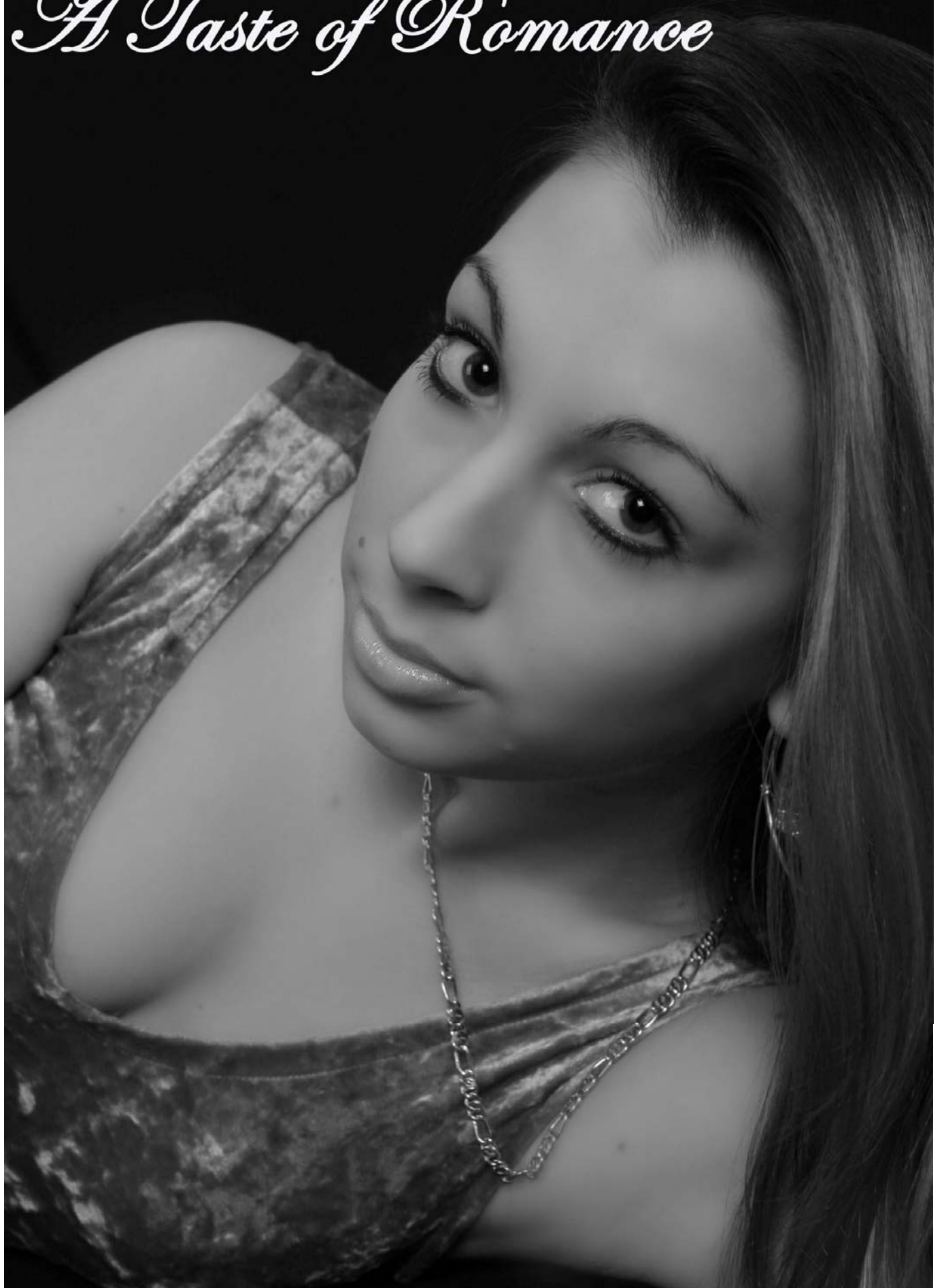


*A Taste of Romance*



A Taste of Romance

© 2007 by Serena Knight  
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## **Arianna's Leap by Cyan Bell**

### **Chapter 1**

The smell of burnt ozone permeated the air, mixing with the dampness and the thick darkness choking the room.

Arianna shook herself, settling all of the atoms in her body in place, neutralizing the resonance enhancer strapped around her thigh. Crouching in the darkness, she listened intently for any sounds of movement while scanning the room with her enhanced night vision. The cold night bit through the thin fabric of her sinash, leaving tendrils of puckered flesh in its wake. She'd traveled back to 2008, over one thousand years and even with the advancement in technology she was still forced to transmit in silk. It may be a completely natural material, but it hardly provided any real protection. Arianna had expended the small percentage of processed raw material permitted for time travel on the wickedly sharp sword she kept in her leather sheath. The weapon sat strapped over her shoulders to rest along her back. The weight was a reassuring line that ran between her shoulder blades.

Arianna thought about the map she'd committed to memory before she left. Other than the resonance enhancer, she was allowed no notes, computers, or other technology from her time. A committee of physicists had deemed the transmission of non-essential equipment an unacceptable risk. They were worried that during the process of transmission an elemental transfer between metals and the time traveler's organic material would occur.

The committee's biggest concern centered on future technology changing history if it fell into the hands of someone in the targeted ancient time period. They insisted on safeguards. For this reason the enhancer had been imprinted with her DNA, so if anyone else tried to use the device, it would self-destruct, and with it any person ignorant enough to think they could use it.

Arianna had researched Leim ui Bhanain castle and its bloody history. Its very foundations were steeped in horrific battles. The walls rang with tales of torture, witchcraft, and a malevolent elemental. The latter was the result of a violent murder; the resulting poltergeist was especially unpredictable and terrifying. For the last four hundred years the castle had been known as the "Bloody Chapel."

Arianna knew the castle's fortifications had stood impervious to attack for hundreds of years. The massive stone walls presented no immediate problem to her, however. She wasn't trying to get in. Her time travel settings placed her inside an unused room on the first level. Her target had no idea she was here, and you can't keep out what you don't know exists.

She stood and kept close to the walls. The rough stone snagged her garments, and abraded the skin on her palms. She stepped out into the hallway and raised her nose to the air, testing the cold night for signs of life. To the right side of the corridor she could smell a fire burning deeper in the castle, the taste of ash cloying on the back of her palate. Mentally checking the floor plan in her head, she used the very limited moonlight to navigate toward the main study.

Anger burned inside her, urging on the adrenalin surging through her body. Her employer requested a quick kill, but she had other ideas in mind. She'd been told why she was here, and that alone was enough motivation.

She pulled the long sword out of its sheath. The metal sang against its housing as it slid free from its constraint. The sound sent shivers up Arianna's body, like a lover running his fingers up her spine.

Coming to the end of the hallway she entered the study and swept a quick glance around. She wanted to see his face, wanted to see terror before she ran her weapon into his abdomen, splitting his insides in half as she glided the sword home to the hilt.

Arianna felt a rising tide of impatience. The crackle of flames licking at the wood in the fireplace sounded unnaturally loud in the empty room.

Arianna stalked into the study, scanning it for any signs of the castle's owner. Her skin prickled from the warmth of the fire, sweat trickled down the middle of her shoulder blades. The air smelled of dust and mold, and the only light came from the dancing flames in the stone hearth.

A large table sat positioned behind the velveteen chairs gathered around the fireplace. The table lay crammed with books, no doubt taken from the immense library that lined the walls from floor to ceiling.

Arianna walked around the chairs to the table. Her employer had briefed her on the target she was hunting. So when she saw some notes spread across the top of the table with text on them, she knew what would lay there. Pages of hate filled words the monster was spouting and committing to print so his psychotic ideas were immortalized.

*Well, fuck that,* Arianna thought. *If he wants to get a fire under his desire, I'll make sure the filth gets the due consideration it deserves.*

She reached for the papers, with every intention of picking up the pages and throwing them into the flames. She'd take great pleasure in watching the paper blacken and disintegrate into ash as the fire hungrily consumed the fuel.

What Arianna didn't expect was the subject of his thesis. It made her pause a moment; distracted from her mission. She whispered the words written in his scrawling script.

"Human genome project and its indications of use to modify vampire DNA, with a view for future use for IVF treatment in vampires." She took a deep breath, thrown.

This didn't equate with what she'd been told. She was hunting a monster, a murderous, conniving bastard. What was this shit? This looked like the work of someone who was trying to help bring about new life, not take it!

Movement behind her made her drop the papers to the desk and quickly turn. She brought the sword to rest defensively in front of her. To the naked human eye it would've looked like she'd just appeared in the next position her actions were so fast. But she knew the vampire who stood in the doorway would know better.

The other occupant looked at her, shock written on his face. Her target stared at her from his frozen spot in the doorway.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?" He sounded unsure. His eyes never stopped sweeping the room.

Arianna sized up her opponent. He was at least nine inches taller than her 5'7" frame but she wasn't intimidated, it wasn't the reason she hesitated. She'd questioned the information she'd been given when she read the research lying on the table. As a result she didn't cross the distance between them and take his head off with a practiced stroke to his throat.

"Padraic?" She knew it couldn't be anyone else, after all who else would be in an Irish Castle at this time of night? She was caught in an unprecedented moment of conflict.

"What do you want?" He started to move further into the room and toward her, but hesitated when she moved the sword above her head into an attacking stance.

Arianna silently met his eyes, searching within them for the answer she needed. She held the sword fisted above her head, the sharp point trained on his body. If she were human the weight in her forearm would have borne down on her, the acids

building, causing her arm to cramp. It didn't bother her, wasn't even a consideration with her enhanced strength.

The silence between them was thick with the pops and crackles of the fire consuming wood. Arianna listened to his breathing, and stared into his hazel eyes, flecked with green and gold.

In an instant, she knew. It went all the way to her bones. This man was not a murderer. She positioned the sword over the entrance to the sheath and slid it home. She gave the weapon a tweak, so the hilt and a smaller blade separated from the larger one. She didn't take her eyes off the other person in the room. It was an uneasy stand off.

Even though she believed he wasn't a killer, she could be wrong, so she wasn't taking any chances.

Arianna coiled the muscles in her arm and released them to throw the smaller knife as fast as she could, the steel making a whistle as it cut the air around it. The small but heavy weapon was a finely made and balanced instrument, so it was no surprise when it hit its mark with a thunk, and sent its intended target falling to the ground.

Padraic opened his eyes, pain lancing his brain as light speared through his retinas. He tried to lift his hand to feel for the bruise on his forehead, but he found his wrists and ankles restrained. His arms were pulled behind the back of the chair he sat on and his ankles were bound to the legs. He gave a grunt as he tried to pull against whatever kept him anchored, dots appeared in his vision as pain blossomed in his head.

"What is this?" A strong but soft voice demanded from within the room. He looked up to see a figure standing by the fireplace, indicating the papers she held in her hand.

Black silk flowed over her frame, a second skin that seemed to cling to her curves, slits in the arms showing toned muscles and soft skin. Her amber eyes caught the light of the fire, blazing with intelligence and inquisition. He closed his eyes and rested his head on the back of the chair.

"What does it look like?" He groaned out. When he'd closed his eyes he couldn't help but think about the way she looked in the fire light, the way the material seemed to outline every single line and muscle on her body. Her ripe lips begged to be nipped and

sucked on. He didn't even want to think about her breasts, the way the silk seemed to slide over them like a caress.

He opened his eyes and shook his head slightly, the pain jarred his vision, chasing away the thoughts. He could feel the first stirrings of anger. She'd tried to kill him, had tied him up, and was now interrogating him. Screw his libido; it just went to show how long it'd been since he'd been with a woman.

Padraic obsessed over his DNA research, trying to make a mark on a world where nothing seemed to change. He'd isolated himself from outside pressures, trying to make a difference without actually being part of it. As a result it had been a long time since he'd partaken of female company other than to feed.

Then it struck him, he was tied up, which was impossible. Vampires were too strong to be restrained with rope, or anything else people generally thought about using. He tried to pull his arms apart again. Although he could feel a slight give, the bonds refused to break. He could probably smash the chair to pieces, but that would still leave him in the position of having his hands tied together, and pretty much helpless.

"This looks like research into changing vampire DNA so you can either reverse the conversion from human to vampire, or in the same respect, help vampires to parent a baby. You're theorizing using the same technology being used to map human DNA, using the genome technology."

She looked at him, not just a glance, but really looked at him, like she was trying to see into his soul.

He'd seen a moment in her eyes when he first came into the room where he thought she was going to try to take her keen looking blade and shove it down his throat so it came out the other end of him. Now he could tell she wasn't so sure, she'd hesitated. Instead of killing him she'd knocked him out.

"What the hell is going on? And what did you use to tie me up with? I don't think you realize just what you've gotten yourself into!" Fury bubbled around in his body, he felt it spewing out of his eyes. He was a vampire damn it! He was a predator, a hunter, strong, and cunning. She'd caught him, she even moved like him, but she wasn't vampire, he'd smell it if she was.

She strode toward him and slapped the notes on the table next to him. Leaning down to take hold of the armrests, she studied him brazenly and sniffed the air around him. She closed her amber eyes and breathed in deeply. Her body was so close to his, he could smell her, an intoxicating mixture of sandalwood and rose.



Padraic's heart picked up its pace as his cock shifted in his pants. It *had* been too long. He moved his hands, trying to think about the pressure on his wrists and not the one building inside his prick.

He watched as she languidly opened her eyes, the pupils dilating from pinpoints to consume the liquid fire of her irises.

"You know, for a man who's supposed to be planning the eradication of an entire race, you sure sound like somebody who's trying to save one."

He was stunned. She was talking about genocide, no really, what the fuck was going on?

## Chapter 2

Arianna couldn't help it. She'd gotten a good look at Padraic while he'd been unconscious and then she'd filled her senses with him when she smelled him.

Vampires didn't wear cologne. They identified each other with the scent of their pheromones. He smelled spicy, a mixture of cinnamon, nutmeg and paprika, with just a hint of vanilla.

Something inside her had stirred, her heartbeat picking up a step as she studied him in his repose.

Light from the fire kissed his full lips, danced in his dark chocolate colored hair and brushed his long eyelashes.

She wanted to reach out and stroke his strong face, tracing the line of light as she rubbed her thumb over his lower lip. He'd felt lean and muscular under his vermilion sweater, his ass tightly snug in his jeans as she moved him from the floor to the chair. The urge to run her fingers along his warm skin, wrap her fingers through his hair and take his mouth with hers made her throat tight. It didn't help that his voice had a slight Irish lilt to it, or that it sounded like you could drink it, smooth and mellow, like coffee liquor.

She had a sudden recall of the feeling of Padraic's tight ass in her hands as she had hefted him into the chair. Reason two thousand and twenty five for hating this damn fabric, if your nipples started to point, the entire world knew about it.

Arianna turned away from Padraic toward the fire. He hadn't been unconscious for too long, and had woken up rightfully indignant. She'd noticed his reaction to her nearness, the bulge straining against the denim. The nerves in her skin became sensitive in sympathy. She chastised herself for the carnal thoughts. She had to keep her tightly held composure. She wasn't here for a quick roll in the hay. She'd been paid to do a job. She almost groaned out loud when she realized it was a job she didn't think she would carry out. She was a killer, she wasn't stupid, and she wasn't prone to being carried away on the wings of whimsy.

Arianna had seen the face of a genocidal maniac before and he didn't fit the profile.

"I pulled down a couple of your candelabras and used the iron chains to make some manacles for your hands and ankles. I knew you'd probably object, but I didn't really care." She said it like it was something in passing, like "by the way I watered your lawn for you."

Arianna took a deep cleansing breath, trying to rid herself of his scent, but it still lingered. Having enhanced senses could actually be a curse. She just hadn't realized it before now.

Padraic raised his eyes to the empty brackets that once held ornate candle holders and his eyes went wide.

"I realize medieval architecture isn't everyone's idea of living, but I only just finished renovating. You've got the wrong guy, I haven't killed anyone, so if you're done critiquing the aesthetics of my taste in lighting leave right now!"

Arianna turned back toward him, and raised an eyebrow in defiance. He looked straight back at her and gestured with his chin toward the doorway. She couldn't help but admire how he didn't back down from her even though he was obviously in no position to make threats.

"I don't know who you are. If you really knew who I was, you wouldn't be here. Just how did you get in anyway?"

He was calm and controlled, but there ran an undercurrent of anger to his voice. Padraic's shoulders bunched, the muscles worked as he tried to get free of his bonds. Good for him, it'd been a while since she'd met someone who kept their head and didn't beg.

