle fall?" he murmured to himself.

It took men scores of years to build the mammoth structures, and it was a sad sight to see it destroyed. Just as he was about to turn away, he spotted a lone figure atop the hill gazing at the castle. The sun was behind her, silhouetting her as her long dark hair lifted in the wind.

A fission of awareness snaked down Elric's spine. His blood quickened as he gazed at the woman. He began to move toward her. The closer he got, the faster his heart beat. Could it be after all these years he had finally found his mate? Could it really be that easy?

He moved around her so that he would come up from behind. He wanted more time to study her and to gather his thoughts on what he would say. At one time he had planned everything out, down to the last sentence of what he would say to his mate, yet now as he approached the woman, he couldn't recall anything of his speech.

A gust of wind whipped around him as he reached the top of the hill. He watched as she wrapped her arms around herself in a bid for warmth. Her wavy auburn hair danced around her head as she continued to stare at the castle. He couldn't tell much about her figure through the thick, bulky clothes she wore, much to his disappointment.

Just as Elric was about to approach her, another man walked up and tried to talk to her. It was obvious from the man's staggering and slurred speech that he had imbibed too much.

"A pretty lass such as yerself doesna need to be alone," he said.

She turned her head toward the man and Elric got a closer view of her profile. "Thank you for the offer of company, but I'm fine."

Her accent intrigued him. Aimery had said she was visiting Scotland, but from where, Elric had no idea.

"Ah, an American," the man said and moved closer.

Elric didn't know what an 'American' was, but he didn't like how close the man was to her. He started to move toward them.

"Please," she said. "I thank you for the hospitality, but I just want to be alone."

"I canna do that," the man said.

Elric had had enough. "Listen to the woman and leave her alone," he said, his tone soft and unthreatening.

Marin heard the second voice behind her and turned to face him. By his easy tone she wasn't expecting the very male, very handsome man before her. If there was ever a picture in the dictionary beside the word warrior, it would be this man.

Though he sported a kilt, it was a little different from the rest of the Scots at the festival. And the white shirt beneath it certainly wasn't the polyester blend that the others wore. In fact, it looked rather...authentic. Marin swallowed when she noticed the sword at his hip. By the way his hand casually rested on the hilt, he knew how to use the weapon. And it wasn't there for show.

"You've had too much to drink this day, my friend," the man said to the drunk. "There are plenty of women below who need your attention."

The drunk looked from the warrior to the festival below. "Aye. Ye're right," he said and walked away.

For several minutes Marin watched as the drunk stumbled his way down the steep slope to the crowd in the valley. She had wanted to be alone with the castle ruins, and was about to ask the warrior if he could leave, when she raised her eyes and found him staring at her intently.

"My name is Elric Sinclair," he said.

His voice was as smooth as velvet, as dark as sin, and sent her blood rushing through her. Men never affected her this way and she was immediately leery of him.

"Thank you for your aid."

"I'm not one to leave a damsel in distress."

Marin found herself smiling despite herself. "Now that is something I've never been called."

His dark brows rose as he crossed his arms over his thick chest, his arms bulging with muscles. Her gaze raked over his thick legs, narrow waist, and wide chest to his face. He had chiseled features and chocolate brown hair that was pulled away from his face in a queue. His green eyes studied her silently.

"I see you like our history," he said after a moment.

Marin glanced over her shoulder at the ruins. "I think it sad that such a significant part of Britain's history is left to this."

"Britain, aye?," he said with a frown. "But not all castles are torn down?"

Was it her imagination or had he asked that as a question? "No," she said and turned to the castle. She felt Elric move beside her, but he didn't get too close.

She realized she had never given him her name. "My name is Marin. Marin Chapel."

He smiled and bowed slightly. "Nice to meet you, Marin. An unusual name you have."

"My parents liked the unusual."

"That is not always bad."

Marin tried to ignore the pull of Elric's body. It was like he had some kind of magic power over her that she wasn't able to deflect. She could hear every breath he took, sense every glance of his eyes, and almost hear the beating of his heart.

"You feel it don't you?" he asked softly.

She jumped and looked at him. Her lips parted, but she didn't know how to answer.

"You feel the draw of Scotland's history," he said with a slight pull of his lips. "They say that if you can feel the draw of Scotland that in another life you were Scottish."

Marin closed her lips and licked them as she tried to pull herself together. There was definitely something about Scotland that put her off kilter. "I've never heard that saying, but I suppose it could be true."

"So you believe in past lives?"

She shrugged and tried not to notice how intense he had suddenly become. "I don't disbelieve it or believe it. I've seen no proof either way to show me that it is or

isn't true."

The intense light of his green eyes dimmed. "Ah," he said sadly.

"Do you believe in past lives?" Marin found herself asking.

He nodded. "I most certainly do. When two people meet and feel a connection that goes deeper than anything they can explain, a love so strong, so true that it could only be they are soul mates...then it proves past lives."

"How?"

He turned to face her. "When two souls find each other again and again in different lifetimes, their love grows stronger, allowing them to find the other quicker each lifetime. 'Tis magic."

She had never thought of anything like that before, and it gave her pause. "How do you know this?"

"I've seen it," he simply said.

She glanced at the crumbling stones of the castle and the weeds and ivy that covered the few stones that stood upright. "What happens if the souls don't find each other?"

"They continue looking in the next lifetime."

"You sound so certain."

He smiled seductively. "That's because I am. Do you not believe in love?"

"Oh, I believe," she said. "My parents were madly in love with each other. It used to embarrass me as a kid, but as I grew older I realized what a precious thing my parents had."

"Are they still together?"

Marin nodded. "They were rarely apart, and that was true even in death. They died within weeks of each other. It was as if Dad couldn't live without Mom."

"I'm sorry."

There was only kindness in his green eyes, and Marin realized it felt good to talk about her parents and the love they had, a love she doubted she would ever find.

"Do you believe in love?" she asked.

"Most certainly."

He said it with such conviction that it left her speechless for a minute. "Have you found your soul mate?"

He nodded.

Marin sighed and wrapped her arms around herself. "You're very lucky then," she said. "Not many people are so sure of such things."

"Come with me," Elric said and held out his hand to her.

Though they were having a nice conversation, Marin didn't trust him. "Where?"

"Into the ruins," he said and took her hand. "Let me show you what it was like inside a castle."

Marin laughed as Elric pulled her after him. And once she entered the ruins, it was like she had walked through an invisible doorway that brought her senses to life. She took a deep breath and smelled the earthy scent of Scotland and the history of the castle. Her gaze wandered over the stones as she imagined what the castle had been like before it had been destroyed.

“Close your eyes,” Elric whispered into her ear as he came up behind her. Chills raced down Marin’s spine and across her skin. It never entered her thoughts not to do as he asked. She could feel the length of him against her, his heat surrounding her, and his warm breath fanning her neck. She had the sudden and nearly uncontrollable urge to lean into him.

“Listen close and you can hear Scotland opening her past up to you. The castle is alive with activity. A fire roars in the great hall, servants scold children as they race through the hall, and the mistress of the castle readies everything for the evening meal. Her husband walks through the door, searching the hall for her. He spots her near the dais where they would sup and hurries to her.”

Marin could feel, hear, and see all that Elric whispered in her ear. It was as if he had said, Scotland had opened her history for her to glimpse inside.

“The lord stops in front of his lady wife,” Elric continued as he slowly walked around her.

Marin desperately wanted to open her eyes, to look at Elric. But at the same time she wanted to see what the past held.

“His lady gives him a welcoming smile, seeing the desire and heat in her husband’s eyes. He doesn’t take her upstairs as she wishes. Instead, he teases her.”

Marin opened her mouth to ask how the lord teased his wife when she sensed Elric step closer to her.

Chapter Four

Elric was nearly undone with desire. He stared at Marin's elegant beauty. Her skin was the color of cream, her eyes a greenish hazel. She had an oval face, high cheek bones and graceful, arching brows over her large eyes. Her wavy auburn hair hung just past her shoulders, and he wanted nothing more than to bury his hands in her hair and pull her against him for a searing kiss.

Instead, he gazed down at her full, wide lips and lifted his hand. "The lord teases his wife with his finger," he said and traced Marin's dark pink lips. He saw her tremble and lean toward him. "The lord sees his wife's desire flare in her eyes yet still doesn't take her to their chamber."

Elric had always been a master of seduction, but it had never backfired on him so gravely before. He wanted Marin with a ferocity that frightened him. His rod throbbed with desire, and the urge to back her against the walls and bury himself inside of her was strong--nearly too strong to ignore.

He knew she felt something by the way her body trembled, and it wasn't because of the chill. She might not realize they were soul mates, but given a little time she would understand what bonded them.

As much as he wanted her right then, the first time with his mate would be somewhere warm and seductive, not in the middle of castle ruins where someone could walk upon them.

Suddenly, Marin's eyes flew open. She searched his face and backed away a step as she slowly shook her head.

"It's useless to fight the pull of Scotland, Marin," he said softly. "Once she has touched your soul, she will always be a part of you."

"It isn't Scotland I'm worried about."

Elric knew he had frightened her, but it wasn't him exactly as much as it was what connected them. She had a lost look about her, a fragile look that made him want to take her in his arms and protect her from the world. Yet, he sensed great strength in her.

"You've been hurt by someone," he said suddenly.

She shrugged, a defensive look coming over her lovely face. "Hasn't everyone been hurt at one time or another?"

"What did the bastard do?"

She turned her back to him then. Elric leaned against the stones and waited. The wind whipped through the ruins, whistling softly as it brushed past them. It was almost as if they were the only two people in the world, and only the laughter and music from the valley below reminded him differently.

"He left me," Marin said so softly Elric didn't think he had heard her correctly. "On the day of our wedding. He left me."

Elric clenched his jaw and fought the anger that suddenly swept over him. "Did he at least tell you why?"

Her auburn hair swung side to side as she shook her head.

“He’s a cowardly bastard that doesn’t deserve you then.”

She turned toward him, a small smile on her face. “Thank you,” she said. “Most people just tell me how sorry they are, they never say anything about Johnny.”

“Is that his name?” Elric said, distaste curling his lip.

“Yes.”

“I could have told you just by his name he wasn’t the man for you.”

Her smile widened. “Is that so? Well, I’m not in the market for a man at the moment, but I’ll be sure to seek you out when I am.”

He wasn’t deterred by her lack of wanting male attention. “Aren’t you the least bit curious what name I would say?”

“A little.” She cocked her head to the side and regarded him a moment. “All right, what name would you say?”

