

Lord of the Hunt



Katina Abram

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by Katina Abram

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Lord of the Hunt

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Dedication

To my darling husband-my very own Lord of the Hunt & to
our two Hunt male offspring.

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Chapter One

In the distance, the sound of barking disturbed the otherwise quiet air. Leon crouched as he waited for his prize. She would know what it was to defy the Lord of the Hunt. For centuries, he and his kind had walked the earth, easily slipping between the Hunt world and the earth. His younger brother, Ronan, would laugh at him, knowing that he was desperate to tame his mate. She had been no less fiery when he had faced her together with his two brothers that morning across the boardroom. Defiant as she signed her company away to them, she had watched him helplessly in the charged air, like a rabbit caught in a stoat's sights.

"Don't forget that one day, I shall set up my own company again. I just need time and I will find it."

He had nodded his head, taking her seriously. "I am happy to have you continue in this company but don't be too sure that everything will go your way." She had looked at him, and if looks could kill, the Lord of the Hunt would have been summarily dismissed to the world beyond.

"I have always succeeded in my life. Be sure you want what you wish for," she answered him with a toss of her head.

All that glorious hair swinging about distracted Leon, who just needed to close his eyes to imagine her naked in his bed with strands of hair across her succulent mouth and gorgeous breasts.

Leon saw Dana jerk a little where she stood. Obviously, she couldn't believe that she had imagined herself naked on

his bed! He smiled at her and he knew that she knew that he had looked into her mind and seen the naughty image.

Leon laughed silently to himself at this confirmation of his connection to her—if he needed any. The battle lines drawn, she had sashayed her way out, leaving his brothers stunned.

"What a firecracker!" commented Ronan.

"Watch how you describe my mate," was Leon's only comment as his brothers stared at him in comprehension.

Like watching a favourite Youtube clip, he recalled clearly his run-in with her later that day at a meeting which she had demanded with him and his brothers. She had made it clear that she expected the company to guarantee her sister's future and Leon had readily agreed, anything else unacceptable to the Hunt, who cherished their strong family bonds. "You will marry me one day soon," he had told her.

She had jerked in surprise and answered scornfully, "Not in a million years."

His brothers cleared their throats warningly. Conan, the oldest, having convinced his mate by force, as generations of Hunt before him, and knowing what it meant for the woman, wanted him to take it easy. Leon had relaxed and gone over to her. He'd taken her hand in his and wished her a civil goodbye. He'd then bent down and kissed her hard on her lips till she moaned with the force of it, and he placed his hands on her chin and tilted up her face to kiss even deeper. Much as her reaction had been tinged with apprehension, he'd felt her attraction to him as her pheromones responded to his touch. Her breasts had peaked and he felt her resentment at her body's response to him. He'd stopped and watched her,

intrigued by the signals she was reluctantly sending him. He had to pursue this—it tantalised him.

He had turned and motioned for his brothers to leave them. He'd waited till the door closed behind them and went over and locked the door, ignoring their warnings. He had sauntered over to her and watched with hungry satisfaction as she'd backed off, fear and resentment making her smell irresistible to his Hunt side, which screamed for him to throw her down on the floor and claim her, as generations of the Hunt had been doing.

The only thing that had stopped him was the memory of his sister-in-law, Senara, saying that her first time with Conan had hurt so much that she had wanted to die. He wished to make his mate his own in the comfort of his bed with no room for interruptions and no chance for his mate to escape, while he claimed and marked her for eternity—the future generations depended on it.

The wedding night mating ceremony for Hunt women had been compared to a walk through hell. He knew his sister-in-law had suffered and had survived it only because of her love for Conan and his love for her. He had introduced Senara to Conan and he never forgot how he had soothed her the morning after her wedding night, when she had come to him in sheer agony. He had seen how Conan had suffered, watching his wife in his brother's arms. He could not do anything as the Hunt were only allowed to take their wives once on the wedding night to seal their vows and could only have sexual intercourse after a week. It took that long for the women to recover from their mates' passion. They would then

be mated for all eternity and need each other sexually on a regular basis to survive and be fertile.

Dana backed away in sheer fear and distrust for this man, who so affected her senses and her body.

He smiled and saw that she registered the lengthening of his teeth. He saw her shake her head to dismiss what she had seen. He quickly moved forward and dragged her into his arms.