Normally she wouldn't have hesitated. He'd already be dead. One of the greatest assets in her line of work was her gut, and it told her there was something very wrong going on. She turned one of the purple chairs around and sat down in it, resting her elbows on her knees while she studied him.

"Look, I don't bullshit anyone. I tied you up because I'm not stupid and you're going to get hurt trying to attack me. I'm honest to a fault, so I'm going to lay it out for you. Don't bother trying to threaten me because I know you're a vampire and to be honest, it doesn't impress me." She looked at the floor, trying to decide how much to tell him. She would give it to him, the whole lot right between the eyes. Sometimes you just have to be thrown in and then make the decision, sink or swim.

"Padraic, I only know what I was told. Tristan Parker is the senator for vampire affairs in the future. He's also the man who fronted the money for my trip." Arianna stood and paced in front of him, unable to contain her agitation at the lies she'd been told.

"He told me you were at the head of a movement to wipe out an entire race of people. At this point in time the existence of vampires is being kept quiet. The only people who

know of your existence are either vampires or humans who belong to vampires. In the future there'll come a time when humans find out there are vampires in the world." She stopped and looked him in the eyes, trying to decide if she should break the rules and disclose what was going to happen in the future. Sink or swim?

"At first, there'll be a time of darkness for your race, where all mankind will be hell bent on the complete destruction of vampires. A key turning point will come and whether everybody likes it or not, vampire kind will become integrated into the human community. Vampires will marry humans, start families, and make their own communities." She indicated the papers on the table.

"From the research I read in those papers, you may be the reason vampires can procreate. Producing children born human so they can decide later on whether they want to be a vampire or not."

Arianna sat back down on the chair and dry washed her face with her hands. This was a monumentally important concept, the reason children born from a vampire union were tolerated. At birth the child of a vampire was born human and at eighteen the child was given the choice whether they would follow their parents into immortality.

It wasn't always an easy thing for parents, some of them had to watch their children die. At least they gave them the choice.

Time to get angry. She'd been sent on jobs all over the world at different times. Most of the time she wasn't even told why she was going but she did what they paid her to do. This time it had been different. Tristan Parker had made sure she knew why she was coming back to kill Padraic. Parker, the stupid bastard, had made two drastic mistakes. First, he'd treated her like she was an idiot and second he'd lied to her. Arianna had one fundamental rule, don't try to deceive her by trying to put one over on her or else she'd make you pay.

"I don't understand. How can you know any of this? You're talking about the future, things that haven't even happened yet. You still haven't explained how you're strong enough to tear apart an iron chain." Padraic's eyes were alert, watching everything she did, a stubborn set to his jaw.

Arianna couldn't even imagine what it would be like to listen to this information, to theorize what your future was going to be. She admired his fight and his resilience. He hadn't stopped working at the chains binding his hands, his arms constantly working.

One way or the other she was going to have to make a choice, kill him or set him free. There was clear danger in the latter course, he was going to be like a caged lion

being freed if she let him go. He'd pounce on her like a piece of meat, which was why it was so important she got through to him.

She continued on as if he hadn't spoken. "Using the DNA technology you're only just starting to investigate, vampire DNA and human DNA will integrate. The result will be a race that has all the strengths of a vampire; enhanced hearing, sight, smell, strength, speed and immortality, without the minuses. A hybrid vampire human can walk around in the sunlight, eat whatever they like, and escape detection by other vampires. They don't smell like a vampire."

Padraic flexed his biceps and shoulders, testing the strength of his bonds or maybe trying to make himself more comfortable. Arianna noticed his movements but concentrated on what she was saying. "They are natural born assassins. They're the elite killers for the government, the most thorough mercenaries for hire. I was told you were hell bent on the destruction, eradication, and genocide of the Stealth. The Stealth, that's what they've been called."

Arianna was tired, it seemed like she'd been in the game forever and it didn't look like a finish line was anywhere in sight. She leaned back in the chair and swiped at a tendril of hair fallen over her left eye. Silence hung thickly between them. Arianna sat back up and watched Padraic as he stopped struggling for a moment, as if in thought.

She wouldn't blame him if he started to call her a crazy bitch, but she had to make him to believe, because she already knew he was in danger, she just didn't know why yet.

Padraic raised an eyebrow at her, calm and composed, which was amazing in itself. Arianna had seen men fall to pieces and start to cry just at the sight of her. He, however, approached the situation with thought and careful reasoning.

"How do you intend to prove any of this? You've come into my home uninvited and threatened my life. Why should I believe you?"

There was intelligence in Padraic's eyes, that much was clear. If she was right, then Padraic was an important part of the history in her future. If she'd killed him all of that could've changed. What was Parker really up to?

"My name is Arianna. The proof you need is sitting in front of you. I was able to tie you up because I'm just as strong as you are, just as fast, and just as lethal."

Arianna could feel the cunning smile transform her face as her two front canines slid out to become longer than the rest of her teeth. "I'm an assassin, I was paid to kill you and I didn't care because I thought you were responsible for the uprising,

responsible for the death of my race. I'm one of them Padraic, I'm a hybrid. I'm Stealth."

Padraic shifted his feet as soon as Arianna undid the ties binding his ankles. He watched as she undid the metal chains that wound three times around his leg. He couldn't deny her intelligence. If she'd only done it once he would have been free on his own by now.

She stood behind him and did the same with his wrists. No sooner had she released him than Arianna was across the other side of the room, hand resting behind her head on the hilt of her sword.

He rubbed the chaffed skin on his wrists, while trying to decide if he should try to attack her.

Confused and angry, he ran a hand through his hair with frustration. Could she be telling the truth?

He walked over to the window and threw the pane open taking a big breath of the cold night air deep into his lungs. The darkness of the world outside the window was only broken by the soft light of the moon, the colors of the rolling landscape distorted by the monochrome light.

Roscrea was a typical region in Ireland. Damn cold, so cold it was almost painful to take a breath of air in, and it left a stream of smoke as you exhaled.

The castle had been bombed in 1922. When it was restored during the 1990's the new owners installed some luxuries, like heating in the main bedroom, modern windows that opened, and a huge bath in the main en suite. Although it was nice to air the rooms, the disadvantage was it left a definite chill in the atmosphere, and a clinging touch of damp.

"You're telling me someone wants me dead for something I haven't done yet?" Why did he believe her? He should be yelling, telling her to get out, but there was something about her, something familiar.

"You're missing the point!" Arianna was back to pacing again. He could see the agitation in her strides and the barely concealed fury on her face.

"Parker hired me to kill you for something you didn't do. He wants you dead, but not because you want to destroy Stealth. There's something else going on, and until I know what I can't leave you alone. It's expensive to hire an assassin. It's even more

expensive to pay for a leap. Something is very, very wrong.” She stopped and looked straight at him. She gestured wildly with her hands. “I’m not the only one who’s going to buy Parker’s bullshit. There’ll be others, and for some of them, motive just doesn’t matter, money does.”

While it was true she was fast, strong and intelligent, he seriously doubted someone as small as her could protect him.

“I don’t need you to protect me! I’m over three hundred years old, there’s a reason why I’ve survived this long! If you want to know why this man Parker wants me dead, why don’t you go back to where you came from and find out? Who is Parker anyway and where are you from?”

He’d had just about enough and it was only an hour until sunrise. There was caution in her eyes, the way she listened, looked, and took in an extra large breath every thirty seconds, smelling the air. It didn’t appear as though it took any thought either; Arianna just did it automatically like it was second nature. A natural born assassin she’d said, a natural born fighter by the look of it.

Arianna sat down in one of the chairs and Padraic followed her lead, taking a seat across from her.

“I can’t go back, not yet. This castle is a difficult site. There are flux’s in energy here all the time, bends in the magnetic field of the earth.” She began to explain.

“Hold on.” Padraic raised his hands in the air palms toward her. “Treat me like I have no idea what you’re talking about and explain it simply. I’m into chemistry and biology, not physics.” He wasn’t an idiot but Arianna would have to break it down a bit for him to be able to absorb it all.

She paused, chewing on her bottom lip and started again. “Throughout history there have been reports of ghosts and spirits in this location. A lot of those documents have talked about terrifying ordeals, accidents and apparitions. This building sits on a weak point of the earth’s magnetic field, so it’s prone to break through.” She gestured with a side sweeping motion around the room, indicating the whole of the castle. “When you have a bad television signal, sometimes you get a faint double.”

“Yeah, ‘ghosting’.”

She seemed surprised at his words. She nodded and continued, “What’s happening is basically the same thing, an unclear transmission leads to ghosting, and that faint signal has to go somewhere. There is usually a surge of energy with it, which

gives the person who sees the double image a feeling of dread. Thus the tale of a haunted castle develops.”

Arianna walked over to the fireplace, her body close to the fire. Padraic stood and closed the window then walked over next to her. Enough shock therapy from the frigid Irish air, this was a reality and Padraic had to deal with it.

Arianna’s chestnut hair glowed in the firelight, and his gaze was drawn to her lips again. This was ridiculous, he had other things to think about, but he found himself wondering if she would be quick enough to put in a hit before he could kiss her.

“What has that got to do with not going home?” He pulled his mind back to the matter at hand.

She turned away from the fire and looked at him.

“It’s too unstable for me to go back. I’ve probably only got one trip left, so I have to make it count. I could go home and see if I could find out what’s going on. There’s every chance in the meantime somebody else will already be here to finish the job I started. I wouldn’t get back in time to stop them in fact I mightn’t get back at all.”

Padraic thought about it, half of his mind was on the fantasy of taking a sip from those crimson lips, watching the way Arianna talked and the way her nipples had hardened to twin points from the frigid air. Glimpses of skin showing through the slits in the arms of her garment revealed the goosebumps on her skin. He wanted to run his hands up them, feel the glide of the silken material under his palms.

A sharp pain seared through the front of his right shoulder, bringing him back to the present moment. He looked down to find the point of an arrow jutting through his skin and his knitted sweater turning black with blood. For a moment he thought Arianna had stabbed him, but when he looked up he saw the shadow of a man in the doorway.

Arianna turned around, simultaneously taking out her sword. He heard a growl from deep within her throat and a muttered curse.

Taking hold of the arrow he broke the end off, sending jolts of searing pain through his shoulder, chest and arm.

“Oh, fuck me, that hurt!” He gasped at the sensation of wood scraping against bone. The arrow was firmly imbedded in his flesh, the tip poked through the other side. He needed help to pull it through the rest of the way, but when he looked up to ask her, the Stealth had gone.



### Chapter 3

Parker. The bastard! She turned around and recognized the gaunt face of the parliamentarian as his steely eyes sighted down the hairs of the crossbow.

The cold breeze from when the window had been open had blown Parker's scent away from her. The only indication she'd had that he was there was the feel of the arrow disturbing the air as it passed by her. He'd been silent as death, after all he was a vampire, too.

Arianna ran out of the room in pursuit of the elusive attacker. He was nowhere. She ran in the only direction he could have gone and paused at a junction. She had the choice of going down the stairs to the lower level, or continue through the halls of this level.

She knitted her brow in concentration. Even if only a small portion of the castle was used, it didn't mean the place wasn't huge, a labyrinth of mazes where side corridors might take her into nowhere, or another wing altogether.

Arianna had two things that gave her an edge. She not only knew the layout of the castle, she was a professional hunter, trained to track and kill.

She pulled out her sword and made two slits on the front left and right of the garment she wore. The extra movement from the tears above her thighs would make it easier for her to crouch along the line of the wall, which would keep her concealed in the shadows. Opening up all of her senses, she listened for Parker's footsteps and hoped to catch a snippet of his scent. Then she smelled it, but unlike most vampires it was cologne, old spice.

*Self-pontificating asshole*, she thought for a moment, growling in frustration. She took off into the dark damp hallways in pursuit of the lingering aroma. She needed answers. Arianna almost pitied him. Parker didn't have to be whole to still be able to talk. She'd studied techniques in torture as a sideline to her skills.

A person could lose their feet and still not bleed out if a tourniquet was applied *before* you cut the appendage off, and that was just for starters.

Arianna followed the scent through the hallways, turning when she thought she heard something or his smell went around to a different corridor. She moved like a breath, silently whispering through the castle. She was a phantasm, a black spirit with malevolent intentions.

The trail ended at a door open a fraction, it was a dead end. There was nowhere for him to go, she had him cornered. The wooden door would've made too much noise

for Parker to close it completely. She smiled in the darkness, an evil grin of pure malice. She slipped inside the room and crouched down, like a cat stalking a mouse. She rested against the wall, ready for attack, but it never came. His sickly cologne permeated the room, oozing thickly in her nose, but she couldn't hear any movement in the room.

"Fuck this," she forced out between gritted teeth. She stood and scanned the room, her posture in readiness to fend off a blow. Every nerve and muscle in her body was poised on the edge of readiness. She was prepared to move fast, and to take down her opponent like a strike of lightning.

Arianna expected a defensive vampire holding a crossbow, the sight turned in her direction. What she didn't expect was a completely empty room. Parker was gone, like a ghost, his scent lingered but he was nowhere to be seen. Fury burst in her, making her tremble with rage. "I'm going to gut you, Parker, you asshole!" She bit out through clenched teeth. She had to get back to the study. Padraic had been shot with an arrow, and although the wound wouldn't be fatal it would hurt like a son of a bitch.

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Arianna detested surprises and the ones she faced now were no exception. First, there was the unlikely disappearance of her antagonist and now the sight of Padraic sweating and lying on one of the seats, face pale and devoid of all blood. The veins on his forehead and neck stood out like puckered blue forks. Padraic's eyes had gone dark and large, the irises swallowed by the pupils.

Arianna was confused. It was just a wooden arrow and there was no reason for him to be in such unbelievable pain. She ran over to him and looked at the oozing wound. Blood seeped around the shaft of the broken weapon.

"What's going on, Padraic? It's just an arrow." She reached behind her head and gave the sword hilt a tweak, freeing the dagger from the larger blade. Taking the smaller knife, she lifted his knitted shirt and cut it free from his body, unveiling the point of entry. The area around the arrow had gone black. The scent of decomposition wafted from the blood seeping from the raw edges of the wound. The smell pervaded her nostrils, making them flare and her stomach convulse with nausea. *Uh nothing like the scent of death to turn your guts inside out.*

"The last owners of the castle had a christening here in the 1990's. They thought it might help to have the castle blessed, including all of the artifacts they'd collected over

the years.” His voice was hoarse, barely above a whisper and pushed through lips set in a grimace.

Arianna’s insides went cold. Ice speared its way through her intestines.

“Parker used a crossbow he found in the castle? He shot you with an arrow that’s been blessed?” She already knew the answer. It was as plain as the rotting flesh spreading around the holy object nestled in his shoulder.

“Yeah, consecrated by a priest and holy as the pope himself.” He closed his eyes and pulled his head back to scream as his flesh died literally before her eyes.

“Shit!” No wonder she hated surprises.

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A torturous burn radiated from the shaft of the arrow. Every nerve was alive with pain. It claimed his muscles and consumed his skin. Padraic felt like death rode the waves of his blood as it passed through his heart, delivering it to all of his major organs and piercing his brain.

“Arianna, pull the arrow through!” He was burning in a bonfire, about to combust. Padraic clamped his teeth and lips closed with a snap.

If she didn’t take it out soon he would be nothing but a fermenting decomposing corpse, but he wouldn’t be dead. The only thing that could end his life was the taking off of his head, or by destroying his heart. There would be nothing worse than living in limbo, inside a body rotting around you as you writhed in agony for who knows how long.

Arianna pulled him up to a sitting position. The pain tore a ragged scream from his throat. The shaft of the arrow moved around as she took hold of it, her fist up against his back. She steadied him with her other hand, and braced herself. He felt the tension within her muscles.

“Are you ready?” Arianna snarled.

“Do it.” His scream shattered the quiet of the room as she pulled the embedded arrow without warning.

It didn’t matter that she’d tried to be as quick as she could. Time seemed to slow down so Padraic felt every millimeter scorching a burning path through his flesh as it passed through him. And then she dropped him. As he fell backwards to land on the chair, a gush of fluid burst out of the back of the wound, and with it came the smell of charred rotting flesh.

Padraic's body rejected the damaged tissue, ejecting it with the rush of blood held at bay with the arrow plugging up the wound. At least the pain had eased. He still had a problem, though he had remarkable regeneration abilities too much blood had been lost from his failure to get the arrow out straight away. He'd also lost a lot of the flesh around the wound, gobbets of it sloughing off with a stomach turning 'slurp'. The hole in his chest was a hell of a lot bigger than it should've been.