Elric pushed off the stones and walked toward her. “You need a man who will be strong for you. A man who will support you in all you do and be there for you when you need him.” He walked around her, breathing in her fresh, clean scent. “You need a man who will protect you from the evils of the world, a man who would cherish you and love you all the days of his life.”

He stopped in front of her and stared into her hazel eyes. “You need a man who you could trust unequivocally.”

“There is not such a man that I’ve found.”

“You haven’t looked in the right places.” He stepped closer to her and tugged a strand of hair caught in her long eyelashes.

“I’m not looking at all right now.”

“Ah, didn’t you know that’s when Fate seeks you out?” he asked and leaned close until his mouth was inches from hers.

Marin tried to hide her disappointment in not being kissed as Elric turned and walked away. For long moments she stayed and watched him as he returned to the festival and disappeared into the crowd.

She looked at the ruins and could still feel Elric beside her, his warmth calming her.

“I’ve lost my mind,” she said aloud. It must be Scotland and her history that made her feels things that weren’t normal. At least that was the only explanation she could come up with.

She feared Elric. He was intense and seductive and entirely too charming for his own good. And damned handsome as well. It was a lethal combination, especially for Marin.

* * * *

Marin stared at her reflection and wondered at her sanity. All she had thought about the rest of the day at the festival had been Elric. And no matter how many times she had glanced up seeking him out, he wasn’t to be found. It was like he had just disappeared. And by the time she was dressing for dinner, she had convinced herself that Elric had just been a figment of her imagination.

She looked at her reflection in the mirror and gazed at the long, full black and silver skirt and a form fitting black sweater, one of her nicest outfits she had packed. She wasn't sure why had she decided to wear it since she was just having dinner with Rhonda, but it had felt right. She had even put on the black and silver chandelier earrings and necklace. Marin had never been one to lie to herself, and the poor attempt to tell herself that she was dressing this nice to impress Rhonda was a very bad lie. She was dressing in the hopes of seeing Elric.

There was a quick knock on the door adjoining her and Rhonda's room before it opened and Rhonda stepped in. She whistled and came to stand beside her.

"So you did meet a man today."

Marin frowned. "Why do you say that?"

"A woman doesn't dress like that unless she has a date. You look fabulous, sweetie. Who is the man? Was he at the festival?"

Marin turned away from the mirror and went to the closet to find her shoes. She tugged on the tall, high heeled boots and zipped them. "I'm an idiot. I'm not ready to date, to have dinner, to have sex. Nothing. I'm not ready for anything."

"Is that why you're dressed in a killer outfit that would make a saint drool?"

Rhonda asked, her arms crossed over her chest and her brows raised.

Marin sighed loudly. "I don't really know. I did meet someone. He was very different, Rhonda. He was handsome, intense, seductive and oh so sexy. It was like no matter how hard I tried to pull away from him, there was an invisible rubberband that snapped me back."

"Then stop fighting it," her friend said as she sat beside her on the small couch. "You deserve some happiness, and if a kilt wearing, handsome Scotsman is interested, then run, don't walk, towards him."

She laughed at Rhonda's words and gave her friend a hug. "Thank you," she said and pulled back.

"You're welcome."

"No," Marin said and took her hands. "Thank you for everything. For not telling me how stupid I was not to see what Johnny was, for not telling me 'I told you so', and for not letting me wallow in my self-pity back in Texas."

Rhonda shrugged and blinked away tears. "What are friends for? Besides, we always said we'd visit Britain together."

Marin laughed. "You're the best, Rhonda."

"Oh, all right," Rhonda said and stood up. "Stop this now or we'll both be blubbering idiots and you'll have to redo your make-up."

Marin stood to put on her lipstick. "You're not coming to dinner with me, are you?"

"No," Rhonda said, her face scrunched in her 'I'm sorry' mode. "I've got a date. With Lachlan, the handsome Scot."

"Good," Marin said. "Have fun and be careful."

"Oh, I will." Rhonda drew on her coat. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do," she called as she walked back into her room.

Marin took a deep breath and walked out of her room. It was too bad the small

inn didn't have room service. She didn't relish eating alone, but she had to eat. It was just after seven as she slowly made her way down the stairs. She let her eyes scan the dining room/bar as she reached the bottom step.

The room was crowded, but not too loud. She found an empty table near the large fireplace and walked to it. She sat, and instantly a young waitress was there ready to take her order. Marin ordered a glass of wine and the special of the night which was some kind of stew.

Marin didn't have long to wait before the wine was placed in front of her. She sipped her wine and stared into the fire as she recalled her conversation with Elric. Word for word. The fact she had wanted his kiss, had felt bereft when he left her, made her take stock of herself. No man had left her feeling so...off kilter. The fact that she wanted Elric's company now, to listen to his lilting accent and feel his heat made her want to rush to her room.

She leaned back in her chair and felt it. Someone was watching her. Slowly, Marin let her gaze wander the room until she saw him in the corner alone. Elric gave her a smile and slightly nodded his head in her direction.

There was something about the feral look in his eyes that made her heart beat and her stomach flip. When he suddenly stood and walked towards her, Marin's stomach flip-flopped as she grew more and more nervous.

"Eating by yourself?" Elric said as he reached her.

She nodded and glanced at the chair opposite her. "Would you like to join me?"

"Aye, I would. Thank you." He pulled out the chair and sank into it. "Do I frighten you?" he asked, his face serious.

Marin gazed at the man before her. He wasn't the typical twenty-first century man. While most had changed from their kilts they wore at the festival to jeans and a sweater, Elric still wore his kilt.

She licked her lips and tried to form a response to his question. "You do, and I'm not sure why. It's not just because I've been hurt. I feel different when I'm around you."

"Different how?"

"I can't explain it."

He smiled and leaned back in his chair. "Are you hungry?"

She was, but not for food. Marin nearly fell out of her chair at her thought. She looked away from Elric's green gaze and at her hands. "Not really."

"Good," he said and suddenly rose. He took her hand and tugged her to her feet. "Come with me."

"Where are we going?" she asked, a little frightened, yet excited at the same time. She had never been so impulsive or adventurous.

The excitement waned as they left the small hotel. The chill of the day was gone, and in its place a rather damp, cold night had descended on Scotland. Marin shivered and wrapped her arms around herself. She needed her jacket.

"Do you ride?"

She turned and looked at Elric. "Ride? Ride what?"

He chuckled and grabbed her hand again as he began to walk around the hotel. "Horses, Marin. Horses."

“I’m from Texas, of course I ride horses.”

“Good,” was all he said as he continued.

They didn’t stop until they came to the barn at the back of the hotel. Elric released her hand long enough to open the stable door, then shut it after her. Marin inhaled the smell of horses and smiled. She had always loved horses.

She slowly followed Elric as she walked through the stables until he came toward the back. There, a young man stood holding a horse. One horse. Did Elric expect her to ride alone? If he did, he was in for a rude awakening.

He patted the young man on the shoulder and took the reins from him, then turned to Marin. “Are you ready?”

“Who is going to ride?”

That seductive, secretive smile of Elric’s returned. “We both are.”

Marin’s breath lodged in her throat. No one had ever done anything so romantic, so seductive, so...thoughtful for her.

She took Elric’s hand and let him lift her onto the horse before he mounted behind her. His thick arms came around her and held the reins.

“Do you trust me?” he asked into her ear.

To her surprise she said, “Yes.”

With that, he nudged the horse and they cantered out of the stables into the cool night air. She let herself lean back against Elric’s wide chest as he maneuvered the horse. With every step of the horse she became more and more aware of Elric and his body that surrounded hers. His long legs molded to her, easily guiding the horse. Her bottom rubbed against his groin, and there was no mistaking the hard bulge that she felt.

Just knowing he wanted her made her nipples harden and moisture gather between her legs. His warm breath fanned her neck and cheek as he wrapped an arm about her waist to hold her close. His arm, nestled just under her breasts, was nearly too much to bear.

She wanted him, wanted to feel his hands on her breasts. Her body was a mass of quivering nerves by the time he stopped the horse. For a long moment they just sat in silence, and that’s when she finally noticed where they were--the ruins of the castle.

When Elric slid off the horse, Marin instantly missed his warmth. She hadn’t noticed the cold when his body had surrounded her, but now it was quickly seeping into her bones. He held out his arms for her, and she moved into them. Slowly, he slid her down his body, his eyes boring into hers. But she couldn’t look away. She was drowning in his green depths and the desire she saw there.

His fingers intertwined with hers as he led her into the ruins. She hadn’t noticed the back part of the castle before, the part that hadn’t been torn down. It wasn’t until Elric led her to the stairs that she saw part of the castle could still be inhabitable.

A torch was mounted at the base of the stairs, and Elric grabbed it as they started up. Through the narrow climb, Marin couldn’t help but feel as if she were going back in time. The light from the torch cast shadows on the wall, but she wasn’t scared. She knew Elric would protect her. He was her warrior.

And when he stopped in front of a door and faced her, the torch held high to shed light, she knew what was inside.

“You know why I brought you here?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“If you want to leave, tell me now and I will return you to the inn.”

To answer him, she opened the door and stepped inside. Her heart skidded in her chest when she saw the multitude of candles and the pile of blankets on the floor. Her body quivered with a desire so deep and strong that she wondered if she would ever be the same after this night.

Chapter Five

Elric shut the door and put the torch in its holder by the door, then turned to face Marin. She looked like a goddess in the light of the many candles. She was magnificent with desire glazing her eyes.

He took a step toward her and wondered if he should tell her everything before he made love to her, or wait until after her body was sated with love. She answered his silent question when she held out her hands to him.

Making love to women had always been second nature to Elric, but this time...this time was different. Marin was different. She was his mate, and he wanted their first time to be something they always remembered and cherished.

When his hand took hers, he found his shook slightly. His blood pounded loudly in his ears, and his heart thumped wildly in his chest as his thickening rod begged for release. He gently pulled her toward him until their bodies nearly touched. His eyes moved across her lovely face and stopped at her mouth.

Her lips were parted and her chest rose and fell swiftly, as if she too anticipated what was between them. In the distance the soft sounds of a lute and violin filled the air. Elric laced his fingers with hers and began to move with the music. His eyes never left her face, not even when she closed hers and swayed with him.

Elric didn't know how long they moved with the music as it wove its spell around them. All he knew was that he was alone with Marin, his mate, and he was going to claim her and her body as his.

Slowly, he ran his hands up her arms, over her shoulders to her slender neck. He cupped her face with his hands and gently traced her lips with his thumb. Her warm breath skidded over his skin, heating his already hot blood.

He wanted to strip off her clothes, lay her down on the blankets and plunge into her. His need for her had grown until it was nearly drowning him. He lowered his head until his lips brushed hers. A smile pulled at his mouth when he heard her sharp intake of breath.