"I will run your company well. I took it as I will have you, despite your lack of cooperation and your refusal. Make it easy on yourself by giving yourself to me," he advised.

Dana tried to twist away from his grip. "You only got my company because I wanted my sister to attend the best school there is and pay off the debts my father had accrued." Laura was over five hundred kilometres away, enjoying her studies. Their father had died a year earlier, and their mother when the sisters had been just teenagers.

Leon softened his hold on her. He could sense her pain when she mentioned her father. "I know how much that hurts, Dana. One's parent is precious. You were close to him, as was Laura. Believe me, I need you to accept me, and you need me."

Dana shook her head in denial. "I have my sister; she's all I need," she said defiantly.

He gathered her protesting body close and looked into her eyes. "Neither of us has the choice; we need each other to survive."

She pushed at him. His words seemed to strike a chord somewhere because with his keen Hunt sense, he could see

into the deep recesses of her mind. He felt her heart jump a beat and saw how her skin rose in goose bumps as frissons of lust and feeling induced by his proximity disturbed her. She tried to make him let her go.

Leon refused to let her go or tell her that her sister would also be a Hunt-mate—his brother Ronan had his sights on her, but she would not know for another three years, when she finished her studies. A charming young girl, she had caught Ronan's eye when she visited the Redlune Corporation behind her sister's back to beg for help. Things had only got better when he met Dana and his body told him he had met his mate. He had never thought to find his own mate placed conveniently as the Director of Garnet Trades, the gem company he had taken over.

He recalled that morning had been fraught with tension. A pleading Laura had come to ask confidentially that he keep Dana on in the company. "She believes in the company; she has put so much into it. I hope that you are an honourable man and will give her the opportunity to prove to you that she is an asset."

Her pretty face had been marked with worry and her love for her sister struck his vulnerable side as he thought of what his brothers meant to him. The company supplied precious stones to Europe, which was proving a fast growing market. To keep Dana on would be invaluable, as her knowledge of the company's core competencies made her pivotal in acquiring new markets.

"I will do so little one," he had assured Laura, who had looked at him with enough hero worship to have him clearing

his throat uncomfortably. He didn't add that the company was ideal for the Hunt, who needed to be away from human eyes once a year, to exercise their rites to keep their clan going in the dark regions of Northern Europe. New markets could be found close to the Hunt grounds so as not to arouse any suspicions about the Hunt gathering there annually.

Ronan had pleaded their case, too. He had turned to his brother in surprise; they had taken over many companies without giving a thought to who had been affected. What he saw told him clearly that Laura was to be Ronan's mate. He saw his characteristic reaction which marked the Hunt's identification of their mate: the change in the colour of the right eye, and extra incisors that caused the jaw to flex to accomodate its sudden appearance. As Lord of the Hunt, it was his duty to allow his clan easy access to their virgin mates.

His own mating was imminent. The dawning of the red moon was only a fortnight away and his son should be conceived to ensure the survival of their kind and ward off the fight for the throne from rival Hunt clans that were forever looking for new territory. The near violence of their mating, together with the pain experienced by their mates at first copulation, was a curse that had to be overcome with patience. Patience was not in Leon's vocabulary but maybe he would learn. He sighed, disturbed by thoughts of all that could go wrong if he wasn't careful.

The rapid pounding on the door brought his attention back to Dana. He pulled her closer and caught her face in his hands. He devoured her lips, ignoring her protests and

struggles till unrelentingly she was brought close to his chest. He let her feel his strength and the hardness of his arousal as he separated her legs. She began struggling and his Hunt instincts came to the forefront. He grabbed her in his arms, leaned over and whispered, "Ah, Dana, how you make me hard." He pressed against her and her virginal fears only added to his determination to make her his on the night of the red moon. She would give him a son and be his for all time.

Dana pushed back at him, furious now, and he laughed at her ineffectual struggles.

He released her and stepped back. He straightened her clothes, gently rubbed the back of his hand on her face, and walked away to the door without looking back. Yes, if this morning was anything to go by, he had an interesting life in front of him with his mate.

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Chapter Two

Dana stretched as she came out of her bath. She could not get rid of the image of Leon in her mind. He had seriously frightened her this morning with his insistence that she would be his wife-mate, as he called it. She wondered how she was going to work for Leon as his right hand with this threat hanging over her head. Was she afraid of Leon or her attraction to him? Never before in all her twenty-four years had a man ever made her feel sexually alive.