His heart thundered in his ears, proclaiming its clamoring fight to keep his body sustained with its life giving fluid. He gasped like a fish out of water, flailing in the putrid fluids soaking the chair underneath him. Padraic's eyelids fluttered against his cheeks as his eyes rolled into the back of his head. Darkness started to consume his vision. Arianna took his shirt and waded it up against the exit wound underneath him, putting pressure on the hole in his back.

The sting of a hard slap brought him back to the surface. He struggled for air and reached for the light. Padraic opened his eyes and watched her use her teeth to pull back the black silk sleeve encasing her arm. She offered him the bared skin of the inside of her elbow. He gulped down some saliva, trying to lubricate his throat enough to be able to speak.

"I can't take the blood of another vampire." He croaked as his vision started to sway again.

"I'm a hybrid. I'm engineered to save both humans and vampires. I'm able to supply blood for you to feed." She thrust her arm against his lips. He could hear the rushing blood whispering through her veins and smell the faint metallic tang along her skin where it came so close to the skin.

Instinct chased all other thoughts out of his mind. He opened his mouth, the eyeteeth sliding out and elongating, and then he bit. Hot blood filled his mouth as he drank. Her thrumming pulse in his mouth urged him on, encouraging him to suck and lap up the spurts of the sweet thickness as it flowed onto his tongue with every pump of her heart. Finally he let go and fell back. Spent and satiated, her warm fluids passed through him and chased away the lingering pain, now just a dim memory in his body.

Padraic tried to steady the frantic pace of his heart, and the surge of adrenaline released through his body. He reached up to touch his chest, to feel the gaping hole in his shoulder, but all he felt was the smooth warm expanse of skin.

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Arianna watched as the raw wound in Padraic's shoulder knitted and started to reform while he fed from her vein. First the hole had started to get smaller and then the edges reached for one another and knitted together. As quickly as his body had started to fall apart, it healed at the same rate. But her blood was engineered to aid in the process of regeneration. Heightened amounts of adrenalin made her the perfect blood door for a wounded vampire.

The release of endorphins poured throughout her, nerve endings came alive, every movement sent shivers of pleasure through her body. Her nipples hardened and a warm flush rushed its way along her skin.

Padraic's mouth grasped onto her sensitive flesh, his hands wrapped around her arm. Her already enhanced sight became super imposed. She looked at his bared chest and she could see the pores in his skin, the heat radiating off his body in shimmering waves. She closed her eyes and swallowed, trying to right her vision. When she opened them again she could see normally but her heart still raced and her nerves were still alive with the electrical impulses of the need to touch the sensual curves of his muscled torso. His skin was pale, and soft, like the moon had kissed it. The fire in his flesh was lowered by the healing properties in her blood. She wanted to run her lips over his nipples, tease them with her tongue, and trace her fingertips along his lean stomach to trace the line of his hip as it disappeared under the denim of his jeans.

She licked her lips, trying to wet the sudden dryness. Arianna knew it wasn't real. It was a product of the bite. She couldn't help her reaction to the chemicals released into her body. She took shallow breaths as warmth flowed from her breasts, through her stomach and nestled between her legs. The silk fabric rubbed her taut or tight nipples, caressing them as she breathed. When Padraic finished feeding, Arianna leaned over him and inhaled deeply. The spicy scent of his body drove her over the edge. She took his smiling lips with hers, demanding entry with her tongue and teeth. Padraic gave her entry to his sweet mouth with a guttural moan as she ran her hand over his warm taut skin.

She could taste the faint tang of her blood on his lips, and the last aniseed flavored drop of sytine on the tip of a tooth. The concentrated chemical made contact with her tongue, which sent her hunger into overdrive. She kissed him with more urgent thrusts of her tongue when the heat in her pussy flared to life. She whimpered as he reached up and ran a palm over an erect nipple. The silk fabric tore as she shimmied

off the shoulder harness holding her sword. The clang of the weapon hitting the ground broke through her clouded thoughts, landing her firmly in the here and now.

Arianna pulled back from Padraic's warm encompassing lips, and stood, feeling like she'd burnt her hands on a stove top. Taking a deep breath, she picked the sword up in its harness and settled it back into place. The weight on her shoulders was an instant reminder of why she was here. Arianna was brought out of her stupor, the flames of lust dissipating to slow embers.

She examined her arm, at the twin pricks where his teeth had entered. Arianna had known what was going to happen, but usually she could keep it under control. For some reason this time she hadn't and she couldn't understand why. She pulled the sleeve back over her forearm and looked over at Padraic, who appeared just as confused as she felt.

"What was that all about?" His voice was stronger now, low and smooth.

Arianna shivered slightly, *just the last of the sytine working its way through my body.*

In the meantime it was best not to get too close to him, she might do something she'd regret later on. Heat started to creep along her neck. *Come on! Stealth do not blush!* She cleared her throat before starting.

"There was a scientific study into the effects of a vampire bite on a human. The idea was to try to work out why a human subject often feels... excited after they've given blood. The results had shown that while a vampire is feeding they inject a chemical known as sytine into the blood stream. The subject doesn't struggle and in fact enjoys the experience." She absently rubbed at the inside of her arm where the puncture marks were, her mind wandering back to the feel of Padraic's lips as he drank deeply from her vein. She abruptly dropped her arms to her side and made fists, forcing herself to continue the explanation. "It also has antibiotic properties and helps the wound heal faster. The sytine encourages the production of endorphins in the body of the person they bite, and as a result they're usually aroused," she couldn't help but flinch at the word aroused and then shake her head to get rid of the urge to relive the moment they shared.

"By the time the vampire has finished feeding." Arianna tried to sound as professional as possible. There was a moment of silence as he seemed to digest the scientific explanation of what would have been a normal reaction to his bite.

"Way to take the magic out of a moment." He muttered.

“You know my hearing is just as good as yours, don’t you?” Padraic stood and looked at the ruined shirt and couch.

“Oh shyte, do you know how hard it was to find that chair?” He scrunched his face up at the blackened ooze that had soaked into the chair. Arianna raised an eyebrow at him as he turned away from the ruined upholstery to look at her. He didn’t miss a beat, just kept on like neither of them had said a word.

“You said you were engineered to feed vampires, wouldn’t you have some sort of ability to fight off the effects of this sytine?” Padraic looked at her, eyes reflecting the fire as the light played along his bared chest.

Her heart picked up the pace, but she kept a blank look on her face.

“I’m a hybrid. They didn’t just add things in, they used what was already there, so no, I don’t have defenses against the sytine in your blood. I’m Stealth, I’m always in control of my actions and the decisions I make.”

He picked up an eyebrow, and one side of his lips turned up in a half smile.

“You didn’t seem very in control from where I was.”

The heat rose in Arianna’s face again. She turned her gaze toward the hearth.

“Feel free to lose control again anytime you like.” The invitation in Padraic’s voice didn’t go unnoticed.

“It won’t happen again.”

## Chapter 4

Cold reality chased away the last vestiges of lust. Arianna found herself in a situation where determination was called for. She turned back toward Padraic.

"I followed Parker throughout this castle, every turn he took, every corridor. I've memorized the map for this place and he still managed to give me the slip. His trail ended in a room where there was no other door or exit." She moved back over toward the table, trying to put some distance between the two of them so she could think more clearly. She slammed her palm down on the desk in frustration, making Padraic jump and the room echo with the slap of her hand on the timber.

"Damn it! There has to be something I don't know, because I'm good at what I do. I always get my man, and people can't just disappear like Parker did. What didn't he tell me about this castle when he briefed me with information on taking this assignment?" She was all business, not a trace of the emotion she'd felt only a few moments ago.

Padraic padded on bare feet over to her. The proximity of his scent, and his bare flesh brought on a recollection of the feel and taste of his kiss. She beat it down.

*No more getting down and dirty. There's shit to do and I'm the one who has to do it!*

"There are secret passageways through out the castle," he said. "When you were given your blue prints, did they include all of the hidden ones within the building?" He'd gone serious too, the teasing lilt gone from his voice.

"No, it didn't! Parker planned this from the start. He must have kept the secret passages from me so he could move around undetected." She thrummed her nails on the top of the table and chewed her bottom lip in thought.

"But why wouldn't he want me to know he was here? I was sent to kill you, he couldn't have been here for you, for all he knew you were dead." She thought a moment and the answer came to her. "Oh, motherf..." She left the cuss unfinished, awed at the ramifications of what she was saying.

"He wanted you dead, too. He came to kill you." Padraic said quietly.

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Arianna walked Padraic to his room. She would have preferred to stay in the study, but it didn't have a door to keep the room secure.

She stayed alert for any sounds indicating Parker was about to attack again. The crossbow was the perfect weapon to kill either of them. Since Parker didn't have to make physical contact he could loose a killing shot and be gone in the blink of an eye.



Even if he ran out of arrows everything hanging on the wall or kept in a display case was an example of medieval warfare. To make it worse it'd been blessed and was considered a holy artifact.

Arianna entered first, sweeping an assessing glance across the room before Padraic came in behind her. His bedroom was on the bottom level of the castle. Rooms at floor level were easiest for men with broadswords to climb through in the middle of battle so there weren't any windows. Besides there wouldn't be much to see, the outer wall of the keep wouldn't offer anything even remotely worth seeing. But for a vampire it was the perfect accommodation, made for the dark. Even with her enhanced night vision Arianna couldn't see the hand in front of her face. Stealth were born with more rods in their eyes than normal in humans, they could make better utilization of any light present. When there wasn't any light to begin with the superior eyesight didn't make any difference.

She felt him brush past her in the inky blackness and a flame blazed to life as Padraic lit a hurricane lamp. The golden glow illuminated the room. Tapestries depicting battle lined the walls, rugs covering the hard brickwork underfoot. The most comfortable looking thing in the room was the bed. It was enormous, piled with cushions and dressed with a crimson satin comforter.

"Is there a secret passageway that leads to this room?" Arianna asked as she turned to close the door. She went to turn around when she realized Padraic was getting changed. She quickly turned to face the closed entryway. *Getting ready to die for the day.* But it didn't bother her. It could well have been her preparing to do the same if it hadn't been for her engineered DNA.

She caught a glimpse of bare hip as he took his jeans off and she smiled to herself. He wasn't wearing any underwear.

*Bad girl!* She silently chastised herself.

"I've checked and to my knowledge there isn't one," Padraic said. "There's only so much I know about this place, which is mainly what I've been told. Why aren't you out looking for Parker? Do you think he's gone back to where ever it is you came from?" She heard the sheets rustle as his body slid under the covers and the bed settle with a creak. She turned back to face him.

"Don't you wear anything to bed?" She hadn't meant to say it out loud, it'd just come out.

“Do you?” He asked with a cheeky smile. He was met by her silence and she gave him a look of indignation.

“Nope.” He grinned. He looked like he enjoyed her momentary loss of composure. But could anyone blame her?

The covers were pulled up to his hips, and from the waist up he was a feast for her eyes. Padraic had a tight waist, taut and toned with muscles. His skin was soft and supple, with dusky nipples on smooth skin. There was only a tantalizing trail of hair below his belly button disappearing below the covers.

His eyes twinkled while he watched her take in the sight of his naked torso. Padraic clasped his fingers behind his head, which just made it worse. The muscles in his biceps rippled, and his abdominal muscles flexed. His brazen teasing irked her, or was it she was enjoying the view? She raised an eyebrow at him as if to say “so what?” when what she wanted to do was play her fingertips along the valleys of his muscles and throw the covers off to see just what lay underneath.

*Breathe, damn it, girl!*

“Parker’s a vampire just like you. He has to go somewhere dark during the daylight hours. He’s here, he knows as well as I do how unstable the magnetic field in the castle is. He’ll have to wait to go home, too.”

Arianna pulled out a hardwood chair from behind an ornate but dusty duchess pushed up against the wall. It looked like one of the original pieces of furniture that had been in the castle. She could imagine the lady of the manor sitting on this chair in front of the mirror, being sure to stroke her hair one hundred times with a boars hairbrush.

Arianna turned the back of the chair around toward Padraic and straddled it. The torn skirt of her silken sinash hung through the back to dangle near the floor. The front of the chair rested snugly against the door, if it moved even the slightest she’d be up and swinging without a second thought. She was pretty sure Parker had gone to ground for the day, but there was nothing to say he wouldn’t give a last ditch effort.

She rested her sword along the line of her right calf, the hilt warm in her hand, while she danced her fingertips along the grooves molded for her grip, perfected for her hold only.

“What’s that?” Padraic asked as he pointed at the black carbon fiber strip wrapped around her thigh. The slit in the fabric of the sinash over her left thigh had opened wide when she’d sat down on the chair and made the device fairly obvious.

“That is the reason I’m here. It’s a resonance enhancer, technology from the future. Through out history there is evidence of disturbances in the magnetic fields of the earth. Flux’s like I was telling you about before. At these points there is a momentary weakness in the fabric of time, matter and space.” Arianna looked down at the technology and ran a hand over the smooth surface.

“Using documentation of past occurrences and computer extrapolations physicists managed to guess where these energy bucks are going to take place and when. If I stand in place at the right time there is a moment of vacuum, where the atoms of your body are unstable, and with the right change in the resonance of those atoms, they can be transmitted somewhere else.”

She stood the sword onto its tip and spun it, watching as it balanced on the tiny edge. Then she caught the hilt, abruptly stopping the centrifugal energy. She looked up at Padraic through a curtain of hair.

“So, in order for me to come here, there was investigation into the magnetic fields of Roscrea. The temperature and the chemical analysis of the earth and the air are all important factors being taken note of right now. Once these are compiled a frequency is fed into the enhancer, which in turn instructs the atoms in my body to resonate at the correct frequency.” She sat up straight again and leaned the weapon against her calf, the other arm draped over the back of the chair.

“During the phase of instability my atoms are transmitted to the location they should be and the time they should be there. The universe finds a way to correct what it sees as an imbalance.”

She wondered if his head would explode or if he wouldn’t believe her, any normal person wouldn’t. But then any normal person didn’t believe in vampires at this stage in time, and Padraic couldn’t refuse to accept the unknown. He was the unknown, he was a vampire.

He’d brought his arms down from behind his head to rest on top of the covers, and he didn’t look so cocky either.

“What year is it where you come from?” He looked fascinated, the scientist coming to the forefront.

“3008, just over a thousand years from now.”

“And how old are you?” He was taking all of this in his stride. He sat up, the covers falling even lower on his lap, which made her mouth go dry.

“Almost five hundred years old.” She looked him in the eyes but her brain tried to get her to look lower.

“How long have you been an assassin?” He asked.

“Too bloody long,” she said taking her left hand and dry washing her face. It’d also been too long since she’d been with a man, which had to be the reason why she was having thoughts about Padraic now. She held onto her control by a thin thread and it wouldn’t take much for it to break. It didn’t help he wasn’t the bastard Parker had painted him as. Vampires by nature are predators, and only someone who could match Arianna in intelligence and cunning would be worth her time. She found her attraction to him came from reasons other than the way her body responded to his smell, taste, and his physical attributes.

“You were born immortal, right? How come you’ve aged?” He asked. Just as she thought, intelligent to a fault.

She shook her head and got up off the chair, trying to center her thoughts.

“Stealth are born human, we grow up in boarding schools where we’re taught to be the best killers possible. When I was twenty-five I was injected with a serum to activate the genetically engineered DNA in my blood.”

She turned the chair around so the back was up against the door. While she was out during the day trying to find Parker within the secreted corridors of the castle the chair could be pushed up and under the handle. Arianna considered not going. A chair wasn’t going to stop another Stealth if they came after him. Then she looked up at the door and saw a thick bolt across the door jam. The lock was new, and coupled with the solidness of the door itself, it would hold against an attack. If a vampire couldn’t get through than a Stealth wouldn’t either. Both were matched in strength.

The sudden impact against the door took Arianna’s breath away. Her hands were taken and pinned against the door.

Oh damn, there must have been a secret entrance to the room, and Parker had decided to give it one last try. She fucking hated it when she was wrong!

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Padraic moved as quietly as he could but he knew speed and surprise were the most important part of his attack. He matched her for strength, agility and speed. It meant nothing if he couldn’t catch her off guard. He pinned Arianna against the door, putting his hands over hers on the hard wood. He smiled in triumph and moved his face near her throat, breathing in the mixture of sandalwood, rose, and the tempting scent of

blood that ran just beneath the creaminess of her skin. He moved his mouth close to the shell of her left ear, feeling the lines of her body through the soft material against his bare chest. He noticed the feel of her firm ass as it pressed against his hips, teasing his cock against the cleft in her cheeks.