Her hands gently came to rest on his waist as she leaned into him. The feel of her full breasts pressed against his chest caused his rod to buck with anticipation. Yet, somehow he held back.

He let his tongue trace where his thumbs had been before he gently nipped at the corners of her mouth.

"Elric...please," Marin murmured.

He moved his arms until one cradled her head and the other moved to her back as he pressed her tightly against him. Then, he took her in a kiss that held all his hopes, desires, and need.

Her arms moved around his back as her nails raked across him. A sigh escaped her as she leaned her head to the side and thrust her tongue against his. Elric broke the kiss and looked deep within her hazel eyes. He smoothed back tendrils of hair from her face and found that he wanted to tell her everything about the curse, his kingdom, and her

role in it. It suddenly became very important to him that she know everything before he took her body, because once they were joined, there was no turning back.

“Marin, I must tell you something,” he began, but she put her finger on his lips to stay him.

“Not now,” she said softly. “I don’t know if it’s this land, the history, you, or the magic of this night, but I don’t want to talk. I want to feel. Make me forget the outside world, Elric, even if it’s only for a few hours.”

Elric wasn’t about to deny her, not when he saw the look of need in her hazel eyes. He took her hand and led her to the pile of blankets he had readied for them. Once she had sat, he kneeled in front of her and reached for a foot. He tried to tug off the shoe, but it wouldn’t budge. It wasn’t until she reached for a little contraption on the side of the boot and pulled it down that he was able to pull off the boot. He found the little contraption on the other shoe and pulled it down, hearing a soft zipping sound as he did.

Once both boots were off, he looked down to find her legs encased in wool stockings. He raised his brows at her. “The air doesn’t hold that great of a chill.”

“It does for me. I’m not used to his cold.”

He forgot about the wool stockings as he moved toward her for another kiss. Her lips were like nectar from the Fae. He couldn’t get enough of her sweet taste. Gently, he leaned into her until she laid back on the blankets, and though he wanted to cover her body with his, he didn’t. He supported himself with his arms, hovering just over her as he took her lips again and again.

He shifted and moved to her side as he kissed along her neck and nipped at her ears. His hand moved to the buttons on her sweater. When he had them all opened, he lifted his head and gazed down at her body. A black and silver flimsy garment held her breasts. He found himself intrigued and traced the top of the lace.

A soft sigh passed through her lips. Elric glanced at her and smiled. “What is this?”

“A bra,” she said and licked her lips. In the back of her mind something made her realize he should know what it was, yet, she was too caught up in her body to ask. “It helps to hold me.”

“Hmmm,” he murmured as he bent down and kissed the top of each breast.

The bra was not only beautiful, but Elric found it quite...erotic. The women of his time wore nothing like it, and though he wanted to inspect it, he wanted to taste her breast more.

He pushed her shirt off her shoulders, then sat her up to pull it completely off. To his surprise, Marin reached around to her back and unfastened her bra. Elric’s breath locked in his chest as the lace fell away from her breasts. The light from the candles set a soft glow to her skin, and, as he watched, her nipples hardened before his eyes.

Yet, when he reached for her, she hurried to stand. He turned to see what she was about and found her reaching underneath her skirts. Curiosity held him still, and it wasn’t long before he saw her tug off her wool stockings. She gave him a shy smile. In return, he leaned back on his hands and let his eyes roam over her.

“Take the skirt off,” he said.

No woman had ever taken her clothes off for him, and he found he quite liked it.

As Marin unfastened her skirt and let it drop to her feet, he dug his fingers into the blankets to keep him still.

More black and silver lace hid her sex from him, and just as with the bra, he found the hint of her woman's hair barely visible through the lace almost more than he could bear.

He sat up and reached for her. Elric ran his hands over the lace and looked up at her. "Do you know what this does to me?"

She shook her head as she licked her lips. Her auburn curls danced around her face as she gazed down at him.

"The sight of this barely hiding your sex from me drives me wild. I want to lay you down and bury myself inside of you."

"They're panties," she said, her voice shaky.

"They're coming off."

Elric caught the waist of her panties and pulled them over her hips and down her legs until she stepped out of them. And then she stood before him in all her glory. With her full breasts, trim waist, flared hips, and lean legs, Marin was nearly perfect in his eyes.

"You're magnificent," he said as he tried to pull her down to him.

She shook her head and smiled as she squatted in front of him and began to tug off his boots. Elric watched as her hands gently pried off his boots, then reached for his tunic.

He unfastened the pin that held his tartan in place over his heart and set it aside. He sucked in a breath when her soft hands met his flesh as she pulled his tunic over his head. For a long moment, they simply stared at each other, then Elric rose to his feet.

With Marin kneeling in front of him, she unfastened his sporran and gently set it down. Her gaze moved briefly to him before she reached for his kilt. After a few moments, he realized she didn't know what she was doing, and with just a flick of his wrist, the kilt dropped to the ground. He smiled as her eyes grew round.

"You really don't wear anything under the kilt."

"Nay," he said and sat beside her. He lifted her chin until her eyes met his. "I want you, Marin. I won't lie about it, but I will give you one more chance to change your mind and leave."

"I want to stay. I like how I feel when I'm with you."

He cupped the back of her head and pulled her towards him for a fiery kiss that soon turned frantic with need. His rod begged for release, but he held tight his control and learned Marin's body.

Her skin was soft as lamb's wool and her body as responsive as only a mate's could be.

Marin closed her eyes and gave up to the delicious feel of Elric's hands and mouth on her body as she fell back and he moved over her. He knew just how to touch her and just where to touch her. It was as if he had delved into her deepest fantasies and given them to her in one night.

Her breasts grew heavy as his fingers grazed the undersides and his mouth kissed her neck. The heat of his body surrounded her and drove her wild for his touch. He

teased, he kissed, and he licked her neck and all around her breasts. Everything but her nipples.

She was going crazy with need. Her hands ran over his thick shoulders and neck as his muscles moved beneath her hands. She arched her back as his finger came close to her nipple, and just as she thought he would finally give her some release, he moved away.

Marin bit her lip and sighed as his warm mouth kissed between the valley of her breasts. Finally, he cupped her breasts, sending tiny spasms of pleasure through her. And just when she thought she would die from need, he gently ran his fingers across her nipple.

A soft cry tore from her throat as desire shot through her. As if to torment her, his ran his finger all around her nipple, sometimes touching, sometimes not. He tormented first one breast, then the other, until her breasts were aching and full. Only then did he take a nipple in his mouth and suck.

The feel of his warm mouth on her nipple sent liquid heat to Marin's sex. Her sex clenched with need, and she rubbed her hips against him, seeking the release she knew he could give her.

But the torment to her breasts was far from over. He flicked his tongue over one nipple as his fingers squeezed and plucked at the other. Her fingers plunged into his thick, dark hair as her body melted against him.

When he sat up and trailed a hand over her breasts and down her stomach, Marin opened her eyes to watch him. The way he gazed at her body made her feel beautiful and loved, something she had never experienced before.

Marin didn't know whether to be shocked or excited at the ease in which her body responded to Elric and how much she trusted him. When he parted her legs, she didn't hesitate or refuse. She opened them, letting his gaze linger on her sex. The sight of his eyes feasting on her hungry sex made her blood heat with longing. She wanted to be everything Elric thought she was and more. And the one thing she feared above all was disappointing him.

She forgot all about her fears when his hands moved over her thighs. And just as he had with her breasts, he teased her again. His hands touched her thighs, her stomach and her hips, but never the place that sought him the most. Her hands clenched the blankets as she fought to keep her body still.

Her senses were in a riot. She could hear her blood pound in her veins, her breath leave her lungs and her heart beat wildly in her chest. She could feel the heat from Elric's body, his hard muscles and his gentle caress over her skin. She could still taste the seduction and need in Elric's kiss.

So when his finger finally delved in her moist folds, she didn't hold back her cry of pleasure. His finger moved over her tiny bud, bringing ripples of bliss shooting through her. And when he pushed a finger inside of her, Marin sighed.

He settled between her legs, his breath fanning her hot, moist center and driving her wild. Marin could feel the pleasure building with each stroke of his finger inside of her, bringing her higher and higher. And when his tongue touched her tiny bud, she shattered into a million pieces as her orgasm claimed her.

Before the last of the tremors left her body, Marin opened her eyes to see Elric rise over her, his thick rod poised to enter her. She smiled and reached for him. He entered her in one fluid motion, burying himself to the hilt. She wrapped her legs around his waist and waited for him to reach his own climax.

But when he began to move within her, Marin felt herself building toward another orgasm. His thrusts went deeper, faster, and harder. She clung to him as her world began to spin out of control. Her body erupted in a tidal wave of intense pleasure.

Elric plunged deep inside of her before stiffening and crying out his pleasure.

Chapter Six

Marin's eyes began to grow heavy as she lay on Elric's chest, his arm idly caressing her back. She smiled at the exquisite love making they had shared. She wasn't naïve enough to think this happened every day. She knew first hand how fortunate she was to have found someone like Elric, but she also didn't expect him to stay.

She had to return to the US in just a few days. But during that time, she was going to spend as much of it with Elric as he wanted.

Just thinking of leaving Scotland and Elric seemed...wrong.

"What is on your toes?" Elric suddenly asked.

Marin leaned up and lifted her foot. "Nothing."

"You have colored your toes."

She giggled and laid back on his chest. "I painted my toe nails, if that's what you mean."

"Do you do that often?"

She found his question puzzling, and as she thought of the night and his not knowing what a bra and panties were, she knew something wasn't right. "Elric, can I ask you something?"

"Aye. And I will answer truthfully."

"Are you from Scotland?"

"Aye."

Marin sat up and looked at him. At one time in her life, she would have pulled the blanket up to cover her nakedness, but she felt at ease with her body around Elric. "How is it you didn't know about my bra and panties? And the nail polish?"

He took a deep breath and ran a hand down his face before he sat up. "Our meeting wasn't an accident."

"What do you mean? Have you been stalking me?"

Elric's brow furrowed. "I don't know what you mean. I've been searching for you, aye."

"Why me? I'm not anyone special or famous."

"It matters not to me if you're renowned or not. As for special, you are very special to me and my kingdom."

Marin blinked. "Did you say kingdom?"

"Aye. I am from Scotland, Marin, but not the Scotland you know."

"You're scaring me."

Elric rose to his feet and reached for his kilt. "That is not my intent. There is so much to tell you, but I don't know where to begin. I had thought this would be easier."

"Just tell me. Please." Since he was getting dressed, Marin reached for her bra and panties and slipped them on, then hurried to finish dressing. She was zipping her boots when she looked up to find Elric braced against one of the windows as he gazed outside.

"My family is cursed, Marin. It's a curse that we are likely to never break."

Marin considered herself a realist, but she was never one to doubt the unexplained such as ghosts, vampires, witches, and such. “Why were you cursed?”

“My ancestor dabbled where he shouldn’t have been.”

Now her curiosity was near to bursting. “Dabbled with who?”

Slowly, Elric turned from the window to face her. “The Fae.”

“The Fae.” Marin wasn’t sure what she had expected him to say, but it wasn’t that. “As in faeries?”

“Aye.”

She had two options. She could either believe that Elric had escaped from some mental institution or there really were Fae. Since she didn’t want to think she had experienced the best sex of her life with a mental patient, she opted to believe him. “Can you prove it?”

Elric chuckled. “Aye. I know it sounds as if I’m daft, but I’m not.”

“All right. So, there’s Fae and your family was cursed. So, how were you cursed?”

He leaned back against the stones and crossed his arms over his chest. “You’re taking this all very well.”

“Right now I’m listening. I’ll form an opinion later.”

“It’s only going to get worse, but I will tell you everything.”

She gave him an encouraging smile. “Good.”

“In order for my kingdom, Drahcir, and its people to survive, each generation must leave the kingdom in search of their mates. We are given a certain amount of time in which to find and convince our mates to return with us to Drahcir. The mates must return with us willingly.”

Marin swallowed. “Mates? As in soul mates?”

“Aye.”

“You’ve been searching for your mate?”

He nodded and let his arms drop. “I was searching. I found my mate, Marin. ‘Tis you.”

Words eluded Marin. She could only stare at Elric, now wondering if she was mental since she actually *believed* him. “Oh, God,” she whispered and put her hand to her head. “Let me get this straight, because I must have misunderstood somewhere.”

She licked her lips and clasped her hands in front of her as she began to pace.

“Your family has been cursed. By a Fae. Because...”

“Because the fool wanted to see if he could make a Fae princess fall in love with him.”

“I gather she did or there wouldn’t be a curse,” Marin said as she glanced at him. “You must return to your kingdom, Drahcir, with your mate before a certain time?”

“Correct.”

Marin stopped pacing. “Did I leave anything out?”

“Nay. But there’s more.”

She didn’t know how much more she could take. She moved to stand in front of him. “What is the rest?”

“Marin, you asked me if I was from Scotland, which I am, but you didn’t ask me

from *when* do I come?"

"It would explain the bra and panties and the toe nail polish."

"What would?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Sorry. I talk to myself sometimes. It's a bad habit."

"There's worse," he said with a smile.

She tried to return the smile, but she was too busy trying to take all the information in. "So, *when* do you come from?"

"It's a wee bit harder to answer than that. Drahcir was not only cursed, but it was also hidden from the known world."

"When, Elric? I must know when."

"Time goes differently in my kingdom. I've been gone nearly three years, yet by the time I return it will have only been a few months."

Marin sank onto the blankets. "The only explanation is that you time traveled here."

"I did, aye," he answered. "A Fae helped me since someone made sure my mate was not in my time."

She rubbed her forehead as a headache began to develop. "I'm confused."

"I know," Elric said with a deep sigh. "I'm making a bloody muck of it."

"No. It's just a lot for me to take in. Try to explain the time travel part again."

Elric moved until he sat opposite her on the blankets. "Drahcir is hidden deep in the Ben Nevis mountains."

"That's the tallest mountains in Scotland."

"Aye, and near frozen as well. When we were cursed, the Fae also hid our kingdom. With it being so deep in the mountains, not many people even dare to venture into them. We may come and go as we please, but we can never share the location of the kingdom. If any outsiders ever discovered it..."

"Your kingdom would no longer be yours."

"Aye," he said with a nod. "Through the generations, we have been able to venture out of our kingdom, unaware of the year we were stepping into, but it has always been that our mates would be in that time. We just had to find them."

"And they were always in Scotland?"

He nodded.

Marin leaned to the side and braced herself on her elbow. "Now, the twenty-first century woman in me says that's a crock."

"A what?" he asked, confused.

"Not believable," she answered. "If you and your kingdom were cursed, don't you think it's a little convenient that you can venture out at any given time and your mates will be waiting for you? And in Scotland as well?"

"You make it sound easy, but in truth, it is anything but. In the three years I've searched, I did not find you. It took a Fae to discover that someone had moved you to this time. The Fae aren't supposed to interfere, yet Aimery did."

"Why did he? What happens if another Fae finds out that he helped you?"

"Aimery is the commander of the Fae army and a very powerful Fae. He answers only to the king and queen."

Marin nearly rolled her eyes. “Then, if he can shift you through time, why can’t he erase the curse?”

“No one can. Once a Fae curses you, it lasts until they say otherwise.”

“Can’t you and your family talk to this Fae princess and right the wrong that your ancestor did?”

Elric chuckled. “If only it were that easy. That Fae princess disappeared after she set the curse, never to be seen or heard from again. Some say she turned into a dark Fae, others that she died. We’ve asked the Fae many times, yet no one can give us an answer.”

“Wow.” Marin fell back on the blankets and looked at the ceiling of the castle. “What a mess.”

“That’s one way of putting it. Do you have any more questions for me?”

She had several, but none that she was ready to ask yet. She was still reeling from the ‘mate must return’ part. And though she had greatly enjoyed their love making and conversation, it didn’t mean she was anywhere near ready to go anywhere other than out to dinner with him.

Marin sat up and gave him a smile. “I’ve had a lovely night, thank you, but I think I’m ready to return to my hotel.”

He sat up with her, and the regret in his green eyes sent warning signals off in her head. “You can’t do that, Marin.”

Chapter Seven

Elric saw the fear enter Marin's hazel eyes and regretted it instantly. "There is much we still need to discuss," he said quickly. "If I let you return now, you may leave, and if you leave and I return without a mate, my city and all its people disappear."

"What?" she cried as she scrambled to her feet. "Why are you lying? I liked you, Elric. I had even hoped to see you again, but your stories are frightening me."

He knew he was making a muck of things and wished he had Lucian's smooth tongue to aid him now, but his gift had been seduction, not talking. He stood and walked back to the window where he looked out over the village.

"I'm not lying to you. Nothing I have said tonight has been fabricated."

"Then let me leave."

He dropped his head against the cool stones. How he wished he could ask his father for advice. "I can't."

"Please," she cried and moved toward the door.

Elric wanted to let her leave, to see the trust she once had in her eyes for him. He couldn't take her back to Drahcir unless she was willing, and she was certainly anything but willing. Yet, he couldn't make her stay here either. If he wanted her to trust him, he was going to have to trust her as well.

"Before I take you back, I must tell you the rest," he said as he turned to face her.

"There's more?" she asked, her eyes wide.

He nodded. "If I had never found you, you would have been able to go about your life as normal. I would have had to return to my kingdom and watch it and all its people disappear forever."

"But you did find me," she said softly.

"Aye. And now that we have shared our bodies, things have...changed."

Her tongue peeked out to wet her lips. "How exactly have they changed?"

"We were given special ways in order to be able to detect our mates."

"What was yours?"

"Just a sense," he said. "A rightness about you that was lacking in all the others."

She smiled and leaned against the door. "Go on."

"Even though we were given the special ways to help ensure that we didn't make a mistake, the Fae gave us another way of seeing we made the right choice."

"And what would that be?"

Elric sighed. He quickly removed his tunic and held out his left arm. Even in the dim candlelight, the markings were beginning to darken.

"A tattoo?" Marin asked.

"In a manner," he answered. "It has always been on our skin, but when we find our mates and share our bodies, it brings out the markings."

"It's beautiful," she said and ran her hand over the intricate knotwork that ran from his shoulder to his elbow.

"You will have one as well."

Her gaze snapped to his. Then, slowly she began to unbutton her shirt. Elric kept his breathing calm, but inside his heart raced. She peeled back her shirt and he spotted the markings.

“Oh my God,” she murmured. “This can’t be happening to me. Nothing out of the ordinary has ever happened like this.”

Elric clenched his fists as he fought the urge to take her in his arms, yet he sensed that she needed to gather her thoughts and sort through everything first.

“Is there anything else?” she asked. She jerked her sweater back on and fumbled with the buttons.

“Actually,” he said hesitantly, “there is.” When I said things had changed, I wasn’t lying. Now, if you decide against returning with me, you will never find happiness. Neither of us will.”

Marin sighed and briefly squeezed her eyes shut. “Unbelievable. Take me back,” she said, her voice shaking. “Now.”

Elric went around the room and doused the candles before he reached for the torch. He led the way back down the stairs where he once again set the torch in its holder and walked Marin to the horse.

Just as he was about to lift her onto the horse, he stopped and listened.

“What is it?” she whispered.

Though she might be distraught over everything she had learned, her fingers dug into his arm and she moved closer to him.

“We’re being watched.” He looked down into her hazel eyes and tucked a lock of auburn hair behind her ear that had gotten caught in the wind.

“Do they mean us harm?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“It’s probably just some drunken men from the festival.”

He wasn’t about to tell her that he thought it might be a Tnarg and he needed to get her to safety fast. “Stay here,” he told her and turned to a pile of rocks several paces behind him.

Since the men of the time didn’t walk around with weapons, Elric had buried his sword. He shifted aside some of the old, crumbling stones and pulled out his sword. After he fastened it around his waist, he walked back to Marin.

“That’s real, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Very.” He grabbed the horse’s mane and vaulted onto his back, then held out his arm for Marin. He easily swung her up behind him, and when her arms wrapped around his torso, the desire that flared within him had him shaking.

With a quick tap on the horse’s flanks, they set off. The horse must have felt his agitation and worry because he snorted and jerked his head up and down several times before he settled into a comfortable gallop. Elric was vigilant of his surroundings at all times. The noise of Marin’s time made it difficult for him to discern where the threat to them was, but he caught a glimpse of a dark haired beast just before they reached the village.

It was the Tnarg.

Elric cursed under his breath and knew he would have to stay with Marin at all

times until she made her decision. He maneuvered the horse to the inn's stable and dismounted. When he reached for her, she easily slid into his arms and gave him a warm smile.

"Are you still angry with me?" he asked and ran a hand down her face.

She shook her head. "It's hard to take it all in at once, and based on the tattoo now on my left arm, I know you aren't lying. But, you're asking me to leave all that I know, my time, my friends...my life...to go to an unknown place that is stuck in some kind of time warp. How do I know if I'll be happy?"

"How do you know that you won't? Are you so happy here that you are willing to risk your future and my kingdom?"