"I managed to get past the defenses of a trained killer, so, what does that make me?" His voice was thick with want as his prick gave a twitch, rapidly hardening in response to the feel of Arianna's body trapped against the door.

Her reaction was so fast she'd finished the maneuver before he'd finished taking a breath. She slid down the door, taking her hands out from under his, simultaneously twisting and pushing her way through his legs, she came out behind him. Taking his hands and twisting his arms behind him, she brought his wrists together, firmly but without pain. She leaned in next to his ear, her barely covered breasts pressed against his back.

"What does that make you, Padraic? Brave." Then she let go of his hands.

Padraic turned around slowly, moving his body against hers. She didn't move away and he knew she'd be able to feel every inch of him. He slid against her like a caress, including his hardened cock as it brushed her hip.

"I thought you said you slept naked?" She raised her eyebrows at the black satin pajama bottoms.

"I wanted to see if I could rattle you." His voice was laced with amusement.

"Keep trying." She purred, and put her hands on either side of his head against the door. She stepped in and took his lips with hers, driving quick thrusts of her tongue into his mouth as she took her hand off the door and danced her fingertips along his body.

Padraic took her hard ass in his hands and pressed his body along hers, his cock jumping with the firm contact of her belly.

Arianna traced a line down his neck, then a soft caress along the line of his collarbone. She scraped her nails down his nipple and along his stomach, making the muscles twitch and tighten. Then she tickled her way along the line of his pants, teasing the hairs that lead down past the drawstring. She stopped kissing him and looked into his eyes. The liquid amber of her iris's disappeared as the pupils' dilated. He pulled up the fabric of her garment at the back and teased the bare soft flesh of her ass, running his fingertips up her back. She slid her palm down the shiny material covering his hip

and traced her palm forward until she cupped his covered cock with her hand. Her fingers slipped from base to tip while she bit his bottom lip.

Padraic gasped in a quick intake of breath as she caressed her fingers over the full head, and then she let go of his lip and his rigid member.

“Keep trying,” she whispered and walked away. He heard her barely contained chuckle as he closed his eyes and let his head tip backwards with a ‘thunk’ on the door.

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Arianna instructed Padraic to slide the bolt across and secure the door while she was gone. She listened on the other side of the door to make sure he’d done what she asked before she left. Part of the floor plans for the castle were in her head. Now she had to spend the day looking for as many passageways as possible, and maybe any rooms that hadn’t been on her copy of the building. With any luck she’d stumble upon the daytime resting place of Parker, and then it would be as easy as cleaving his head from his body with her sword. She ached to feel the sensation of the ringing steal in her hands as it smoothly slipped through the bone and muscle of his neck.

The real problem was, this whole castle had been built for fortification. It was designed to keep people out and there were too many places for someone to hide in the dark.

She thought momentarily about the feel of Padraic’s lips, the feel of his hot skin, and the hardness of his rigid cock as she held it in her hand. A wicked smile covered her face, and then she sighed. Her feelings for him shouldn’t be as strong as they were. She’d known there was something strange going on when he’d bitten her and the sytine had an effect. Arianna had been taught from an early age to keep others at arms length, to only be reliant on herself. Sure there’d been men but only in response to her physical needs, she was a woman after all. She wasn’t some useless damsel in distress. She could handle herself and that was why she was so confused about the emotional feelings that accompanied the responses to Padraic in her body.

Arianna had come to the end of the passageway which met with the main corridor on the bottom floor of the castle. She looked to the left and right, trying to decide which direction she would try first. There was an entire castle to search through and she only had part of the picture. It was going to be a long day.

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Padraic opened his door, and found Arianna leaning against the wall. He watched her profile for a moment, looked at her lips and the way her long eyelashes rested against her cheeks. The black smudges under her eyes were darker, more defined. He felt like reaching his hand out and smoothing away the marks with his thumb. But would she allow him to touch her in such a way?

He was fascinated by her, by her strength and independence. How long had she been alone? As long as he had or longer? He wanted to lay a kiss on each of her eyes and soothe the lines of tiredness from her face. What had she been doing during the twelve hours he'd been locked in his death-like sleep?

"You didn't even try to be quiet. What if it hadn't been me here? I've heard stampeding Baraboo quieter than you!"

She hadn't opened her eyes, remaining perfectly still. If he hadn't seen her move her lips he would've looked around for someone else.

"Don't you ever sleep? And what the fuck is a Baraboo?" He felt a lot better since his rest, completely healed from being shot the night before.

Arianna opened her eyes and looked at him, the kind of stare that would make a lesser man back down, but he stood his ground. He knew the score. Both of them forged against another aggressor. What they didn't know was why, and one way or another they would find out. Her face softened, the stare fading to tiredness.

"No, I don't sleep. Not while I'm on a job. I have extra adrenalin in my blood, so I can go many days without having to sleep. But that doesn't mean I don't get cranky." She smiled a little at him.

"As for the Baraboo, I won't spoil it for you. You've got that to come yet. But, yes, it is named after the town in Wisconsin." She pushed herself off the wall to stand in front of him.

"Come on, I found something today and it's given me an idea, with any luck by the time this night is through we won't have to worry about Parker anymore."

Arianna led the way down the passageway. When they met the main hallway they turned right. On the way back to the stairway up to the next floor they turned right again, toward the kitchen.

"Did you know the castle has a dungeon?" She asked apropos of nothing.

"I assumed there would be one, but there wasn't anything on the plans." Padraic reached into his pocket, feeling around for the lighter he always kept there. He closed his fingers around the metal rectangle and flipped the lid. He ran his thumb over the wheel so a soft flame jumped to life.

"There's a reason for that. I'm hoping Parker doesn't know about it either, because I've got a plan to lure him in there. There's a passageway running beside it where you can view what's happening without anyone knowing." Padraic watched the nasty smirk spread across her lips. Shit, he'd hate it if she had a look on her face like that over him.

"What's so special about the room?" He watched as she stopped, reached up and pulled a nasty looking weapon off the wall. It had a wooden handle, like an axe handle, with leather wrapped around the handhold and studs on the other end.

"Studded truncheon," she explained and handed it to him before she continued her walk. "Let's just say this castle has many, many secrets it's yet to give up."



## Chapter 5

Arianna crouched down in the study, one leg under her and the other pointed out parallel with the floor, the inside of her foot resting against the floor. She listened to the still night, and scanned the room, sniffing to make sure she was alone. She drew the sword out of its sheath, slowly, enjoying the feel of the metal as it passed out of its holster with a sigh, the weight settled in her hand. She rested the side on the top of her boot, caressing the steel like you would a lover.

Bracing herself for the sting, she pushed her palm against the razor like edge, sliding her hand upwards till she could no longer take the pain lancing through her flesh. She lifted her hand and looked at the gash, watched as the deep laceration filled with blood and dripped off the side.

Arianna stood and trailed the weapon beside her. The high pitched ring of metal being slid along stone echoed through the hall before she drove it back into its housing.

The noise had been nothing more than a call, like when you tap the side of a tin of pet food, here kitty kitty kitty! The real enticement was the smell of the blood freely flowing in droplets from the tip of her fingers. She clung to the wall but moved quickly. She smeared blood over the rough stone walls, drowning out the burst of heat and pain that came with every touch, every abrasion.

Stealth blood was rich with adrenalin. The black market value for one hundred milliliters was five hundred dollars. The smell alone was catnip for any vampire, and Arianna was counting on Parker to be hungry after spending the whole day on his own with no food source in sight.

The dark pressed on all sides of her, it seemed to reach out and devour any light trying to move around the halls. She had to take her time, but still move quietly. She was trying to entice her prey out of hiding, not get caught.

Coldness seeped through the stones, weaving its way through her skin into her bones. She stopped her body's natural instinct to shiver and concentrated on what she was doing. She took the stairs down to the bottom level of the castle then took the first right, passing by the traditional banquet room. She headed toward the chapel, turned into a hidden alcove with a tapestry hanging at the beginning of it and stopped at a door.

Using the lighter she'd gotten from Padraic, she lit the torch hung on the wall in the hallway. There was little light available in the hallways, but the room would be pitch black.

Taking the torch out of its holder beside the ominous black void, she passed through the doorway and immediately hugged the wall on her right. She slid along the cold Masonite and kept her feet near the edge of the room. It didn't take long for the harsh smell of burning fuel to fill the very small area. To the naked eye it looked like an old storage room, but there was nothing in it. She crouched against the wall close to the floor across from the entrance way and waited to see if Parker would follow the trail of blood she'd left for him to find.

The warmth of the torch licked her arm and made the skin on her face burn. Having the torch hadn't been a choice. She'd have been blind if she hadn't brought it with her. At the same time she was worried it would interfere with her heightened sense of sight. What happened if it went out and it took too long for her eyes to adjust? She thought about it, adjust to what? There was absolutely no light source in this room. If this torch went out she was screwed.

She looked around the room at the walls and found a ring to place the torch in. This way she didn't have to be worried she'd drop it, and it also left both of her hands free.

The overpowering scent of the kerosene in the torch must have interfered with her sense of smell because she saw him before she smelled him.

"Arianna. It's nice you left me a snack, but I've already eaten." Parker said conversationally, before his voice turned business like. "Why haven't you killed Padraic yet?"

He stayed in the shadow of the doorway. He talked like he was still in the middle of a deal. All he had to do was step forward a couple of steps and it would be over.

*Come in and get me you stupid asshole. Come and get what you deserve you lying sack of shit.*

"Parker, you know very well why I haven't killed Padraic yet. You lied to me. I really fucking hate being lied to. There is no way in hell he's responsible for the genocide of Stealth. His work is with saving the human race as well as vampires." She stood to her full height, muscles bunched with tension. "Why would he want to get rid of a race incorporating both species? And what do you mean you've already eaten? On what?" She was furious. It was quiet anger that bordered on insanity. She was going to kill him, she was going to see an eight-foot spike shoved up his ass, but he had to come into the room.

Why was he still standing there? She heard a chuckle as he took one step forward. He raised the crossbow to his shoulder. Parker's gaunt features looked angular and corpse like in the flickering light. A glimpse at his face revealed a face similar to a skeleton, the deep pits of his eyes showed only blackness.

"I know about the room, Arianna. Do you know why it's called an oubliette? It's French, and it's a place to put somebody to forget about them. I know about the trick floor in between us and the spike in the pit below."

She growled in frustration. With the false flooring between them she wasn't able to charge him, nor could she forget the fact he had the crossbow ready to shoot her.

"Unfortunately one of your fellow Stealth knows about it, too." He indicated with a shove of the weapon toward the floor and grinned viciously. "I found your little trail of enticement and I've got to admit you're right about one thing. The taste and smell of Stealth blood is irresistible."

"You sent another Stealth? Did you think I wouldn't get the job done? You came yourself. Why the fuck would you send someone else?" She fisted her hands, her nails biting into her palms. She resisted the urge to jump across the room and wrap her fingers around his throat.

"I was just going to watch, to see you kill the traitor, then you went all soft. I decided to take matters into my own hands. The second Stealth was supposed to be insurance, but instead he made a sufficient wake-up meal." He talked like he had been to an exclusive restaurant, and gave her a smug self-satisfied grin.

Parker raised the bow up to sight on her as she reached behind her to take out the blade. If worst came to worst she could try to stop the arrow with her sword, but it was a slim chance. She would be the first to admit she was good, but even Stealth had their limitations.

"It's you, isn't it! You're the one trying to destroy the Stealth. You want the extinction of thousands of hybrid vampires. Why do you hate us so much? You hired them to kill your target for fuck sake! Tell me, Parker, tell me why you're about to drive an arrow through my heart!" Spittle flew from her mouth as she screamed at him. Rage spewed out with every word.

"You don't deserve a thing you vermin filth. But because I'm an upstanding person I'll tell you, let you see why there's such a gap between the elite and the trash. Your kind has contaminated the vampire world!" He gestured toward her with an upward jerk of his chin. "You half-breeds spout about being the best of both species,

the benefits of being vampire without the drawbacks. The truth is you are tainted, contaminated with human ideals and genes spliced with weak human cells. Pure vampires should take their place again at the head of the food chain. We should be back in the times when vampires were free to kill and fuck whatever we wanted. Humans are cattle, and that's how they should be treated!" His façade had taken on the forcefulness of a dictator.

Arianna had met Adolph Hitler, had been the one to orchestrate his apparent suicide in a bunker in Berlin. She'd seen the eyes of a psychopath before, so she recognized it in Parker's eyes. It was the holocaust all over again; only her race was the target of a madman.

"Why Padraic? Why would you be so hell bent on trying to kill him? You could have just left me to do my job, or left him for another Stealth. You didn't. You came after me to make sure I was dead, too. There was no reason for you to think I wouldn't go through with the assignment you'd paid me to do. There has to be another possibility for you wanting both of us dead." She'd taken a step forward, unable to stay still. Screw him, she'd go out fighting, she wasn't going to die because this spineless, crazy shit had shot her.

"God damn you, Stealth are thick! All you think about is how to kill, not the why or reason. Then you have to go and change the rules, go and grow a conscience." Parker sighed. He continued like he were chastising a child.

"Padraic is the reason for hybrid vampire humans, his technology for mapping the DNA of vampires was incorporated into the mapping of human DNA. He is the father of the stealth species. If Padraic is killed, then you can't be born and our future won't have you filthy rotten parasites in it." He looked down the sight of the bow, adjusting his aim and taking a breath. It was coming! Arianna braced herself and held the sword between her hands, ready to move to fend off the speeding arrow. Although her brain was screaming for her to take action, she'd gone totally quiet, even her breathing was silent.

"One last thing, Parker. You still haven't told me why you have to kill me." Only her lips moved as her eyes concentrated on the tip of the weapon. She waited for its release.

"How do you think he got the idea, Arianna? He used a sample of your blood to start the process of hybridization. When you die, so will any chance of your species being engineered." His finger started to squeeze the trigger.

Time to put her legs up in the air and kiss her ass goodbye because the way she saw it, she was screwed.

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Padraic moved out silently from behind the tapestry near the entrance to the dungeon. The only evidence of his presence was the air and dust disturbed by the movement of the heavy wall hanging as it settled back into place. He had stayed concealed in the passageway as he watched and listened to everything Parker said.

He came up behind Parker just as Arianna was readying herself to take the blow from the crossbow. The same crossbow Parker shot Padraic with the night before.

Padraic was pissed. Angry that this self-indulgent asshole had paid someone to kill him. Furious he had shot him and seeing red at the sight of Parker holding the crossbow at the woman he cared for. Padraic pulled his hand back, using his immense vampire strength so his muscles coiled with exertion, ready with barely contained power. Then he swung the studded truncheon and its spiked tip at Parker's head. The impact split the other mans skull and imbedded the weapon deeply in the bone. A bit of shattered skeleton broke out and with it a piece of gray matter as blood began to ooze around the puncture site.

Padraic let the truncheon go as soon as it hit its target, and from the momentum alone, Parker took a step. He stumbled to his knees and straight through the trick flooring to be impaled on the spike below the room.

He wasn't alone on the wicked looking eight foot spike. The body of the Stealth he'd killed earlier in the night rested on the spear underneath him. Parker's body slid down the steel until it rested on the drained corpse at the bottom of the pit.

Padraic looked up at Arianna, a shocked expression on her face. On the ground next to her lay the arrow, sliced cleanly through the shaft. Then she broke out into a smile.

"My hero." She smirked, and laughed.

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"What is the deal with the dress you're wearing?" They were back in the study. A fresh fire burned in the hearth, warming Padraic's back. Arianna sat still while Padraic put a bandage on her side. She'd manage to dodge the arrow, cut it in half even, but the front half had continued through and grazed her waist. He'd pulled at the fabric of

the sinash and ripped it so the cut she'd originally made now went up to the ribs on her left side.

"It's called a sinash. When we transmit we can only wear a limited percentage of engineered materials. I hit my maximum with my sword, everything else has to be natural, so my garments are made from silk." She sucked in a breath as he dotted the wound with iodine, then covered it with a patch and taped it there. "It's colored to blend in with the environment we transmit into. I knew I was coming here at night and into a dark castle, so black seemed the most appropriate shade."

"So you won't be able to leave while you have this on?" He indicated the dressing he'd just applied.

"I'll be ready to leave in the morning, which is the next safe opening for transmission back to 3008. I'm part vampire remember, I'll have healed by then." She smiled at him. Hunger burned in his eyes, making tingles stir in the pit of her stomach.

He knelt in front of her, which brought him just the right height to work on her waist.