"Don't," she said and backed away. "I have enough to think about without the added stress of thinking of killing all the innocents of your kingdom. Just let me think on this for awhile."

Elric was just glad to hear she wanted to think on it and hadn't run away from him. "How long do you need?"

"I don't know," she said with a shrug. "Give me a few days."

He didn't like it, but he would do it. He gave her a curt nod and reached for her arm to drag her to him for a long, slow kiss. He wanted her to remember his taste as she fell asleep that night.

When he finally lifted his head, her lips were swollen and desire blazed in her eyes. "You cannot deny the attraction between us."

"No, I can't," she said and took a step back. "And I won't."

"Don't go out alone at night," he called as she reached the stable door.

She stopped and turned to him. "You're keeping something from me."

Elric walked to her and offered her his arm. "I just worry. Let me walk you back inside."

She hesitated only a moment before she took his arm.

* * * *

Marin shut her door and leaned back against it. Her mind reeled with everything Elric had told her. It was hard to discount any of it though, especially with the mark on her arm.

She walked to the bathroom and took off her sweater. For long minutes she stared at the elaborate knotwork and Celtic influence of the marking. It had darkened since she had first looked at it, making it nearly black now.

"The proof I've asked for is before my eyes," she said to her reflection.

She wouldn't call what she felt for Elric love since she had just meet him earlier that day, but there was most definitely something that connected them, something that drew her to him like a moth to a flame. But could she leave everything she knew? All her family was gone, so the only person she would leave behind was Rhonda.

Marin took a deep breath and pulled off the rest of her clothes to ready for bed. As she snuggled in her flannel PJs and buried herself beneath layers of blankets on the

bed, she couldn't stop thinking of Elric. She missed his warmth, the way his green eyes sparkled when he teased her, and his gentle touch. Most of all, she missed his presence and the way he made her feel.

She closed her eyes and recalled the promise in Elric's eyes. A promise for a new life perhaps?

Chapter Eight

Elric waited until he saw Marin shut her door before he hurried back to the stable. He jumped onto the horse's back and nudged him into a run. If the Tnarg was out there waiting, he had to find the creature before it got to Marin.

The Tnarg left an easy trail to follow. Its long, wide prints were unlike anything Elric had ever seen. If it hadn't of been for his brother, Lucian, discovering the ancient text in their library that detailed the Tnarg, Elric wouldn't know what it looked like now or its hunting habits.

The ancient text had described in detail what the Tnarg would do once it found Marin, and Elric would die before he allowed it to come near her. He had expected to find the desire he felt for Marin, but he hadn't expected the deep feelings so soon. It surprised and pleased him.

He focused back on the Tnarg and stopped his mount. Next, Elric closed his eyes and opened his senses. If he was right, the Tnarg would try and attack by tomorrow. Elric wanted the beast dead. Tonight.

The crack of a small twig behind Elric caught his attention. Slowly, he reached down and grasped the hilt of his sword as he silently drew it from its scabbard. The Tnarg was behind him in the forest. One of them would die this night, and it wasn't going to be Elric.

* * * *

Marin hadn't left her room all day. Rhonda had tried repeatedly to draw her out, but not even the revelry from the festival could drag Marin from the safety of the inn. She knew she was being a coward, but she needed time to think without Elric's seductive persona clouding her judgment.

She had tried to think of what it would be like to say good-bye to Elric, and then had tried a scenario where she agreed to go with him. Her head had begun to ache with the choices swirling through her mind. And to make matters worse, storm clouds had rolled in bringing rain and a ferocious lightening storm.

A crack of thunder drew her attention to the window. It had begun to grow dark, but because of the time or the storm, Marin didn't know. She couldn't believe she had been so lost in thought that she hadn't realized the passing of time, but by the grumbling of her stomach, it was a very distinct possibility.

She stood and walked to the window. People from the festival were running to get out of the downpour, and that's when she spotted Rhonda with Lachlan.

Marin smiled as she watched her friend with the Scotsman. Rhonda deserved some happiness, and she sincerely hoped Lachlan gave it to her. She was about to turn to get some shoes to go downstairs to find some food when her door was suddenly thrown open. And in the doorway stood the most fearsome creature Marin had ever laid eyes on.

She tried to swallow as her stomach plummeted to her feet like lead. The

creature's red eyes blazed with fury as it stared at her. It stood at least six foot tall with a brownish mass of matted hair covering its body and long talons on it's hands and feet.

Marin might have taken some self-defense classes, but nothing had prepared her for an attack from a creature like this. Give her a drunk, randy man and she could bring him to his knees with one punch. Now, all she wanted to do was run to Elric.

Elric.

She wished she hadn't been hiding from him all day. Maybe if she had been with him the creature wouldn't be in her room now. Marin made to move toward the door connecting her room to Rhonda's and the creature snarled and hissed as it stepped farther into her room.

With no weapon and the thunder drowning out any cries she might emit, Marin knew her situation was hopeless. Before she could blink, the creature suddenly flew towards her. The sound of a crashing sound as Marin fell to her side and rolled away sounded behind her. She didn't look over her shoulder as she scrambled to her feet and made a run for the door to Rhonda's room. She was just feet from the door when something latched onto her foot. The sensation of several razors cutting through her jeans and into her skin let her know the creature had gotten a hold of her.

Marin kicked out and felt her foot connect with something. She looked over her shoulder and saw the beast holding onto her foot and growling. It began to pull her backwards toward it. She clawed at the rug and screamed.

"What the bloody hell," she heard from the doorway and looked over to see Rhonda and Lachlan.

The creature let out a loud growl and turned back to Marin. As she was being yanked backward, she reached for anything she could get her hands on. Something touched her hand, and she immediately grabbed hold of it, then launched it at the creature. One of her heavy hiking boots landed squarely on the beast's head.

It howled its fury and tugged even harder. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Lachlan and Rhonda beating at the creature with shoes and even a hair dryer that Lachlan swung by the cord.

Suddenly a loud, booming cry filled the room. Marin turned to find Elric running toward them with his sword swinging over his head. Luckily, Lachlan stepped aside as Elric brought his sword down and embedded it in the creature's chest.

"Are you hurt?" Elric asked as he reached for her.

Marin's eyes were fixed on the creature with Elric's sword sunk into its chest. It was still breathing and no matter how hard she yanked on her foot, it wouldn't release it. "It has my foot," she finally said.

She watched as Elric pried open the beast's long fingers and freed her. Marin scrambled to her feet. "It isn't dead."

"Nay," Elric said as he looked her over. "We haven't much time."

"What the bloody hell is that?" Lachlan asked.

Elric looked over his shoulder at Lachlan and Rhonda. "Something you want no part of. You need to get out of here. Now."

"I'm not going anywhere without Marin," Rhonda said, though her voice shook with fear.

Marin licked her lips and moved away from the creature. "We can talk once we get out of here."

"Good idea," Lachlan said.

The words had no sooner left his mouth than the long, low growl of the creature filled the room. As one, all four turned to it. Marin's mouth fell open as she watched it pull the sword from its chest and stand. There was no gaping wound or blood. It was as if it had healed itself. Its gaze turned to her, and Marin felt her blood turn to ice.

She saw the creature and Elric move at the same time. The beast reached out toward her, and she felt its long talons slice through her sweater and into her skin. Everything seemed to move in slow motion as Elric bellowed and pushed the creature toward the window. Glass shattered as it plummeted to the ground.

Marin looked down when she felt something soaking her jeans. It took her a moment to register that it was blood. Her blood.

"Marin!"

Elric jerked at the woman's scream. He moved to catch Marin as she began to crumple. After one look at the blood, he lifted her thick tunic and spotted the four long gnashes in her side. He quickly rose to his feet and pulled back the bedding until he found the linens. With one jerk, he pulled the linen free and began to wrap it around Marin.

"Help me," he bellowed to the man as he tried to sit Marin up.

The man swallowed, visibly shaken. "Thank God for you. That...thing...would have killed us for sure."

"Aye," Elric said. "It would have."

"I'm Lachlan."

Elric glanced at the man and nodded as he finished bandaging Marin. "Elric. We need to get out of here fast. The Tnarg will return soon."

"A what?" the woman asked.

"It's all right, Rhonda," Lachlan said and moved to her. "We'll go with Elric and Marin."

Elric didn't wait around to see what the couple were going to do. He had to get Marin away from the Tnarg immediately before it killed her. And there was only one place he knew he could go.

"You can't take her in the rain," Rhonda shouted as they caught up with him.

Elric didn't spare her a glance as he walked down the back stairs. "We don't have a choice. It's either the rain or the Tnarg."

To his surprise, Lachlan held open the door for him. The rain was coming down in sheets making it near impossible to see but a few feet in front of his face. The Tnarg could be anywhere, and it sent chills of dread racing across his skin.

"Where are you going?" Lachlan yelled over the rain.

Elric ran into the stables. "Bolt the doors," he called.

Once they were locked inside, he set Marin down and checked her bandage. The blood hadn't slowed. "I must get Marin to safety. I don't have time to tell you everything. I'm leaving and taking Marin with me. It's the only thing that will keep her alive."

"I'm not letting you take her without me," Rhonda said, her arms crossed over her chest, her red hair plastered to her face.

Elric slowly rose to his feet. "Know this, if you follow me, you will never be able to return."

"Just where are you going?" Lachlan asked.

"To another time."

Rhonda put a hand on his arm when he went to reach for Marin. "Did Marin know of this creature?"

"Marin knew everything," Elric answered. It irritated him to be taking time to explain to Marin's friends, but he knew he didn't have a choice. "She was making a decision on whether to return with me and save my people or not."

Just as Elric expected, Rhonda opened her mouth to ask another question, but a loud banging on one of the stable doors stopped her. "The Tnarg," he said and scooped up Marin in his arms.

"Thank you for your help," he said to them before he raced to the other end of the stable.

As he reached for the bolt, Lachlan's hand freed it. Elric raced into the rain and toward the spot where Aimery had opened the doorway. Behind him he heard the screams as the Tnarg chased them.

Elric saw the doorway open as he approached. He stopped and looked at Lachlan and Rhonda. "Thank you for everything. Now, you must run and hide. The Tnarg wants me and Marin, but it might attack either of you."

He stepped through the doorway and sighed. The consequences of bringing Marin through time without her consent could be severe, but he would do it again if it meant saving her life. Whether she returned with him to Drahcir was another matter entirely.

"Oh. My. God," he heard from behind him.

He turned and found Lachlan and Rhonda. "What are you two doing here?"

"I don't know you," Rhonda said and put her hand on Marin's forehead. "She's my best friend, my only family, and I'm not about to let you take her away until I hear what she wants you to do."