"Is everything you're wearing made of silk?" He whispered hoarsely.

"Find out, Padraic. Rattle me." She challenged him.

He stood and took hold of the sinash with both hands and in one fluid movement, tore it in half. Her body was jarred with his strength while her naked flesh was bared before his devouring eyes.

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Padraic drew in a breath in appreciation. She had the tight body of a soldier, but possessed the curves and softness of a woman. Her ripe breasts were incased in a black silk corset. Her hard nipples pressed against the soft material and begged for him to caress them. A pair of rope like suspenders held up black silk opaque stockings, a g-string barely covered her pussy. Just above the resonance enhancer there was a tattoo snaking its way around her thigh, twisting and interlocking an endless ring around her leg.

Arianna stood and challenged him with her stare. He closed the gap and took hold of the back of her head, lacing his fingers through her chestnut hair and pulled her head up to claim her lips with his. He tasted her ripe lips, licked and teased her parted pout while he caressed her tongue with twists of his own. He was rewarded with a moan from her throat.

He used the other hand to take the sinash off. The soft material floated to the ground without a sound. Padraic dipped his head to run his tongue along her throat, feeling her racing pulse against it. He could feel his cock getting hard, the combination of her smell, feel, and the rush of blood unleashing the predator in him.

He forced out a sound of impatience from deep in his throat and moved down further, licking her nipple through the thin silk and biting softly. He moved to the other breast while he kept stroking the first with his thumb. When he'd finished with the other pebbled nub he felt her hand on the back of his head, turning his face toward hers.

"I said rattle me, Padraic!" She ordered.

He took the corset in his fisted hands and twisted with brute strength, only interested in freeing her creamy skin so he could caress and lick every inch of her. The suddenness of the garment being torn from her body made Arianna gasp for breath.

Padraic knelt in front of Arianna as he started to lick, bite and blow on her hard nipples, while she ran her hands through his hair. Her mewls of pleasure and the slight tremors made his nerves jump to life, wanting the feel of her fingers on his body.

She leaned over him and took the bottom of his sweater, hurriedly pulling it over his head then tossing it to the floor. Her eyes blazed with hunger and barely contained need. He ran his hand up the inside of her stocking covered leg until he found bare flesh, then teased the soft skin with his fingertips. Padraic followed the caress with his lips as she leaned over him again and slid her nails up his back. He arched against the caress. The pressure in his bulging cock was enough to make his balls ache. The heady smell of her hot wet sex made him lick his lips in anticipation.

He rose to kiss her again, his hand sliding down her curves to push aside the g-string and glide a finger along her dewy lips. He purred with urgency, legs almost buckling.

She broke away long enough to grab her smaller knife out of the larger sword and handed it to him, pausing for just a moment.

"I've never given somebody my weapon before, Padraic, don't make me regret it." She growled out and watched to see what he'd do with it.

He didn't hesitate with the knife as he slid the smooth side along her hip. The cold metal elicited a sigh from her mouth. He watched her eyes as he slit the suspenders and g-string off her body, then handed the knife back to her with a raised eyebrow.

"Good boy." She whispered.

“Not even close.” He admonished hoarsely. Using one hand he pushed her backward into a chair while the other pulled off the cut material. He knelt before her and pulled off her boots. Taking the tops of the stockings, he pulled them down and tossed them. He started to kiss and nibble his way up the inside of her right leg, licking and running his elongated canines along the sensitive flesh until he came to her thighs.

He widened her legs with his hands and pulled her closer to the edge of the chair. He traced the slick lips of her pussy, and put one finger and then another inside her.

Arianna watched him, then sighed in pleasure, shut her eyes and dropped her head backwards to rest on the chair.

Padraic opened his mouth and slowly ran the tip of his tongue over her tight wet clit and claimed it, sucking gently while he kept his fingers moving inside of her. The muscles in her cunt tightened around his fingers, the tension in her abdomen contracting the muscles as he slid his hand up her belly to strum a tight nipple.

She sighed with pleasure as she started to shake.

“Padraic?” She whimpered. Her words halted his thrusts but he kept his fingers buried inside her silky flesh. He looked up her body into her half-lidded eyes.

“Yes, my warrior?”

“You’ve rattled me, Padraic, now it’s time to fuck me.”

In one fluid movement he was up and had pulled down his pants, freeing his hard cock, pre-cum oozing out the tip. Her eyes went large as she let out an “mmmm” at the sight of his rigid length. She reached out and took it in her hand, stroking up and down, dancing her fingers over the purple head.

Padraic closed his eyes and luxuriated in her touch, as his member leaped against her hand. She cupped his balls and stroked feather light fingernails along them. He let out a moan. He opened his eyes when she let go and watched as she moved herself onto her knees to put her mouth around the head, licking the pre-cum glaze on it. He growled and took hold of her hair, pulling her body up along the length of his body. He kissed her deeply with urgent thrusts of his tongue, relishing the sweet taste of her mouth and then turned her to bend over the arm of the sofa.

Padraic parted her silken folds with his fingers and used the other hand to place his thrumming head at the entrance to her hot core. He used his thumbs to stroke along the labia that surrounded the tip of his length, using her cream to lubricate his cock and then took hold of her hips.



Padraic waited there, her quivering body held underneath his hands as she tried to buck back and impale herself on his shaft. The drive to thrust into her was like a buzz in his head, but he would wait. He'd bring her to madness just as she made him.

He ran a hand down her back, enjoying the feel of her tight muscles under his fingertips. He uttered a guttural groan, he didn't know if he could wait much longer.

"Padraic!" She screamed.

He rammed himself into her, opening her, widening her, until she was filled with him and he felt like he'd branded her. He pulled out and slid back into her again, his balls slapping against her clit, again and again, until the ache in his balls was unbearable. Then he pulled her up so her body was snug against his, one hand sliding against her clitoris, while the other pulled her hair aside. He pressed the tips of his canines against her throat, scraping them ever so gently along the creamy skin.

She whimpered, her cunt tightened around his cock and his teeth slid into her flesh with little resistance. The taste of her hot sweet blood poured into his mouth as her tight wet pussy muscles contracted around his sensitive cock. She let out a scream which reverberated around the room and pushed him over the edge so his hoarse cry followed.

He convulsed deep within her heat, his hot seed spilling out with his release. He luxuriated in the overwhelming and exhausting pleasure of their climax. Padraic slowed his rhythm. He enjoyed the sensation of his member incased by her slick flesh, while they both tried to calm their racing breath. Arianna flopped down over the edge of the sofa, both of them too tired to speak or move.

## Chapter 6

Padraic's heart was beating so hard he feared it might burst out of his chest. Arianna's blood had been satiating, and her pussy had gripped his cock with glorious rhythmic pulses, draining him of his cum. He was left spent and sweaty, but the adrenalin in her blood had made his pulse erratic and racing.

He stayed inside her for a moment and wrapped Arianna in his arms, breathing in her heady scent while he pulled her up to kiss her shoulder.

"I want a bath and I'm going to take great pleasure in making sure you're squeaky clean, too. Then I'll tempt you to spend some time with me."

He felt so light, and she felt so good in his arms. She nodded quietly and he slid out of her. Bending over he scooped her up under her thighs and pulled her close to his chest so her head rested under his chin, her silky soft hair tickling his skin.

"Hey! I'm not some helpless maiden, I can walk." She didn't look angry, but he could tell she wasn't too sure about the idea of being told what to do.

"While it's true that you're not a helpless maiden, I did save you tonight, and for a while, at least, I'm going to be in charge."

Padraic carried her into his room, kicked open the door and left her on the bed burrowing into the cushions with a sigh. He lit the hurricane lamp and then went into the en suite, turned on the taps and filled up the large marble bath. He paused in the doorway when he found her lying flat on her back, one knee bent with her foot on the bed, an arm flung above her head to rest on the silky tendrils of her hair.

He could feel the stirrings of hunger in his body again. God she looked so beautiful lying there, skin glowing in the light of the flickering lamp. He stood still for a moment and studied her while her eyes were closed, the soft sweep of her skin, the pale perfection of her hip, and the wonderful rise and fall of her breasts.

He could definitely feel the rise of lust as his cock started to twitch.

Padraic walked over to the bed and ran his hand up the length of her leg, over her hip and finally he gently flicked her nipple, enjoying the sensation of her soft warm skin. He wanted to suck the rosy bud into his mouth and lick the hard nub until Arianna moaned with pleasure. She opened her eyes and gave him a lazy grin, which grew when she saw his rigid length.

"Tell me, Padraic, what do you intend to do with that?" She raised an eyebrow at him. He pretended to consider the question for a moment.

"I was thinking about driving it into your pussy until you scream some more." He took her hand and pulled her to stand.

"Is that an important endeavor for a noble scientist?" She asked. She gave him a cheeky smile and followed him into the bathroom.

Padraic turned off the taps and lowered himself into the hot swirling water. As Arianna entered the steaming pool he grabbed her around the waist to pull her onto his lap. He positioned her so she was facing him, legs on either side of his hips, and her body pushed his engorged cock against his belly. She wiggled around a little, the sensation forcing him to quell the urge to groan. He concentrated on breathing in and letting it out slowly.

"At this time, I think so." And then he did what he wanted to from the first moment he saw her, he rubbed her bottom lip with his thumb and she took it into her mouth. He pushed the pad along the line of her teeth, then took it out and smoothed out the dark patches under one of her eyes.

Padraic reached over to a stainless steel shelf and grabbed a bottle of bath gel, and then used the other hand to squirt some onto his palm. He began to lather her skin, making it slippery so his hands glided over her throat, shoulders and nipples. She moved to allow more room between them and entwined her fingers with his, taking some of the gel onto her own hands and sliding her hands over his body. His pulse picked up, his cock pulsing as she ran her nails over his taut nipples. The feel of her slippery skin under his hands was driving him to a higher state of arousal, but he'd be in control this time and he'd take his time. It seemed like a good plan right then, but he thought he might have to revise it when she reached down into the water and took him in her hand. She danced her fingertips along his bulging head then took hold and swept her hand down the length of his shaft.

Oh, help him, he had a gorgeous naked warrior in his bathtub and as much as he wanted to make slow luxurious love to her, he didn't know if he could hold on!

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Arianna grasped Padraic's cock at the root, sliding her hand in a slow, measured movement back up to the head. She licked her lips, remembering the feel of having his engorged flesh in her mouth and the taste of his silky pre-come. She tickled the sensitive spot at the tip and was rewarded with a growl low in Padraic's throat.

The hot water moved around her body, caressing it while Padraic's hands glided over her, his palm skimmed over her hard nipples. Her whole body was singing with pleasure, filled with the feel and smell of him. Then he surprised her by lifting her out of the water, so that she wrapped her legs around him and held on. He took them out of the water and into the bedroom, laying her on the bed. They were both still sopping wet from the bath, little tendrils of steam wafted from their hot bodies. It didn't matter, all she could think about was the fire in his eyes.

He walked back into the bathroom and came back with a towel, quickly drying himself and then taking the time to dry every inch of her. He threw the towel to the floor and knelt on the bed, then lay down next to her.

Padraic trailed his nails along the bare skin of her waist, the tender light touch making goose bumps break out on her skin. She took his cock in her hand as he leaned over and kissed her lips softly as she teased his balls with her fingertips. He moved his head and took one tight nipple in his mouth, gently nipping the bud while he rubbed the other one between his thumb and forefinger. Pleasure screamed through her blood, every nerve responded to the warm wet heat of his mouth on her skin.

Arianna could feel the fire and cream building in her pussy, the urge to have him inside her growing. She grasped his hair and pulled him up to face her so she could see his eyes. Padraic's canines protruded out of his slightly opened mouth, she gently ran her thumb over the right tooth, and the digit came away with a slight glaze of sytine. She slid the sweet fluid along her tongue, and then licked the wicked point of his tooth. She felt a sharp sting and the tang of her blood. Padraic's eyes went wide and he devoured her mouth, sucking greedily on her tongue. The direct contact of the concentrated chemical and her blood almost had Arianna seeing stars. The heat in her cunt became a burning ache and her cream started to flow in rapid response to the hunger of her wanting him inside her. He slid his hand along her thigh and she opened for him, gasping as his fingers found her silken folds, delving inside with two fingers and playing her clit with his thumb.

"Arianna, do you have to go in the morning?" His question cut through the building ball of pleasure filling her head.

"Yes." She tried to anchor herself so she could hear what he was saying. The things he was doing to her body made it so hard. He moved over her, resting in between her thighs so that he held himself up on forearms on either side of her body.

She brought her legs up and around his hips, urging him to make that final connection, to fill her with his cock.

He searched her eyes intently as he ran his fingers through her hair. He entered her slowly, every inch accentuated by the slow grinding of his hips.

She closed her eyes, breathing in slowly and enjoying the sensation of her core being widened, her muscles accepting the way his entrance changed the shape of her.

He pushed his length fully inside of her, until she was stretched wide and her nerves sang with completion. Then he began to pull out just as slow. He did this time and time again, until his rhythm picked up as he ground his hips into her, rubbing her clit. She urged him on, pressing her ankles into his ass and pushing her pelvis up to meet his thrusts.

She opened her eyes and found him watching her with an intensity which made her heart miss a beat. He kissed her throat and nibbled along her collarbone. Her muscles started to tense with a coiled readiness in her cunt, tingles ran up her spine. She was a breath away from orgasm, his body gliding against hers, caressing her nipples.

"Stay!" She heard him demand, and then she came, muscles spasmed all over her body and gripped his cock deep inside her. She felt the hot flow of his seed and the leap of his cock as he answered and came inside her.

Her heart was racing, the beat loudly filling her ears. She tried to steady it with deep breaths. He'd asked her to stay, demanded it!

Arianna lay under Padraic's warm musky body and tried to think through the post orgasm haze.

She'd been alone for such a long time. The teachers at the school had beaten into her the idea to give up forming an attachment to someone else. But she was still flesh and bone, not a machine, and whether it was supposed to be possible or not, she'd fallen for Padraic. For a moment she thought about what it would be like if she did stay, if she did indulge in the prospect of being with him

Padraic lifted his head from her shoulder, and smoothed some of the sweat off her brow. They were still joined and she could feel the rapid pace of his heart through his chest.

"Stay." He whispered, and softly ran his lips over hers.

"I can't. I have to go back and tell everyone what happened, what Parker's been up to. He won't be the only one, there have to be followers. I have to find out who they

are and I have to stop them.” She was solid in her resolve. Part of her wanted to stay, but she knew her own needs were surpassed by the necessity to weed out the faction of vampires who wanted to wipe out her species.

Padraic rolled off her and on to his back, letting out a breath. She momentarily mourned the loss of his heat, and the embrace of his arms.

“I’m going to have to take Parker’s and the Stealth’s bodies with me. I’ve got work to do before I have to leave Padraic. I have to leave and you have to stay here and work on your research. Did you hear what Parker said about you being responsible for the creation of the Stealth?”

He moved up the bed to lay on one of the pillows. She didn’t fight when he pulled her up to his chest, tugged down the coverlet and brought it up on top of them. She couldn’t get too comfortable, she had work to do, but the heat of his body and the comfort of the bed were making her tired and she could feel the exertion of the last two days starting to catch up to her. Normally she wouldn’t take this down time until she got back home. She allowed herself to let down her defenses and tiredness bared down on her.

“Yeah, I heard what he had to say. As for killing you so I couldn’t use your blood, he was wrong. I’ll just use samples from the other stealth that Parker threw into the pit. We can get his body when we go down to get the other one.”

The rumble in Padraic’s chest soothed her while he talked, and lulled her eyelids to close. Her eyes burned and begged for release.

“How are we going to get down there?” She asked tiredly, the blackness of exhaustion pulling her down into its inky waters.

“I have no idea at all.” And then there was nothing.

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Padraic watched Arianna while she slept. He enjoyed the sensation of her warm body against his. There was tightness in his chest when he thought of her leaving him, of not having her close to him, challenging him. He didn’t want her to be alone anymore and he didn’t want to be alone either. He wanted to leave her asleep so she would miss her window, so he could have the time to let her see how much he cared for her.

He grimaced at the thought of how she would react if she did wake up and to find she’d missed her chance. He sighed, her determination was what made him admire her in the first place. So, against his desires, after a couple of hours he woke her.

Arianna's eyes flew open with a start. She came up with her fists in the air, ready to fight.

"Ease down!" He soothed. He put his hands out to defend himself in case she took a shot. She rubbed her eyes and blinked.

"What time is it?" She croaked out.

"4:30. I let you sleep for a bit. What time is your window of opportunity?" He got up and pulled some clothes out of a chest at the end of the bed. He started to dress, throwing her one of his shirts.

"In just over an hour. I've still got to lug Parker's body back to the room I arrived in, down the hall from the study. Oh and as much as I love your shirt I have to get my sinash from where you left it and see if I can fix it. I don't want to turn up in 3008 as naked as the day I was born." She pulled the shirt over the top of her head and got out of bed.

The sight of her in his shirt made him remember the feel of her body moving underneath him, the sweet taste of her lips.

"Oh no, get that idea right out of your head, we don't have the time!" She walked past him and opened the door. He gave her a cheeky smile and chuckled.

"What? I've got no idea what you're talking about." She gave him an exasperated look, rolled her eyes at him and walked out the door.

"It takes a dirty mind to think like one you know!" He called out after her, and then left to catch up with her.

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Arianna had made it to the study by the time Padraic caught up with her. She chewed on her bottom lip in thought as she assessed how damaged the slashed sinash was.

The corset and panties were useless, but she could still use the stockings and she could cut a piece of material off the hem to tie the fabric over her. She changed from the warm soft shirt that smelled comfortingly like Padraic, spicy, into the smooth cool gliding fabric of the sinash. She cut the hem off and wrapped it around her waist. She hefted the harness for the sword over her shoulders and mentally welcomed the familiar weight of the weapon.

Arianna shook her head, and chastised herself. She shouldn't have left it in another room, what if another Stealth had turned up during the night? She wouldn't make the mistake of letting passion overrule her good judgment again.

Arianna led the way back to the oubliette, wondering how she was going to get the bodies out of the hole. She lit another torch and took it into the room with her, getting Padraic to hold onto the light while she used her hands to open the doors.

"You still alive down there, Parker?" She yelled. He was a vampire, and there was every chance he was still alive.

The stench of rotting flesh assaulted her nose, heralding an ominous feeling of dread and nausea. She pinched her nose with her fingers, trying to breathe out of her mouth but finding the thick stench stuck in the back of her throat. She had to try not to gag. *Serves the bastard right!*

She looked up at Padraic. "You said everything in this place was blessed?"

"Yeah, the walls and everything in it."

She knew what had happened. The spike was part of the main structure of the castle; Parker's body was rotting on the spike. Even worse, he was still alive because she heard a groan.

"Shit!" Her voice reverberated around in the small dark pit below the floor.

"You mentioned you'd done some renovations to this place earlier. There must be a ladder around somewhere and something to wedge this trap door open."

Arianna contemplated the hole. She was formulating a plan to get a ladder down into the pit when she heard something fall down inside. A gush of black fluid followed the unknown object, then an electronic whir.

Energy collected in the room to the point where it choked the room. The concentrated power raised the hairs on the back of her neck and made the skin on her arms break out in goose bumps.

"I thought you said there were no such things as ghosts." Padraic mused.

"What do you mean?" Arianna looked back over her shoulder at him. A shiver raced down her spine, all signs pointed to very bad things on the horizon.

"I just had one pass by me heading out to the hallway. Damned if I didn't feel it touch me!" He looked in the direction the ghost must have gone.

Arianna let go of the flooring and popped up onto her feet, like a surfboarder taking on a wave.



"Padraic, run!" She pushed him out the door, slammed it behind her and took off at a sprint behind him. She stopped near the stairs and crouched down next to him, hands over her ears.

Whooooomp! The foundations shook slightly, dust and dirt rained down on both of them from the ceiling. Padraic spluttered and dusted himself off, then silence.

"Aw, shit, now *I'm* going to have to give you that blood sample." She groaned. She stood and walked back to the dungeon, knowing what she'd find.

The room was empty, the smell of burned flesh lingered in the air. Arianna walked up to the edge of the pit, pushed the door open with her foot and looked in, not expecting to find anything, and for once she wasn't surprised.

Padraic knelt down and looked in the pit, it was empty, there was no evidence two bodies had been in there at all.

"What happened to them?" He stood and looked at Arianna. She just shook her head and walked back the way they'd come. She muttered under her breath as they walked up the stairs to the next floor. "Great, how am I supposed to explain any of this? At least I don't have to lug Parker's heavy ass out of that hole and drag it back to 3008."

Instead of walking toward the study she turned left and about three quarters down the hallway stopped and turned into a room. Padraic's long stride matched her fast ones.

"Each resonance enhancer is coded with our DNA, so nobody else can use it. When Parker landed on that spike he didn't die straight away. He was decomposing, like when you were hit with the arrow. The whole castle has been blessed, the spike was a holy item and it worked in the same way." She turned back to look at him as she grabbed her hair and twisted it till it was tucked into a bun at the base of her neck.

"Parker had his enhancer attached to his waist. When his flesh rotted it eventually took his torso with it, and the device fell off. It must have fallen on top of the body of the Stealth underneath him. The enhancer took a sample of his blood when it landed on him, it didn't match the DNA it was coded to so it self-destructed." She leaned against an empty wooden case.

"Parker, the cunning bastard. You think this is where he got the crossbow from?" She indicated at the case.

Padraic waved the question away and continued with his original thoughts. "Why wasn't there anything left? And why did I see a ghost just before it went off?" He looked

a little shaken, but he seemed to accept her explanation without freaking out. No wonder she liked him so much.

“The self destruction mechanism uses energy in the air to power itself. It draws it in to a concentrated mass, which causes a flux in the earth’s field. Thus you get a ghosting effect. It uses that energy to make an extremely small thermo nuclear implosion, wiping the room of any organic matter and leaving no residue.” She crossed her arms across her chest.

“So I couldn’t have used their resonance enhancers to go back with you even if I wanted to?” He pointed at the black carbon fiber strip on her thigh, disappointment apparent on his face.

“I already told you, you have more important things to do and no, it wouldn’t have worked. If you’d tried you’d be in the same condition as those assholes.” She indicted down the hall with her thumb.

“Now hurry up and get whatever you need to get my blood, there isn’t much time left.”

Padraic left the room and she dry washed her face with her hands. Arianna thought about the conspiracy she’d uncovered. When she got back to 3008, she was going to drop a bomb implicating high society and respectable members of government. What a shit fight! She was not looking forward to going home at all.

## Chapter 7

Padraic carefully undid the elastic cuff on Arianna's arm. He elongated his fangs and licked the tips to cover his tongue in a film of sytine, then ran his tongue over the puncture marks and sucked gently for a moment. A basket of vacuu-tainers sat on the floor, filled with blood mixed with anti-coagulates.

Arianna sighed and shivered slightly when the aphrodisiac hit her blood stream. She made fists with her hands and shook her head, as if to fight off the affect of his ministrations.

"Make them count because they're all you've got." She said as she cleaned the excess blood away with a wad of cotton and threw it away.

There was a beep from the apparatus around her leg. She stood and moved away from the stool he'd brought in for her to sit on while he took the samples he needed. She leaned over him and brushed her lips across his, the touch a soft caress across his mouth.

She stood in the middle of the room, as far away as possible from the walls and any other furniture in the room.

"You better go now, I've only got a minute." She opened a door on the device by sliding down a small section and pressed in a code, then shut it again. Padraic stood and shifted the stool he'd sat down on, then walked over to the doorway with his basket of samples and watched her.

"No goodbye kiss?" He joked.

"Better not take the chance, you could end up torn in half." She replied. He went to laugh but thought better of it when he saw the serious look on her face. Damn.

Padraic watched her from the doorway. He wanted to reach out and touch her. He wanted to say something to change her mind and make her stay, but he knew enough about her to realize she would go. She was tenacious, fiery and committed to finding anyone else involved with the conspiracy to end her life and that of the other Stealth. His gut clenched at only being able to observe her as she left his life.

A wash of energy filled the room, the kind he'd felt before he saw the ghost on the lower level. Static crackled in the air as Arianna went hazy. Her skin shifted and shimmered like a mirage as the atoms of her body became destabilized.

"Padraic?"

He could barely see her lips, but he could hear her. Oh God, he had to say something, he had to stop her. Was it too late?

“Yes!”

“I love you.” And then she was gone, a vacuum left in her wake. His ears went funny like at high altitude, which made him yawn to make them pop.

The pressure in the room dissipated with an audible ‘snap’ and the room filled with the smell of burnt ozone.

She was gone but the dread still clung in his stomach.

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Arianna sighed as the tingle disappeared from her body. She shook herself thoroughly from head to toe, stabilizing herself.

The room was quiet, a little amount of light penetrated so she could see everything. The air smelled just like it does after a lightening strike. The room looked just like it had before she left. In a thousand years this storage room in the castle hadn’t changed a bit.

It had been a stupid thing to tell Padraic how she felt about him before she left. But she figured she didn’t have anything to loose, she wasn’t ever going to see him again.

The first thing she did was to take off the leather shoulder straps and lay her sword down on the floor. She pulled out the duffel bag she’d left behind and took off the sinash, screwing it into a ball and shoving it into the sack with more force than was necessary. Taking the resonance enhancer off her leg, she threw it across the room, disgusted with it and the fact that she knew in a couple of day’s she needed it again to assassinate the next target she was hired to kill.

She pulled out the skin like body suit and squeezed into it. The garment was filled with a gel heated by wires running throughout and controlled by a panel on the front at the waist. She programmed it to 84°F and felt relief from the cold almost straight away. She tugged a turtleneck jumper over her head and put on her jeans. She pulled her boots on last, angrily stabbing her feet into the shoes.

She took out a soft cloth and laid the sword in its sheath on top of it, carefully folding it in the protective layer and then tying it with rope so it wouldn’t fall off. Taking the bundle under one arm, she threw the bag over her shoulder and left.

\*\*\*

Arianna shivered in the early morning air, Ireland was so damn cold, and being naked in the castle had put a chill into her bones.

The one thing Arianna hadn't told Padraic was she'd transmitted from Leim ui Bhanain Castle in the first place. It was such an unstable location to transmit to she'd had to leave from there as well. From what she could tell the place had been empty when she'd arrived the night before. She'd walked through the outer wall and straight through the front door, it hadn't been locked up at all and there were no lights on inside to give the indication someone had been home.

She'd spent two days in the past, but come back to the future only twelve hours later. How was that for time management?

She walked down to the hire car and got in to drive to the nearest town and a warm bed at the inn where she was staying. She threw the bag onto the back seat and started the car. The ceramic engine hummed quietly, a quick look at the gauge for the hydrogen tank showed it was almost full. It felt good to drive a car instead of using the G.P.S to automatically guide the vehicle using the magnetic drive to hover to her destination. Arianna liked using her brain and physical dexterity instead of technology, and this part of Roscrea hadn't converted to automated highways, it was off road and driver controlled the whole way.

She thought about Padraic and the way she'd felt comfortable enough in his arms to have fallen asleep.

It didn't matter now, she was here and he was there, and the two wouldn't meet.

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Arianna woke up in the afternoon with the suspicion she'd forgotten something. She groaned out loud in the darkness of the room.

"The bloody resonance enhancer, I left it behind!" She put her hands over her face and rolled over in the soft folds of the comforter. She was going to have to go back, tonight. Her flight was early the next morning and there was no freaking way she was going to use an instantaneous transporter, people had combusted using the damn technology.

"Bugger!"

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Night had settled over the landscape like a thick blanket by the time she made it back to the castle. She had a battery-powered torch in the back seat of the car. There still wasn't any electricity run out to the property, but she'd heard talk the latest owner had a generator hooked up. She hadn't seen anyone when she'd been here the night before; maybe the owner had given up and gone to live somewhere else? Or maybe it was someone who used the landmark as a holiday home? Some people had too much bloody money.

Arianna grabbed the light from out of the car and stepped out into total stillness. She could see every star without the distraction of city lights, the air smelled crisp and fresh.

She snuck through the open front gates and snaked her way through the grounds. After she'd looked around and listened to see if anyone was home, she walked back through the door she'd come out of that morning.

The hallways were deathly silent, the blackness as thick as she remembered from the first time she'd been here. There was no smell of a fire wafting down the hallway, no evidence what so ever of the life that had once been in the rooms of the damp, dank, building.

Arianna switched on her light and blinked in the glare of the illuminated passageway. It actually made a pleasant change to be able to clearly see where she was going. She walked quietly and quickly toward the room where she'd left the enhancer.

*I'm just lucky the damn things don't go off if they get damaged.*

Arianna walked into the room and found the black strip on the floor near the wall, checking it over to make sure she hadn't broken anything.

She was pushed up against the wall by the full body blow of whoever had been waiting in the room for her. The torch fell out of her hand, clanging on the stone flooring and going out. Darkness enveloped the whole room, greedily snatching away the light.

Arianna was pressed up against the cold rough stone, she could feel the line of a body tight against her back, her hands pinned against the wall by her attacker. For a moment her body kicked into overdrive, adrenaline surged through her body, and then she smelled him, the person who was keeping her hostage. She was confused but there was no way she was going to let him know that.

“Better, Padraic, at least you didn’t give me any room to move this time.” She smiled in the darkness and felt his breath on her cheek. Relief and warmth poured through her.

“Tell me, Arianna, did I rattle you?” He took one of his hands off hers and put it underneath her jumper, stroking the side of her breast so she gasped in a breath.

“Keep trying, Padraic.” She taunted him. It was impossible but her lover was here. He was more than that to her, he was her conscience, her moral compass. He awoke in her all the things that had been repressed by years of combat training and her soul lifted.

He turned her around, pressing his warm soft lips against hers as he pushed her jumper up her waist, running his fingers over her bare belly. Her muscles contracted at the feather light touch. And then he was gone, back into the darkness. She felt her hand being taken as he led her out to the corridor.

“You still own this castle?” She couldn’t believe it.

“Yup.” He said, not pausing in his strides.

“But I looked around when I came here the first night, it looked abandoned.” She still couldn’t get over the fact he was here, now, one thousand years later.

He stopped in the middle of the stairway and turned to cup her face with his hand. “I knew you were coming. I had to let history happen, Arianna. I cleared out till I knew you would be back, only one night, it wasn’t a big deal. I knew you would have to come back for your resonance enhancer so I waited.”

He smiled and started back down the stairs, not pausing as he strode through the door to his room, pulling her through with him and shut the door behind them. Padraic pinned her up against the door and kissed her again, plunging his tongue deeply into her mouth and then swept her bottom lip with a delicate lick. The sensation awakened her hunger for his touch, her nerves bursting with impulses, leaving her sensitive and hot. She pushed her arms against him, forcing him to take a step back. It gave him the opportunity to get undressed; he pulled his sweater over the top of his head, slipped his shoes off and unzipped his jeans.

“But how did you know?” She was trying to stay grounded in reality, which was becoming increasingly difficult with the sight of his naked skin. She ached with the need to run her hands along him and taste his hard nipples in her mouth.

“You told me.” He said, tugging her top and the skin body suit over her head with haste. Naked hunger made the pupils of his eyes dilate, the urgency reciprocated in her

need to be near him, to cross the barrier separating them. She let him expose her bare torso, his hands going to her breasts as soon as they were free.

"I can't have, I only just got back!" She was losing the battle to have coherent thoughts. Padraic took her face in both of his hands and looked her in the eyes.

"Arianna, that can wait till later. This however, can't! I need you right now." His voice was so thick with need she relented, took his ass in her hands and pulled him up against her, so she could feel the hard bulge in the front of his jeans. She wrapped her legs around his hips as he lifted her up under her ass and carried her to the bed.

Thick pillows cushioned her fall as he threw her onto the bed. A quick glimpse around her revealed the same bed she'd slept on the night before, only more modern. She shuffled so she was sideways on the bed and undid the zipper on her jeans. Padraic stood beside the bed and took off her boots. She slid the thick denim over her hips and he grabbed the hems and pulled them the rest of the way off. She was left wearing only a tan lace g-string.

Then she realized she could see, he hadn't had the time to light a lamp. She turned her head and looked at the table next to the bed. She turned back to Padraic and cocked an eyebrow.

"Electricity, Padraic?" She didn't actually mind, it meant she was able to take in a full view of him, his muscled grooves, and the line of his collarbone. He leaned over her and took her thighs in his strong hands, pulling her closer to the edge so her legs hung over the side of the bed.

He knelt down and ran his hands up the inside of her legs till they both met at the lips of her pussy. He gently pried open her labia with one hand and started to strum her clit with the other.

"Arianna, later," he whispered. He licked her clit while he put two fingers inside of her. He sucked and nipped her cunt while he massaged her silken folds till she did forget her questions. His movements were slow and deliberate, he took his time moving around inside of her and circling her clit with soft caresses of his tongue. The pleasure built in her body, sending shivers up her spine with every sweet lick as his fingers delved into her creaming pussy.