He moved his gaze to Lachlan.

Lachlan shrugged and grinned. "I always loved adventure."

Elric silently groaned and turned toward the small village. He wasn't surprised to find they weren't far from the base of the Ben Nevis mountains. He was almost home.

"We need to find clothes, and I need to tend to Marin."

He went to the small cottage at the edge of the village and knocked on the door. It opened to show an old woman who gave him a warm smile.

"I knew you would return," she said. "Come in, come in, lad."

Elric moved to the bed and placed Marin on it. He moved to see about her bandage, but the old woman pushed him aside. "She and her friends are going to need clothes. See what you can find while I'll tend to her."

He didn't want to leave Marin, but he knew Ivy was right. Rhonda stayed with Marin while he and Lachlan found clothes for all of them. By the time they returned,

Marin was out of her wet clothes and sitting up in bed.

“Hello,” he said as he approached.

She smiled. “Hello. I hear we have time traveled.”

“It was either that or let the Tnarg kill you.”

Her smile grew. “Then I’m grateful you chose to bring me here.”

He was so relieved she wasn’t angry that he wanted to kiss her. “How are you feeling?”

“So-so,” she answered. “I must have lost a lot of blood.”

He nodded and handed the clothes to Rhonda. “I hate to do this, Marin, but you must make a decision now. The Tnarg will return here, if he hasn’t already.”

“My decision was already made,” she said as she lowered her eyes.

Elric didn’t like the taste of failure, and the thought of his people and kingdom disappearing into nothing turned his stomach. “I understand. Get dressed,” he said as he turned on his heel and left the cottage.

He stared up at the mountains with the moon shining down upon them brightly. If he closed his eyes he could see the beauty that was Drahcir and the love and laughter of his family. He would return to them soon though. He would not send them into death alone.

Something touched his hand, and he looked down to find Marin beside him.

“You shouldn’t be standing.”

“You certainly can’t carry me,” she said.

“I’ve been thinking. I might be able to convince the Fae to return you and your friends back to your own time.”

“Why?” she asked softly. “I thought you wanted me.”

Elric turned to face her. “I do, but inside you said...”

“That I had already made my decision. I don’t think I could live without you, and frankly, I don’t want to try.”

He gently drew her into his arms, careful of her injured side. “You’ve made me the happiest man on this realm.”

“I’ll be even happier once we’re away from the Tnarg.”

“Only the gates of my city will ensure that.”

“Then what are we waiting for?”

He stopped her as she started to walk away. “Marin, you’re wound is severe and you’ve lost a lot of blood. The trek to Drahcir is not an easy one. The cold alone does some people in.”

She smiled and touched his face. “I trust you.”

At that moment, Elric would have moved the mountains for her. He turned toward the cottage to ask Ivy to borrow her horses only to find her behind him.

“Already done, lad. I sent young Lachlan to saddle the horses. He cuts a fine image in a kilt, just as you do.”

Elric leaned down and gave her a kiss on her cheek. “Thank you, Aunt Ivy.”

“Just keep her safe and tell my sister I said hello.”

He gave her a nod as Lachlan walked up with the horses. Across all four saddles were thick, fur-lined cloaks. He watched as Lachlan lifted Rhonda’s cloak and wrapped

it around her shoulders. The clothes they had found fit her well, and the smile she gave Lachlan bespoke deep feelings.

“They look good together,” Marin said.

Elric smiled down at her. “Aye they do. How do the clothes fit?”

“You did a good job. The dress is only a little tight across my breasts.”

He reached for her cloak and helped to fasten it around her. “This will keep you warmer than you realize, as will the thick wool stockings I gave you. If I know Ivy, she packed extra blankets and anything else we might need in the saddle bags.”

“Then we’re set?”

“Aye,” Ivy said as she slowly walked up. “Take care of your wounds. I worked my magic on them, but the wounds came from a Tnarg and could easily get infected if you’re not careful, lass.”

“I will. Thank you again.”

“One more thing,” Ivy said. “Once you get into the mountains you might think your bones will freeze into place, but keep the faith in Elric. When he brings you through the gates of Drahcir, it’ll all be worth it.”

Elric knew Marin wanted to talk more to Ivy, but there wasn’t time to tell the story of his mother and Aunt Ivy. That would have to be saved for another day. He helped Marin mount her horse then swung up onto the back of his mount. With one last wave to his aunt, he nudged his horse into a walk.

His senses were on full alert. He couldn’t allow the Tnarg to sneak up on him again. If only he’d been able to kill it in the forest, but it was a sneaky creature and managed to outmaneuver him. Elric sighed. This should be a happy moment in his life. He had succeeded in finding his mate and convincing her to return with him to Drahcir to save his people and the kingdom. Instead, he worried that they might never make it.

A loud roar in the distance had Elric gripping his sword. The Tnarg had found them.

Chapter Nine

Marin shivered as they rode deeper into the mountains, the light from the full moon lighting their way. Ever since the Tnarg had roared, Elric had been like a man possessed. She feared if he had been able to, he would have run the horses instead of walking them, but the steep climb and thick snow prevented it.

She was as fearful of the Tnarg as Elric, especially after feeling its talons on her skin, but the frigid temperatures kept her from thinking of anything other than warmth. Her teeth wouldn't stop chattering, and she had no idea how the horse managed to keep plodding through the falling snow.

"We cannot make it to Drahcir in one day," Elric said as he pulled up beside her. "We'll have to stop over night."

Marin nodded, unable to talk though the chattering of her teeth.

She had no idea how much longer they trudged along before Elric suddenly veered off their path. She wearily followed him as she willed herself to stay in the saddle. Of a sudden, she felt hands on her and looked down to find Elric lifting her off the horse.

"You're near frozen," he said as she walked into a cave. "I'll build a fire to warm you."

She snuggled against his warmth, eager to feel her own hands again. The cloak, wool stockings, and thick skirts had indeed kept her warmer than she would have thought, but she wasn't used to this kind of cold weather.

"Lachlan, take care of the horses," Elric called as he sat her down and hurried from the cave.

Rhonda came to sit beside her and sighed. "I'm freezing and I'm in a cave. A *cave*, Marin. You know how I hate to rough it."

Marin laughed. "I'm just glad to be out of the weather."

"Ugh. I do agree. I'm starving, too."

"There might be something in here," Lachlan said as he tossed two bags at their feet.

Marin tried to open a bag, but her fingers were too stiff.

"Here, let me," Rhonda said and took the bag from her hands. She opened it and peered inside. "Its food."

Marin smiled as Rhonda rummaged in first one bag, then the next. It wasn't long before Elric returned with a few sticks in his arms.

"The wood is wet, but we cannot make a large fire anyway. I tried to bring us as far back into the cave as we could go, and with the horses with us, the Tnarg might pass us by."

"Won't it know where we're headed?" Marin asked.

Elric stopped piling the sticks and raised his gaze. "Aye, it knows. It'll be waiting for us, I'm sure."

Marin shuddered, but this time not from the cold.

* * * *

A few hours of sleep and a little warmth did wonders to help Marin. Her wounds pained her only a little, and just as Ivy had instructed, she checked the wounds as often as she could.

“We should reach the gates of Drahcir before nightfall,” Elric said as he clasped his cloak around his wide shoulders and glanced at the entrance of the cave where the sun shown.

Marin never tired of looking at him. He was everything she had ever thought a Highland warrior would be, tall, ruggedly handsome, and fiercely loyal to the ones he cared about. That pretty much summed Elric up in her opinion.

Lachlan had saddled the horses and Elric stood looking at her, waiting. It was time for them to leave, but she wasn't ready. The few hours in the cave had been pleasant, but maybe it was because Elric had been with her. Though, with Lachlan and Rhonda with them, Marin hadn't been able to do more than snuggle against Elric.

“Have you changed your mind?” Elric asked, his voice heavy with doubt.

She walked to him and traced his lips with her finger. “Never. We're safe here. Out there...” She let her voice trail off because she couldn't find it within herself to finish it.

“I'll protect you,” he vowed.

It still amazed her that this man who she had just met was willing to lay down his life for her, and she had no doubt he would do just that if it meant she would live. If there hadn't been proof on her arm and his, she might still be wondering at his sanity. But once she had accepted what was before her, she found it easy to open her heart and soul to him. He offered her something no one ever had, love.

She rose up on tiptoe and kissed him. A soft growl sounded from his throat as he molded her body to his.

“I want you,” he whispered in her ear and moved her hand to cover his hard rod.

With a smile she stepped away from him. “Then get me to Drahcir and you can have me any way you want me.”

The words had no sooner left her mouth than he took her hand and drug her out of the cave. The cold air hit her like a freight train as Elric lifted her atop her mare. With a small pat on her leg, he turned away and mounted his horse.

“Everyone, keep your eyes and ears open. The Tnarg is powerful and deadly. It won't be able to touch us once we reach the gates of Drahcir.”

“Our haven,” Marin whispered.

Rhonda clicked to her horse. “Then let's get moving please.”

* * * *

Hours had passed with nothing. But Elric wasn't fool enough to believe the Tnarg would leave them alone. It had proven its tenacity in Marin's time, and if he had learned anything of the beast, it was that it was very intelligent. It was most likely

waiting for them.

And he knew where.

The pass was just up ahead. A narrow slit between the walls of the mountains that was treacherous on any given day, but deadly if something was waiting for you. There was very little room in which to maneuver a horse and even less in which to try and defend oneself.

Elric looked over his shoulder to see Marin close behind him, then Rhonda and Lachlan bringing up the rear of their small party. At first he hadn't been too sure of Rhonda and Lachlan coming with them, but now he was grateful for an extra body to help ward off the Tnarg.

When they reached the entrance to the pass, Elric pulled his mount to a stop and dismounted. He walked to Marin and motioned Lachlan and Rhonda over. "Listen carefully. The pass is narrow and a perfect place for the Tnarg to attack."

Marin visibly swallowed. "How much farther to Drahcir?"

"Once we get through the pass you'll be able to see the gates."

"All right," she said slowly and glanced through the pass. "Do we continue on as we have?"

Elric shook his head and unbuckled the long dagger at his waist. "I want you to keep this with you," he said and handed it to her. He helped her strap it on under her cloak, then helped her off her mare. "I'll go first. Once I reach the other side, I'll whistle three times. That's when you will ride through."

"What about us?" Lachlan asked.

"Since the Tnarg is after Marin, once she's with me, I think it will be safe for both of you to ride through together. I'll issue another three whistles when Marin has reached me."

"And if we don't hear the whistles?" Marin asked.