"Padraic," she forced out through breathless moans.

He stood and took off his jeans. Arianna braced herself up with her elbows under her and sighed in euphoria. She brazenly looked at the tight muscled calves and the strong trunks of his legs, his toned torso and his blazing eyes. His hard cock protruded



from the front of his body. She let her gaze linger there for a moment before she sat up and leaned over to lick the sweet pre-come glazing the tip of his cock. He gasped as she ran the tip of her tongue over the head of his prick, wrapping her lips around it and sucking gently.

She felt the fire of lust ignite in her belly and travel down between her legs, cream swelled within her pussy. Her nipples started to ache with the need of his touch again.

She heard his primitive groan and laughed, which urged him on even more. He pushed her onto her back again and slid his arm under her lower back. He lifted her up so her back was arched and pushed a pillow under her ass. She closed her eyes as he leaned over her and laved one of her hard nipples, grazing his fangs over the flesh. She gasped in pleasure, and then moaned as he traced the contours of her body with his hand, down the length of her body and rubbed her clit.

He slid his arm out from underneath her and stood, picking her legs up and placing her feet open wide at the edge of the mattress. She opened her eyes and smiled at him, watching as hunger, passion and lust danced across his face. He bunched the strap of the g-string in a hand and with a twist broke it.

Padraic picked her hips up with one hand and used the other to position his creaming cock near her opening.

He slipped just the head inside, making tendrils of pleasure race up her spine. Then he grabbed her hips with both hands again, his hands spread wide to caress her back as his thumbs played over the sensitive flesh just near the hip.

"Scream for me, Arianna." He ordered. As he plunged himself deeply inside her Arianna pushed her hips forward to meet his demanding thrust and she did scream, the ecstasy too much to keep bottled up.

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"It's later, Padraic." Her voice broke through the lazy silence that surrounded the room, the screams of their lovemaking gone and absorbed into the walls.

He sighed, she wouldn't let it go, and he had said he would explain afterward. He had been worried he'd had a stroke for a while after he'd tasted her blood. She was so sweet and now she was his for everyday, not just once in a while.

"I told the authorities about what was going to happen the moment I made the break through in vampire human hybridization. The discovery of time travel was made

around the same time, but I wasn't allowed to change anything." He mindlessly ran his fingers up and down the delicate skin over her ribs, so he felt a slight tremble from her body. He felt her nipples pebble against his side. Moving his hand, he flicked one of the tasty nubs with his thumb.

"Padraic, concentrate!" She ordered, but she didn't move his hand away. His mouth went dry with the urge to take her breast into his mouth and lave it with his tongue, but he continued his explanation.

"The council of scientists decreed history had to be played out or else any interference could cause a paradox. You had to be allowed to take your assignment and go to kill me, as well as having to face Parker. I couldn't try to find you before now, you always found me." Her warm body against his was so reassuring; he could take his time luxuriating in her body if she would just...

"What do you mean I found you? I'd never met you before last night." She'd pushed up to look at his face, but he pulled her down back onto his chest.

"I've made a lot of money out of my research. I'm the majority stockholder in my company. Once I'd mapped vampire DNA, and used the same knowledge to help vampire's parent children the stock went through the roof. It did again with the discovery of hybridization, which is largely thanks to you." He explained.

"What has that got to do with me coming to see you?" She sounded exhausted.

"Apparently I'm going to use some of this vast wealth to fund your visits to my past, between 2007 and today." He tried not to laugh but he couldn't help a knowing smile. She slapped his chest and looked indignant.

"What? A thousand years is an awful long time to wait for the woman you love, even for a vampire. Besides you must agree to it because it happens, and you told me everything about your mission to 2007, that's how I knew you would be coming back for your resonance enhancer." He watched her eyes go wide.

"About what I said when I left, I didn't know I was going to see you again." She was so still, like she was waiting for him to stab her in the chest.

"About you loving me?" He pulled her up so he could place a kiss, a caress across her lips. His hard cock twitched at the sensation of her skin running over his and he almost moaned.

"You better lady because I've just admitted I love you, and I am not paying for someone to travel into the past for a quick booty call." He grinned at her.

“Fine then, I guess I must have meant it. Padraic, I do love you. But you have to realize, as much as I love being with you I’m a killer, it’s what I was born to do. I can’t just sit around and wait for you to send me into the past so I can *meet your needs*.” She said the last touched with sarcasm. He felt a moment of distaste, which must have shown on his face before the words came out of his mouth.

“You may get what you want. The other people who were part of the group that planned the death of the Stealth ran. Because we couldn’t interfere with what was happening the majority of them got away, went to other countries and transmitted to other times. I know what you are, I also know there is more to you than being a killer, you saved me. Hell, you’re made to save life as well as kill.” He paused, dreading what he had to say next but knowing there was no other choice. “That aside, I have no other option other than to send you and other Stealth out on your next assignment, which is to assassinate each and every member of Parker’s puritan group.”

Silence enveloped them both, soothing away the harsh words he’d spoken. It’d taken a thousand years but she was here, in his arms and she was here to stay.

Arianna put her finger across his lips, silencing any more talk of death, or the obstacles they faced and followed her fingers with a kiss, squirming around on top of him so he did let out a moan.

“I want you to do the one thing I’ve never done in my life time, Padraic.” She whispered in his ear.

He parted her legs so she straddled him and used his abdominal muscles to sit up slightly. Reaching behind her he glided his hand over her tight ass and ran his fingers over her slick opening. Having the hot, wet, silky folds of her cunt wrap around his digits made his balls ache. He wanted her writhing on top of him, filled with his length and wrapped in his arms.

“I always do what my warrior demands of me, Arianna. What is it?” He used the wetness on his fingers to oil up the shaft and head of his cock, the head twitching in expectation of entering her.

“Make love to me. I want you inside me, all the way. I want to feel every inch of your cock as you penetrate me, my love.” A plea.

God help him, he almost came that very moment.

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Arianna closed her eyes and moved into Padraic's side after the soft tremors in her body had passed. He'd been so gentle and tender with his slow deliberate movements. His muscles had tensed and quivered with the effort to make it last, to bring her to her peak slowly, so when she got there she thought her body would shatter into a thousand pieces.

She wouldn't cry. Stealth did not cry, but she couldn't stop from shivering ever so slightly.

There couldn't be a happily ever after for them, he loved her and she loved him but she was an assassin. There was every chance one day she wouldn't come back, and she couldn't stay at home and play happy housekeeper. Even he knew the havoc Parker's people could wreck in history. They needed to pay for the uprising they had started against her race.

In time, he may come to regret the decision he made in sanctioning her assassinating Parker's men. He would come to resent her for being the one to go through with it.

For now she would languish in the warmth of her lover, and not think about the future. Tomorrow she had to go out and hunt for the right target to execute in the past.

## **My Dark Lord by Serena Knight**

He was dressed all in black, from his clothes to his high top boots. Drake looked tall and powerful upon his large midnight colored stallion. He raced across the forest toward his village dreading what he might find once he got there.

Fayre came back to the castle all upset with Reverend Estcott. Ella was sitting in the tavern with Shaw in broad daylight. The reverend silently said that maybe it wasn't a good idea.

Drake wrestled with his temper, struggling to understand what he was so upset about. Was it that Ella and Shaw were sitting in Leal's tavern together or was it that they were at the tavern owned by the man he thought murdered his wife? Drake had waited until nightfall for Ella and Shaw to return to the castle which they never did.

The darkness of temptation and love could do wonders to ruin one's soul. The blood pumped through Drake's veins as he slammed the tavern doors open. Riding his horse down to the village still hadn't taken the edge off his anger. He shouldn't even have to ask himself what upset him more. It should be who he thought murdered his wife and that was letting him take the blame for it!

Ella stood up completely thunderstruck as Drake burst through the door. She wrenched her hand from Shaw's. Anxious faces turned toward Ella, a score of expectant eyes asking the same question. "So this is what you have been doing!" Drake said as bitterness laced his voice. He ignored the whispers! He was accustomed to the all kinds of speculation he aroused everywhere he went.

"It's not what you think!" Shaw yelled as Drake strode through the table towards them.

"For you, I know it never is!" Drake growled.

Shaw just laughed out loud.

Ella was outraged! How dare Drake barge through the front door causing a ruckus in the whole tavern. But, he was The Dark Lord and had a lot of power and influence in the village. He knew he could do as he pleased.

*The Black Lady's ghost voice whispered in Ella's ear. My Dark Lord was once like that, bellowing, shouting, and demanding. Despite the favours he showed my family. I held my ground not to bed him until I loved him.*

Ella knew what she had to do. She had to get past the lust, have sex with Drake tonight then find out the answers to her questions. She needed matters to proceed smoothly. She felt like running, bolting toward the door like her life depended on it.

It was hard not to blow up at him, but she calmly said, "We were just getting ready to leave." Ella gracefully walked out the front door of the tavern noticing the looks of sympathy for her.

"Find your own way back to the castle." Drake told Shaw.

Shaw smiled as he put his arm around a tavern wench's waist. "Don't worry about me. I will find my way back later."

The Dark Lord looked around the tavern to see the horrified looks of the town's people but ignored them and walked out.

The room hissed with excitement and panic. Was the Dark Lord in love again? Would this just be another love affair or his next marriage?

A hunter's moon shimmered over the wild and barren landscape making it a place of legend. The land sloped upward sharply. Hamilton Castle seemed to rise out of nowhere, a granite fortress with its tower and battlements.

Ella wrapped her arms around Drake's torso feeling the ripples of muscle in his abs. The horse they rode went faster startling Ella as she gripped him more tightly.

Drake let out a moan. He felt Ella's breasts pressed against his back. If he wasn't hard enough before he sure was now. What was he thinking storming into the tavern like some mad man? He didn't even want to think of the reason why he did it.

Reaching the castle stable Drake dismounted his black stallion. Ella swallowed hard as she bravely allowed Drake to help her get off the horse. Ella knew what she had to do but trembled.

With only one previous sexual relationship in her life, Ella wasn't sure she could be so bold with sexual advances.

*"Sure you can and I will be with."*

Ella all of sudden felt confidence thanks to The Black Lady though she felt strange thinking that a ghost would be present while she made love to Drake.

Ella swallowed hard. It was now or never. She reached up to kiss him gasping as his hot tongue probed her mouth, thrusting between her lips.

"Your room or mine?" Drake whispered in her ear.

"Yours," she gasped, her head rolling back.

"Hot little wench," Drake hissed his breath warm on her neck.

Ella walked down the darkened garden path, which just the night before she walked in unsure and had met Drake as a stranger. This time she knew what she was doing! She was hand in hand with The Dark Lord himself. Ella smiled as she knew where it would lead.

Drake rushed through his castle hallways toward his bedroom chamber. He thought Ella was going to be harder to get than this though none of it mattered as Drake picked her up and flung her down upon his bed.

Drake took off his clothes and came towards her.

Ella closed her eyes, trying to fight down a shudder of arousal so extreme that it threatened to overwhelm her.

"Is this what you really want?"

"You wouldn't be forcing me," she said truthfully. "I want you!"

She flung back her head as his lips caressed her throat, his huge hands warming her wherever he touched. He reached out and caught hold of one wrist, pulling her harshly towards him. His strong hands slid up her legs then stroking the soft dampness of her sex. She sighed. Ella felt weak and trembling, her kneed beginning to shake.

Ella was in a whirlwind of passionate excitement! She flung herself on top of Drake. Her body in wild fever of hunger!

Ella felt such power as his hot shaft penetrated her mouth. She took him willingly, flicking her tongue around the quivering head. Her hands fondled the delicate glands of his shaft. She felt an over flooding of wetness between her legs, soaking her thighs. The candle cast a glowing pool of seductive light around them.

"Oh, I like that" he moaned, "but I don't want to cum that way this time."

He roughly flung himself on top of her. Before she could move, he hurled himself on her, pinning her down with his strong, lean body. His hand moved down her body. Cupping her full breasts, Drake brought his head down to suckle upon them. Between her legs his swollen penis waited, hard and ready.

Ella's eyes opened wide and her lips parted and she breathed in great gasps as if she couldn't breathe.

"You're very wet," he whispered into her ear, "Do you want me to put my cock in you?"

"Yes, you have what I need," she breathed.

His blood rushed. He never felt anything like it; she was dripping onto his hand. Cum was spilling from his prick. The knob was dark purple and distended. He placed the hot swollen head of his cock between her eager cunt lips.

He was penetrating her, it was such bliss, she never knew. Drake stared down into her face as he thrust and filled her.

Ella's cunt clenched even tighter around him. "Yes! Yes!"

Her voice was a tortured whisper. "I'm going to...its coming! I can't stop it!"

Drake sucked in his breath as her body erupted. His hips pumped faster and faster. His cock erupted. With explosive force, floods of hot cum spewed out of him. He muffled his cries against the pale curve of Ella's shoulder as he pumped more and more into her.

Fayre was bringing The Dark Lord's midnight meal like he ordered before he left for the tavern. She ground up the right proportion of dried herbs and wine for the meal and hoped the kitchen servants did the rest. Fayre chuckled though knowing the true magic came from the power of the mind, the strength of will. She was sure the staff did as told.

Where was all that noise coming from? The Dark Lord's bedroom door was halfway opened so she knocked then knocked again and slightly pushed the door ajar.

She dropped the tray upon the marble floor. Fayre couldn't believe what she saw. The Dark Lord was buck naked and having sex with a woman. When she saw the long red hair, Fayre knew before the face peered around his muscular body and saw that it was Ella.

"Whore," Fayre hissed and walked out of the door. Ella must be some sort of witch to have already entrapped The Dark Lord in her bed.

Ella opened her eyes, startled. Fayre watched them making love? She should be mortified! But, she was trying to fight down another shudder of arousal.

People called her the redheaded witch in her hometown. She always felt as if she never quite fit in but wanted to help if she was needed. If that made her a witch then she was one. But, was she a whore too? Fayre's words pierced her soul deeply.

Ella refused to believe she was a whore. She had only given herself to one other man. She had been attracted to handsome men before and never did anything more than flirt. The only reason she made love to Drake was because The Black Lady gave her the clue too. She had to believe that her feeling for Drake were nothing more than is.



“Are you a whore?” Drake asked penetrating her deepest darkest thoughts.

“No!” Ella breathed, but the word came out more of a plea than denial. Did he really believe she was a whore?

Through the haze of her shock, she saw some emotion flash in his eyes, something bleak and maybe despairing. Did he really believe what he asked her?

“I better get back to my room.” Ella said wryly.

Drake’s dark brows snapped together. “That might be best.” He thought with a grunt of self disgust.

Ella quietly gathered her clothing that was on the floor near the bed, devastated. She walked past the clutter of broken dishes and food that Fayre had brought in them dropped on the floor.

How was she ever going to face the next morning? Everyone in the castle would know by then that she and Drake had slept together, barely less than twenty-four hours after they met.

Ella walked down the darkened hallway to her room feeling very much alone as she slammed the shutters closed in her room! She removed the rest of the pins and allowed her hair to cascade down about her shoulders in a fiery tangle. She crawled under the bedcovers praying for someday that she could face the upcoming day.

Ella’s heart pounded uncontrollably as she felt a chill as the ghost of The Black Lady whispered, *“We can’t always chose nor protect the ones that we love.”*

Ella still couldn’t believe what had happened to her in this lifetime and in past. Her eyes filled with tears as the room started to spin. She then remembered how The Dark Lord’s lips looked...smooth and firm as a strange comforting quiver went through her.

It seemed like exhaustion, stress and awesome lovemaking could do strange things to a person’s thoughts.

Ella laid her head down on her pillow falling quickly asleep knowing that tomorrow some how was going to be a better day!

## Lord Dronovic by Jennifer Mueller

*In the year 1252*

Lord Dronovic rode his horse over the rise, an island with little more than an old tower on it greeted him. Hardly a tree broke up the expanse of sea, and sky. That tower was all that could be used as a beacon to find one's way. He might have received land for his wife's dowry but it never meant accommodations or income. Nor did it mean people. The land was desolate for two days ride in any direction, his land now. *What had his father gotten him into with this arrangement?* A small parcel of land on the sea was doubled now, no one exactly sure when the property had come into the family in the two hundred years since the first had stepped on these shores. But when the opportunity came to expand it with a generous dowry from the King of the Orkney's, his father had taken the offer quickly enough.

"I hear she is a fair woman, Dronovic." His cousin Rurik murmured as he took in the sight.

"The little I saw her at the wedding, yes, I remember her as such. I've hardly said two words to her and it's been how many years? I can hardly remember anymore. I'll need something to make up for this dowry father thought was so valuable." They had both been little more than children when the vows were said.

Even though it was visible, it still took them three hours to reach the tower and the shelter it would provide. As they finally neared, it wasn't as desolate as it seemed. There were people everywhere, at least seventy-five of them. All fair skinned, Dronovic could only guess they had come with his wife. When you married a Princess of the Orkney's, which meant Vikings not so long before, that was the only guess to arrive at. He, himself, had some one hundred with him. Many related, to some degree, but all barely filling their stomachs on the land they had on his father's estates.

"Princess Jódís." Dronovic asked the nearest man he saw. No words, he only pointed to the largest concentration of people near the tower itself on the small island that looked like it had

been flung off the mainland. No trees and yet there was timber enough to build a bridge and that was exactly what it looked like they were doing. The sun came out from behind the clouds and illuminated a woman's blond hair like gold.

She looked up quickly. "I hope you approve of the improvements I am making, husband."

Dronovic could only stare. There was no way this woman was his wife. He should have noticed that he had married a goddess. Had it truly been so dark? Golden blond hair hung to her knees in a large braid, her flowing mantle of dark red was thrown back leaving her tunic clinging to her curves, and what curves they were. Pulling herself from the midst of the crowd, she met him as he dismounted. Dronovic turned and found himself eye to eye with her. "I don't mean to be rude but are you truly the one I am wed to?"

"I was only sixteen then and it has been four years since you went to serve your king. We've been working on the tower since I receive word you would be returning. I had hoped to have it finished. You will have to sleep in tents along with the rest of us now."

"Jódís,"

Her back straightened. "Do not tell me you will hold me to my vows of being submissive and you are displeased."

"I think I should never have stayed away so long if I had known you grew so well. Show me what you have accomplished."

Her smile was like a ray of sun in the darkest night. "We just about have the staircase around the outside finished. It is useable but not safe as there is no barrier to falling yet. The four rooms in the tower have been made livable, but we've yet to move the furniture in. Mostly my people have been staking claims to land. I have agreed this year the rents will be in service to get things livable. We'll need to buy goods until next year when rent will be in food and other goods."

“Then I shall set my people doing the same. Perhaps we should start plans for another tower, four rooms is hardly enough. We surely need a great hall most of all. You have been here longer and know what we will encounter.” Dronovic tried to focus on what he was saying and not on his wife leaning far too close to him. God, they were wed, the marriage even consummated, and he hardly knew her. If he thought he could get away with it, he would have taken her behind any sort of cover there was. Sure way to be killed with all her men there but a handsome prospect all the same.

“We have several fishing boats with us. There is a source of flagstones not far down the coast. A great hall is a fine idea. The timber will be harder to procure than stone though. A store room would probably be more practical in the near future once we purchase fish and crops.”

His wife shifted her stance and Dronovic was given a view of a breast straining against the cloth of her tunic. His trews were suddenly straining as well. “Not knowing you were here, my father has estates and a ship should be arriving in a few weeks with enough supplies for our needs. A late wedding gift from him.”

“Excellent.” Jórdís exclaimed before a man called to her. Dronovic stood there unwilling to let his state be known.

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Days passed as the men continued inching closer to making the tower safe. All up and down the coast in scattered groups, some one hundred men started houses. The mornings were for the tower and the afternoons for their personal work. Dronovic was almost certain there were several couples forming between the two groups.

The fiefdom that came as dowry was not the seat of power; it was merely a surplus of land that had been given away. No village existed, no crofts. It was in a good location for trade with the Orkney’s though, that might entirely be the reason Jórdís’s father gave it as dowry to him. She would make sure that her father would be given a good portion of the trade.

Days passed as he watched his wife working hard to make a new estate. He had been given a title after all. Lord Dronovic with a Princess as a wife. Looking up at his realm, the tower only reminded him of his own state, tall and erect with nothing around. Desperate there was only one thing to do when his wife hadn't shared a tent with him yet. He'd have to seduce the woman.

"Perhaps while we have the winches attached to move the stone, we might use them to move the furniture to the upper rooms. It would be safer than moving it up the stairs with the workers limbs to be crushed," Dronovic finally announced.

"Fine idea." Rurik commended and went to see it done.

Dronovic wouldn't admit to the man that it was so he could get Jódís out of a tent and away from all the men.

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With the stairs completed and the rooms filled with furniture, between the two of them it took all the furniture they owned, the men scattered to finish their own homes before the cold weather set in. Any new projects would have to wait until spring. Only the natural cliffs of the island kept them safe from attack, that and Jódís's father almost within sight across the North Sea. The storeroom footing lay on the ground ready to be built but that could be done in the winter since there lay a surplus of stone about from the tower.

"Jódís, I thought we might walk?" Dronovic asked.

"There does seem to be a lack of occupation now that the men are all working elsewhere. Where should we walk?"

"I haven't explored much since I arrived. Show me wherever you wish."

She clasped her hands behind her back and made her way over the bridge in silence. Hips swaying as she walked she was driving Dronovic mad.

"Why did your father arrange a non Norseman for you to marry?"

“No sons and four princesses. The title King might die with him, but the man that takes it up will only have a title not the land, nor will they have a princess to marry.”

“Is your father sick to marry you off at sixteen?”

“I might have been wed at five as some have done.”

Dronovic stopped in his tracks. “True. He’s not sick though?”

“No, well as ever the last I saw him. If we have been wed for years and he does get sick, who is to say that he was not getting rid of property to keep it out of another’s hands? He is a fine chess player.”

He looked over at her not sure why the thought entered his head. “Where have you been living since I went to serve the King?”

“With my aunt. You had no house to offer me and my father had married me off so I was out of his hands.”

“Why did you never tell me? You could have gone to stay at my father’s estate. We could have at least seen each other. I was able to visit there even if I couldn’t make it here.”

“That far south and have everyone call me a Viking? No, I prefer to stay where I am welcome.”

She surely didn’t sound like the child he had left a week after they were wed, not that he was given the chance to get to know her at all. Maybe she never sounded like a child. In that, perhaps he did know why she had never come to his tent since he arrived. He had left her for four years without much of a thought. “You were never unwelcome,” he admitted. She truly wasn’t but once she was out of sight, he hadn’t given her much thought.

“Perhaps not by you, but I did go to your father’s once. Shortly after you left, I traveled there. I was not coming empty handed I had my dowry and household. I left after a week. I heard the women talking when they thought I didn’t speak their language.”

“My sister’s I suppose. They always were backstabbers.”

“Then we agree on something.”

Her breath caught when his hand touched her cheek. He noticed she smelled of perfume from the orient, he'd never been close enough to notice it before. "I have no commitments that call me away. Can we start over? I should like my wife to like me. I swear someone was watching through the keyhole. You can't claim we never ratified the union."

"Ratified the union?"

His smile couldn't stay away. "We never spoke before we said the vows. You claim it to be anything other than a contract?"

"Well, no, I suppose not."

Dronovic let his hand drift down along her neck, her eyes rose quickly when it grazed her breast. "Do you play chess?" She asked unexpectedly.

"Aye, though if your father is so adept at it, I am sure that I hardly rank with your skill."

Her smile grew. "If you win, I'll show you where your hand touches now."

"But if you win?"

Jódís hadn't thought it through it seemed. She caught her lip between her teeth in concentration. Was she willing to move faster than grass growing?

"If I win? You go swimming in the sea without a stitch."

"That's not a very fair trade."

"Then I suggest you win." She turned and walked back to the tower leaving Dronovic with a view of her hips swaying once more. Damn the woman!

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Seaweed lay about everywhere to dry as Dronovic made his way up the stairs. Some of the Orkney Islands had so little else for food they weren't going to let a food source escape notice. Opening the door he hadn't hardly stepped foot inside since all the work was completed. Of four rooms the ground level was the kitchen and storage, the second level dining, the third held an office with a single book, the upper most level was the bedroom, and he'd never been invited to share the bed. An old watchtower, they had to add fireplaces on to the side so that they

wouldn't freeze, a smoky fire burned there now. The mantle was covered with ancient gold vessels, each with intricate designs from people long since gone. His dowry was getting bigger each day. He had to keep wondering why with all the powerful men that were there for the taking, he had been chosen to wed an Orkney princess. A large bed covered completely in heavy wool hangings to keep out drafts stood near the fireplace. A small table and chairs filled the other side. Away from the fire were chests holding clothes and valuables while the walls were covered in needlework. They definitely needed rugs.

"I changed my mind, husband."

"I am glad. I don't enjoy the idea of swimming in the sea in October."

Alone with no one to watch, her smile teased the corners of her mouth as she barred the door. "Now for every piece the other captures, we'll remove a piece of clothing. The winner gets to decide where we go from there."

*Oh, thank god for unsubmitive women.* Rurik told of his brother's wife who, after baring her husband from bed, spent years without because she was too shy to say she wanted him back in bed.

"A much more pleasant suggestion." How mundane he sounded. She might have just suggested he watch her do needlepoint.

"But . . ."

"Jódís, I have spent weeks waiting for you to get used to me being around again, no buts now."

Her finger over his mouth stopped him. "But for every piece we move regardless, we will tell one thing about ourselves. You say you would like to like your wife then you can do this for me. My father is a king. I had power in his household but I was never told anything. I was never told I would marry until it was already decided and then I was told you would be gone for who knew how long. Do not shut me away to do needlework. I've spent four years of it with my aunt."



“Gladly, Princess.” He answered before he pulled her finger into his mouth.

She pulled it out of his mouth making a loud pop. “This isn’t playing chess.”

Dronovic couldn’t help notice her voice sounded a little husky though. “Go set it up on the bed. The coverings will be far warmer than the chairs once you start taking all my pieces.” She picked the ivory set up from the table and moved it to the bed. Watching her lean over was not helping Dronovic keep his mind on chess though and she wanted him to tell her about himself too. Lying on one side of the board, the smell of heather filled his nose, he’d smelled it on her, but looking to the floor noticed instead of rushes, heather was strewn everywhere. No wonder she smelled of it.

Jódís took the first move. “My cousin is the king of Norway.”

Dronovic looked up at her. “Why would a younger son be given a daughter of one king and a cousin to another?”

“Norse prize warriors, which your family has always been.” Her eyes lowered from his. “Besides I had seen you once and commented to my nurse that I liked the look of you. Next thing I know I’m being told we are to wed when we’ve never even said a word.”

Not having to swim in the sea any more, Dronovic moved a piece he was sure she would capture. If she had her way with him or him with her, either way it was the end he had dreamed of for the last weeks. “When did you see me?”

Her finger pointed to him and he pulled off his shoes. Not very revealing but if he got what he wanted, he wasn’t going to be doing it with his shoes on. “We were visiting to see my sister married and you were a guest there. Watched you through the whole thing mentioning it only once to anyone but she must have told my father. Next thing I know we are wed. Now tell me something about you?”

“My father is a count, but after the service I performed for the King and with a princess as a wife, I now outrank him. The king didn’t want to offend your father with a commoner for a husband of a princess.”

Her next piece she watched him as she moved her next piece directly where he was certain to capture it. He was starting to like his wife more and more. “I sing, dance, play the harp, do embroidery, and carry a knife in my tunic.”

Dronovic took the piece she had just moved. “Show me.”

“Tell me something while you undo the laces.” Jódís turned her back to him.

“Chess is the last thing on my mind.”

“Something I don’t know.”

“I’ve been dreaming of you ever since the day I arrived. I fall asleep with thoughts of you.”

Jódís pulled the tunic over her head. Even with the fire, full breasts started to goose bump in the chilly air. Magnificent didn’t start to describe her breasts he had caught cover glimpses of straining against her clothes. It was cool though and she wore a pair of trews to keep out a draft beneath her hem. True to her word, there was also a knife in a scabbard on her calf. A small one, but deadly enough all the same.

“Move a piece,” he offered. “It’s your turn.” Her eyes narrowed as she took off the knife. Maybe she hadn’t thought it out as fully as he thought. She lay there half-naked and he only had his shoes off. If she kept up the same, it would end far too soon.

In the end, she moved one he couldn’t take. “Will it hurt as much as it did on our wedding night?”

“No.”

“Then move.”

Watching her reaction, he moved one she could take. Without waiting for him to tell her anything or reminding him, she took his piece. She was both forward and a bit timid. Then again their first time, people were close enough to yell out encouragement and her cry had brought a cheer from the next room. It never made for intimacy. Spending four years with soldiers, he knew far more now, in theory anyway, and he was certain this aunt would have never

even spoke of the subject to her. He pulled his tunic off leaving them both in the same state. He left it to her this time, moving where she could take it if she wished. Staring at his crotch for a good long time, she finally took his piece. He pulled off his trews and he was naked. The wait left him standing erect, once free of their confines. He moved a piece again that she could capture and waited. She had said when someone won but frankly, they hadn't even gotten past their pawns. Dronovic watched her eyes go from him nude to her still partially clothed.

All of a sudden, she moved her king out in the open where even a pawn could take it. Her eyes didn't leave his as he pulled the piece from the board.

"Well, Dronovic, you won the game. I believe I said the rules let the winner decide where it would go from here."

He reached out and pulled on the tie that held her last piece of clothing up. It fell down easily and she stood there as he walked around her surveying his prize. Dronovic stopped at her back, his breath light on her ear. "If I have won, then I wish you to tell me what you want, Jódís. There is no one to hear, no one to call out if you scream in pleasure. That is what I have dreams of every night, me giving you what you have wanted in our separation. Tell me your wishes."

She turned her head. Her fierce blue eyes looked as if she was ready to cry. "You actually listened to what I said."

"I would truly hate for you to have those two kings in the family have to come hunt me down because I was acting like they did."

"There are three actually. The King of Denmark is a cousin as well. . ." Her argument halted when he ran his hands over her shoulders. Slowly following her arms, she sighed when he let his fingers brush the sides of her breasts.

"Would you like to know the reason my father wished a match with the Norse? He couldn't beat them from Wrathe, so he figured we should marry them to ensure peace." Jódís tried to turn to face him but he held her tight. "Tell me what you wish. You were the one admiring me at your sister's wedding after all."

“The cook at my aunt’s liked to talk about men.”

Ah, cooks have to love them. Dronovic thought an aunt surely wouldn’t have. “And what did you hear that sounded interesting.”

“She said a man could use his tongue.”

“Did she now? So can a woman but we’ll save that for another time. It’s what you wish right now.” Pulling the chess board off the bed, he couldn’t help but see her eyes watching his cock as he worked. She even licked her lips at the thought. “Lay down, Jódís.”

“You’re sure no one can hear? I still hear who ever it was yelling on our wedding night.”

He pushed her back until her legs hit the edge of the bed. Falling, dear god, the bed lined her up with him neatly. He could feel her heat but he didn’t enter. He just teased her folds with his cock enough for her to moan. “No one can hear, Jódís.”

Scrambling back, she pulled out of range. Dronovic moved the covers and pulled them over both of them. Her squirming stopped as his tongue touched her ankle. Dragging it up the length of her leg, he smelled her scent long before he reached the junction of her thighs. Jódís yelped when he bit her thigh gently.

“Don’t do that.”

“Would you prefer here?” Applying the flat of his tongue to her folds, the only answer was a sigh of what he decided had to be pleasure.

“Marta said it was nice. She never said it was like that,” she finally said after a moment. Her hips lifted every time he pulled back even a little and she bit off a cry when he pushed his tongue inside her. He said he’d never torture anyone but this was fun. He lost count of how many times he brought her to the edge only to pull back. His attack wasn’t hard but it was decisive and quick her cry filled the stone walls.

Dronovic crawled up over her looking at such a peaceful face laying there, eyes closed.

“Jódís, what else did your cook say?”

Eyes still closed her smile grew. “I don’t think you’d believe me if I told you.” Her eyes slid open as his mouth touched her nipple pulling it deep in his mouth. “Dronovic, is this a new beginning for us? I truly don’t wish to remember the first night we were wed.”

He lifted his head up to look at her. “I hardly remember our wedding night, other than my father saying I needed an heir now. Perhaps you’ll introduce me to your aunt’s cook. I like her instructions far better.”

Jódís pulled him up so they were meeting eye to eye again. “Then let’s work on an heir. It is what I wish. Maybe we can go hire Marta away from my aunt. That heir of ours would not go to his wedding night as innocent as we were. She can tell him and save us the trouble. She would enjoy it far more.”

Her eyes widened for a moment as he slid in. “Yes, my princess.”