He looked into her troubled hazel eyes. "I'll get through," he promised. He wasn't about to tell her he was terrified of her riding alone through the pass, but it was the only solution he could come up with.

Even if he was with her and the Tnarg attacked her from behind, by the time Elric dismounted she would be dead. With him going ahead, he would have ample time to try and find and kill the Tnarg before Marin rode through. But, just in case he didn't find it, she had a weapon.

"I'm scared," she whispered.

Elric pulled her into his arms and rested his chin atop her head. "I know."

For a long moment they stayed as they were, oblivious to the bitter cold or the stares of Lachlan and Rhonda. There was so much Elric wanted to say to her, and though he had planned to save it until their wedding, he felt the need to say some now.

"Marin," he said and leaned back. "Thank you for trusting me and coming with me."

She smiled up at him. "How could I refuse a man with seduction skills as good as yours?"

Elric grinned and glanced away from her gaze. "I wasn't given the fine tongue of my youngest brother, Sorin, the insight of my elder brother, Lucian, or the wisdom of my

eldest brother, Keiran, however, I do know that I feel whole now, with you at my side. I cannot imagine life without you now, and not because my city would cease to exist if I return without you, but because you are a part of me, my soul.”

For several moments she simply stared at him as she rapidly blinked. “I don’t know your other brothers, but I know what I see before me, and there is no man more handsome, well spoken, wise or insightful than you. I never believed people who said that they had fallen in love at first sight...until now. You say that I am a part of you, but I believe that you have always been a part of me. I want to walk beside you through the gates of Drahcir, and I refuse to allow one hideously ugly beast to threaten that.”

Elric smiled as he pulled her down to him for a kiss. What was supposed to be a simple kiss turned into a raging fire. His body wanted her, needed her with an intensity that frightened him. He pulled away before he lifted her skirts right then and buried his throbbing rod deep inside her.

He stared at her a heartbeat longer, etching her face into his memory and the feel and taste of her into his senses. Then he leapt atop his horse and grabbed the reins.

“I’ll see you soon,” he said before he disappeared into the pass.

Chapter Ten

Marin fingered the long dagger Elric had given her and waited. It had seemed as if ages had passed since she had watched her mate disappear into the narrow pass, a pass in which Elric was sure the Tnarg laid in wait for her.

“How long do we wait?” Rhonda asked.

“Until we hear Elric’s whistles,” Lachlan said. “I’m sure Elric is checking the pass as he goes. If there’s a chance he could find and kill the Tnarg before Marin rides through, then he’ll do it.”

Marin shuddered and wrapped her cloak tighter about her. “I don’t like that he went alone. The Tnarg is very powerful.”

“He’ll be fine,” Lachlan said.

Marin nodded and gazed at the snow at her feet. Her toes had begun to grow numb about a half hour before, but she refused to move from the spot she had last seen Elric. It boggled her mind that he had somehow managed to become so important to her in such a short amount of time. Her feelings for him ran deep, as deep as feelings could go. And though they hadn’t spoken of love, it was there.

Suddenly, she heard the three whistles.

“He made it,” she said as she lifted her skirts and made her way to her horse. “Lachlan, please help me.”

In the next instant, he had lifted her atop the mare. “Be careful, Marin. Keep your eyes open and your weapon ready at all times.”

She swallowed and nodded, then looked at Rhonda. She gave her friend a big smile. “I won’t keep you waiting as long.”

Rhonda’s laughter followed her into the pass. She looked over her shoulder for one last look at her best friend and Lachlan, but they were already out of site. With a deep breath, she turned back around and stared down the long pass.

The silence was deafening. Chills raced along her skin, but it wasn’t from the cold. The place was eerie, and made more so by the fact the Tnarg could be laying in wait for her.

Marin pulled the dagger from its scabbard and gripped it in her right hand. She wrapped the horse’s reins around her left hand and kept her eyes moving as Lachlan had advised. All she saw was snow and ice. The walls of the pass looked to be several feet thick and as high up as fifty feet from her estimate. Though there were a few places something or someone might be able to hide, those places were few and far between.

With each step of the mare’s sturdy legs, Marin became more confident. She nudged the mare into a slow canter and let her mind wander to the memories of the night she and Elric had first made love.

* * * *

Elric jerked his horse to a stop when he heard the whistle. His heart lodged in his

throat as he desperately tried to turn his horse around. He was at one of the narrowest parts of the pass. Another hundred strides or so and he would have made it through.

Once he had gotten his horse backed up, then turned around, he leaned low over his mount's neck and urged him into a run. He had to reach Marin before the Tnarg did. The Tnarg was smart, but Elric never imagined it would have known about his whistle.

With his blood thundering through his ears, he pushed the horse faster. He had to reach Marin before the Tnarg. Marin came into view, and he knew the instant she realized something was wrong. She jerked slightly on her reins, but when she looked over her shoulder and let out a scream, Elric knew real fear.

"Marin," he bellowed as he drew his sword and squeezed the horse with his knees to urge him faster.

He spotted the Tnarg as it yanked Marin from her mount. Rage erupted inside Elric as the creature slashed at Marin again and again as it straddled her. The Tnarg blocked Marin from Elric's view, and he worried that he might be too late to save her, but he would avenge her.

As he approached, he kicked free of the stirrups and launched himself at the Tnarg. Elric grabbed hold of the Tnarg around its neck and rolled it off Marin. The Tnarg screamed and tried to lash out at him with its talons. Elric's blood cried for revenge as he jumped to his feet and faced the creature.

"Attack me, you worthless piece of dung," Elric growled. "Only the vilest of creatures would dare attack something weaker than they."

The Tnarg snarled and climbed to its feet. "Only the smartest of creatures knows how to outwit their enemies."

"We weren't your enemies, until now."

The Tnarg cackled and began to circle Elric. "Do you really think you can stop me from killing her?"

Elation pumped through Elric. Marin wasn't dead. Yet. "Aye, I do," he answered.

"Even if it means giving up your own life?"

"Aye," he answered without hesitation.

It's red eyes narrowed on him. "I will kill you first, then her. I only need to kill one of the mates to end it all."

"Why?" Elric asked. "Why would you want to see Drahcir ended?"

"That should be obvious."

Elric gripped his sword with both hands. "If you won't answer my question directly, then let us proceed."

"As you wish," the beast said just before he leapt at him.

Elric swung his sword up and then over as he side-stepped. He saw his blade slice into the Tnarg's thick fur, but if he expected to kill the Tnarg, he had been wrong.

The beast looked down at the cut that began to heal and laughed. "Did you really think you could kill me? You? A mere mortal?"

A knot of dread began to form in the pit of Elric's stomach. He realized too late his mistake in thinking he could put an end to the Tnarg. Elric glanced at Marin as she began to stir. He had failed her. Neither of them would be able to make it to the gates of

Drahcir.

Though he might have failed her and his family, he would not go down without a fight. He turned back to the Tnarg and lifted his sword.

“’Tis not you that I want,” the creature said. “Return to your home.”

“If you want to kill my mate, then it is me that you want.”

“You would die for her?”

Elric nodded. “Gladly.”

“Then so be it.”

When the Tnarg next attacked, it was with much more power. Instead of half-hearted swipes, those deadly talons were now aimed at his heart. Elric managed to keep the majority of the strikes away from him with his sword, but the Tnarg had more strength than he. Already Elric was beginning to wear down, and the Tnarg looked as though its strength only grew.

The Tnarg struck out and hit Elric on the jaw, throwing him backward. He landed hard on the packed snow and struggled to catch his breath. He knew death awaited him. He looked over at Marin to find her watching him. He didn’t want her to see him die. With a grunt, he rolled to his stomach and ran toward her. He wrapped his arms around her and shielded her body from the Tnarg.

“I love you,” he said as he waited for the Tnarg’s strike.

After several moments, Elric raised his head to see that they were alone. He reached for his sword and waited for the Tnarg to attack once again. Yet, only the whistling of the wind through the narrow passes sounded around them.

“What happened to it?” Marin asked.

“I don’t know.” He looked off in the distance and saw two horses thundering toward them as he helped Marin to her feet. “It’s Lachlan and Rhonda.”

“Can we leave now?”

He shook his head. “First, I need to know if you’re hurt?”

“No. When it threw me off the horse, it knocked the dagger you gave me out of my hand. I’m sorry.”

“Sorry?” he repeated as he pulled her into his arms. “You have nothing to apologize for. The Tnarg must have whistled since I never made it out of the pass. I found you as soon as I could.”

“I really need to get out of here.”

Elric could feel her shaking. She had his cloak in a death grip, and he knew she could handle very little else that day. “Aye. Now that Rhonda and Lachlan have arrived, let us get through the pass.”

* * * *

Marin expected the Tnarg to jump out at them, but they made it the rest of the way through the pass without any mishap. Elric quickly informed Lachlan and Rhonda of what had transpired, but it wasn’t until she saw the tall, gilded gates before her that Marin knew they were truly safe.

“My God,” Rhonda murmured.

Marin could only stare. If the gates that enclosed the city were as beautifully decorated with ancient Celtic knotwork, very similar to the mark on her and Elric's arms, she could only imagine what the rest of the city looked like.

"You look impressed," Elric said from beside her.

She nodded. "I am."

"Then wait until you see Drahcir itself. I think you'll enjoy your new home."

Marin took the hand he offered her and nudged her horse into a walk. As they approached, the gates opened. She looked around, but saw no one that would operate the gates. Elric stiffened suddenly and she glanced over to see him looking over her head at something. She followed his gaze and spotted the Tnarg atop a mountain watching them.

"Can it get in here?"

"Nay," he said and squeezed her hand.

She turned back to him and smiled. "Good."

"Welcome to your new home, Marin," he said. "Take a look around."

"Its warmer," she said suddenly.

Elric smiled. "The Fae bespelled it. The cold doesn't reach us here."

"Thank God," she murmured.

Marin turned her head and let her eyes wander over the lush, green valley, bright blue skies and warm weather. A unique bright blue stone made up the road that traveled down the valley and then up the mountain to the...palace. She blinked at the majestic structure before her. It put Cinderella's castle at Disney World to shame. She had never seen anything so beautiful and grand in her life, never even thought anything of its magnitude existed.

"Wow," she whispered as she tore her eyes from the palace to the structures that dotted the road and landscape. Some were what she would call small cottages while others were on a more grand scale that looked like businesses instead of homes. And on each of the all white structures were symbols similar to the ones on her arm. The atmosphere was one of peace and tranquility. It was all simply stunning.

"What do you think?"

She heard the anxiety in Elric's rich voice. She smiled and said, "I think its all perfect. You never told me it was this beautiful."

"You have to see the city to fully understand."

"I see that," she said as she spotted people walking toward them.

They weren't dressed as she was. Instead of the open sides and train of her gown they had long, flared sleeves and a deep border on the hem of the skirts. She didn't remember much of history, but if any of the movies she'd seen had gotten it right, the dress of the Drahcirians was older than the garments she wore.

"Prince Elric is home," someone shouted.

Marin felt as if she'd been punched. She slowly turned her head to Elric.

"Prince?"

He shrugged and refused to meet her eyes. "Aye."

"Did he say prince?" Rhonda asked from behind them.

Marin could only nod her head as she stared at Elric. "Is there anything else I should know?"

“Only that my parents will most likely demand that we marry immediately.”

She laughed then. “Is that you’re round about way of asking me to marry you?”

“I asked you to marry me the day I asked you to return here with me.”

Marin’s smile died. “I didn’t know.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Elric said with a small smile. “We made it here. I haven’t seen my family in years and I’m anxious to see them.”

“Then let us go to them.”

Elric gave her hand another small squeeze before he released it and waved to the people surrounding them. Marin returned smiles and waves as she followed Elric down the road to the palace. Drahcir was larger than she first imagined, but the beauty only increased the longer she was there.

When they reached the palace steps, Elric hurried to her side to help her dismount. As she slid down his body, hers came alive with need. To her pleasure, Elric’s green eyes darkened and a low growl moved through him.

“I need you,” he whispered.

“Not near as much as I need you.”

“Soon, my love,” he said and kissed her forehead. “For now, we must greet my parents.”

Marin didn’t know what she expected of his parents, but the smiling people before her wasn’t it. The king looked regal in his grand purple robes and golden crown while the queen stood elegantly beside him with her lavender gown and smaller crown.

She stood and watched the couple as Elric raced toward them. The greeting brought tears to her eyes as she remembered her own parents. It was only then she spotted another couple behind the king and queen. It was obvious by their dress and the way the man smiled at Elric that they were kin.

“Lucian?” she heard Elric exclaim.

The two men embraced and slapped each other on the back. Suddenly, five pair of eyes turned toward her. Marin wanted to run and hide. She could only imagine what she looked like after traveling through the mountains and fighting off the Tnarg. She felt something touch her hand and took Rhonda’s hand as she and Lachlan came up behind her.

“Marin,” Elric called to her.

Her mouth became dry as she tried to make her feet move. It was worse than a job interview with a CEO of a company. She forced her feet to move and put a smile on her face as she moved toward the small group. Elric came to meet her and took her hand.

“I love you,” he whispered in her ear.

She smiled and gazed up at him as she began to relax. “I love you too.”

“Welcome to the family,” the king said as he moved forward to embrace her.

Elric stood watching his mate as she accepted the hugs from his mother, father, brother and sister-in-law. He frowned. He didn’t even know Lucian’s wife’s name.

“Marin,” Elric said. “Let me introduce to you my father, King Urises and my mother, Queen Morag”

“Please,” the queen said, “she must not be so formal with us, Elric. You may call me Morag, but I hope you will eventually call me Mother.”

Elric saw Marin blink rapidly to stop the tears that threatened. "It would be an honor," she said.

"And this," Elric said turning to his brother, "is Lucian, my elder brother."

"Pleased to meet you," Lucian said as he bowed low over her hand. "Let me introduce my wife, Isabelle."

Elric was pleased with the brown haired woman whom Lucian called mate. She complimented his brother well.

"Where is Sorin and Keiran?" he asked.

"They haven't returned," his father said.

Elric sighed and wrapped his arm around Marin. "I thought I would be the last to arrive."

"I thought the same," Lucian said.

His mother looked over his shoulder. "Elric, dear, who are those people by the horses?"

"Oh," Marin exclaimed as she ran to Rhonda and Lachlan. "This is my very best friend, Rhonda," Marin said as they walked up. "And this is Lachlan."

"You all must be very tired," Morag said. "Let us all retire in the palace. I'll find Marin, Rhonda, and Lachlan chambers right away."

Elric turned and looked out over his city as his father and Lucian moved to either side of him. "I never thought I would return."

"Did you have trouble finding her?" his father asked.

Elric snorted and told of how Aimery helped him shift through time and the Tnarg.

"The Tnarg moved through time as easily as you did?" Lucian asked.

"Aye," Elric said. "I thought we were dead in the pass. Nothing I did even slowed it."

"It was the same when I battled one."

"You, too," Elric asked. "That means it will go after Sorin and Kieran's mates. It told me that I could return unharmed but that it had to kill Marin."

"What stopped it?" his father asked.

Elric shrugged. "I have no idea. I moved to Marin to protect her and the next moment it was gone. I just wish there was a way to warn Sorin and Kieran."

Chapter Eleven

Marin woke to the sounds of birds outside her window. She rolled onto her back and stretched. Her gaze ran over the beautiful cream and dark mauve bed hangings and she thought of Elric. She had wanted to spend time with him last night, but, after dinner, he and his father, brother, and Lachlan were locked in the king's study. She knew what they were discussing--the Tnarg.

While Elric had been discussing the Tnarg, she had been with Morag, Isabelle, and Rhonda discussing the wedding. Lucian and Isabelle had returned to Drahcir just a few weeks before her and Elric. Morag had wasted no time in getting Isabelle and Lucian to the altar, and it seemed she was doing the same to Marin and Elric. Not that Marin minded. She had waited her entire life for Elric, and now that she had him, she didn't want to let him go.

Marin had many reservations about being a princess, but Isabelle assured her several times through the night that she would be fine. She just hoped Isabelle was right. A princess. Never in all her daydreams had Marin ever envisioned herself as a princess, yet that was exactly what she was about to become.

The door to her chamber suddenly opened, and Elric quickly stepped inside. He smiled as he shut and locked the door.

"I missed you last night," she said as he walked to the bed. Her mouth began to water as he removed his tunic and shed his boots and pants.

"No talking," he said as he laid down beside her. "All I thought about all night was filling you with my rod."

Elric's husky voice and desire filled eyes brought Marin's body to life instantly. She opened her mouth for his kiss and ran her hands over his bronzed skin. His muscles moved and bunched beneath her fingers as his hands roamed down her body.

Her breasts swelled and her nipples hardened beneath her thin nightgown as his hand scraped across her sensitive nipples. A moan broke from her lips as his hand massaged first one breast, then the other.

Elric ended the kiss and leaned back on his knees to look at her. His breath came in huge gulps. "I want you too desperately that I don't think I can be gentle."

"I don't need gentle," she said as she ran her finger over his lips. "I just need you."

Large hands gripped her shoulders and pulled her to her knees in front of him. His mouth came down on hers hard and demanding, promising pleasure so intense she shook from it.

His lips left a trail of hot desire as he went down her neck to her shoulders. Vaguely, she was aware of him lifting her nightgown and pulling it over her head before tossing it to the floor. Marin leaned her head back as his mouth and hands continued to work their magic on her body.

The long, hot length of his rod throbbed against her stomach. She reached down and took him in her hand and gently squeezed. He sucked in a breath and moaned.

Marin moved her hand up and down his length, her blood pumping loudly in her ears as her body pulsed with need.

She kissed his neck and moved her lips across his chest and down to his stomach. When she reached his hips his hands gripped her shoulders, and for a moment she thought he might stop her. She flicked her tongue over the head of his rod and heard him growl. She didn't give him time to stop her though as she opened her mouth and took him inside.

The salty taste of him was exhilarating and only spurred her passion higher. But she wasn't given long to enjoy her newfound power over him as Elric pushed her back on the bed and entered her with one long, hard thrust.

Marin let out a long moan. He began to thrust within her building her already growing desire until she thought she would burst. Her world shattered around her as her climax exploded. She felt Elric give one final push and join her as he cried out her name.

As the last of her tremors left her, Elric rolled to the side and brought her against him. "Good morning," he said as he brushed the hair from her face.

"Good morning. I think I'd like to wake every morning just like this."

Elric laughed. "I'm up for the task. Did Mother get the wedding planned last night?"

"Yes. It's going to be very grand."

"As only royalty is," he said. "Does it bother you that I'm a prince?"

She shook her head. "No. It was just quite a surprise. You never said anything about it."

"I thought it might be too much for you at once, then with the Tnarg chasing us, I wasn't given much time to tell you."

"True. But we're here now."

He squeezed her against him and kissed her forehead. "Aye, we're home."

Silence descended upon them and she leaned up on her elbow to look at him.

"You're worried about your other two brothers?"

He nodded.

"Is there any way we can help them? Get word to them somehow?"

"Nay. We have no idea where they are or if the Tnarg has already gotten to their mates. Only the Fae could find them now."

"Then ask the Fae."

He smiled gently. "It may come to that, or the Fae could already have found them. It was Aimery who helped me shift through time, so who is to say he hasn't helped Sorin or Kieran."

"I hope they arrive soon. You're mother is very worried."

"So are Father and Lucian. All we can do is hope and pray now."

Marin rested her chin on his chest and grinned. "Your mother has the wedding planned for the day after tomorrow. She's having a gown made for me."

"And she will get it done, this I promise you. Now, hurry and get dressed," Elric said as he rose from the bed. "I want to take you out to meet the people."

"And I want to see more of the palace."

"Hmmm," he said as he nuzzled her neck. "We might try the palace first. There

are many vacant rooms and dark corridors.”

Marin closed her eyes and sighed. “I like that idea.

Epilogue

The wedding had been a huge affair, one that would have rivaled England's Princess Diana's. Marin felt every bit the princess and with the crown atop her head keeping her long veil in place, she looked like one too.

She had met her first Fae. Aimery, the very Fae who had aided Elric in finding her. He was nothing like she pictured a Fae to look. He wasn't small with gossamer wings, but tall, slender, and so beautiful he would have put Adonis to shame with his long flaxen hair and unusual blue eyes.

Aimery hadn't stayed long, but before he left he insured the king and queen that he would try to locate Sorin and Kieran.

"Princess Marin," Elric said as he leaned down to kiss her lips. "I like it."

Marin smiled. "I do, too. By the way, have you seen Rhonda or Lachlan? I haven't seen them since the wedding."

"I think they went exploring the palace."

"I highly recommend it after the fun we had."

"I think Lachlan plans to ask Rhonda to be his wife."

Marin was floored. She knew they had deep feelings for each other, she just hadn't realized how deep those feelings had gone. "I'm so happy for them both. I know Rhonda will say yes."

"Enough talk of them. We've been celebrating for the past few hours and I don't think I can wait a moment longer to make love to you."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

He pulled her against him as he claimed her lips in a searing kiss. "I love you, my princess."

"And I you, my prince."

The End