She had never been interested in a man this way, and it was uncomfortable to be so attracted that her body would not listen to her head. Everything feminine in her shied away from the overpowering dominant masculinity that Leon wore so naturally. The forced intimacy he had subjected her to was disconcerting and frightening to one who had, on principle, never had sex with anyone, as she was waiting to give herself to her husband. It was a pact that she had with her sister, Laura, who at twenty-one, had never had a real boyfriend.

She sighed. She missed her little sis, whom she wouldn't see for at least six months. At least she was doing well in the leading art school, if her enthusiastic emails were anything to go by. She slowly dressed and checked her image in the mirror—a slight figure with curves in the right places stared back at her. Her huge, green eyes and dark, glossy, Brunette hair were her only claim to good looks. The lilac summer dress with its thin straps complimented her light tan and she slipped on her sandals and checked her purse. Suddenly, she

felt something and looked around. The window showed that dusk had fallen, and the autumn evening was balmy so she dismissed her apprehension. She walked to her door and closed it, locking it behind her.

* * * *

The sound of a door closing brought Leon back to the present. He rose slowly and watched as she ran lightly down the steps. He moved silently and followed her as she went towards the town centre. He followed her to see if she was meeting anyone. The very thought of her meeting anybody made a flame of rage lick across his nerves and he forced himself to calm down. She walked along the river bank, sat down on the bench, and waited till she saw her friend, Darrell. He recalled his name from the background check that Ronan had done. They both began walking away. Leon followed, finding it hard to stop his morphing and forced himself to calmly watch as they met up with another couple.

They went over to a café and sat down. He moved at a speed which was a Hunt gift even without morphing and smiled at the group. He pushed his hand towards Darrell and introduced himself. "Hi, I am Dana's boss and fiancé. Hope she hasn't spoiled the surprise by already telling you."

Dana stiffened but Leon bent his head and claimed her lips in a deep kiss, which had the others clearing their throats uncomfortably. Leon let her go, but kept a possessive arm around her slim waist.

He said, "Don't be shy, darling. I am sure your friends understand about falling in love at first sight."

Dana tried to remove his arm but he would not let go. She looked up at him, clearly disconcerted by the current of heat that he was aware had run up her body. He dropped his hand and sat down next to her.

Darrell laughed delightedly and congratulated them while her other friends joined him. "Great, now I can concentrate on finding myself a girlfriend, leaving her to your tender mercies," said Darrell, laughing. There was more ribbing as they had a light supper and coffee.

* * * *

Leon was charming and entertaining and with every passing minute, Dana could see how he impressed people easily. *Oh, God, she thought, I am finding him so attractive and sexy. What am I going to do?* Even as these fevered thoughts rushed inside her head, the others took their leave, with Leon and Dana remaining behind. Immediately, Dana shot to her feet.

Leon stopped her by simply holding her hand and pulling her back to her chair. "I strongly suggest that you stay," he ground out. "We have a lot to talk about and believe me, you want to hear every detail carefully if you don't want your sister to suffer."

At the mention of Laura, Dana lost control. She got up and stalked off a little distance to ensure privacy, then turned back and shouted at him, calling him names and telling him in no uncertain terms that she would not allow him to threaten her sister's well-being and that she would kill him if he did so.

Leon laughed. "I am afraid no one can help your sister but yourself. She needs you to be with me or will be in terrible danger if you do not help me and do as I ask you to. It would make life comfortable, but not less difficult," he added with a chuckle. "You cannot begin to imagine the ways in which I would make you mine, Dana. Be prepared, for I will be making demands on you as I mark you forever as mine. It is good that you find me attractive. What you need is a small sample. In two weeks you will lie beneath me mating, while I establish the future of my race in the way only a Hunt can."

He suddenly waved his hand and she felt herself falling to the ground. "Where is this?" she cried, panicked.

He smiled arrogantly. "A parallel existence," he quipped. It was indeed that; there seemed to be a shroud around them, and while she could see their surroundings as the place a little away from the café, she was sure that nobody could see them. He lay with his full weight on her and placed one hand on the side of her face. The other lifted her dress and, holding her gaze, he bent and kissed her gently on the lips. Dana arched against him in angry protest.

He gently but firmly pushed her body back on the ground and said, "Listen, Dana, I am only preparing you for our first mating." His licked his finger and pushed gently, entering her.

She stayed still and closed her eyes; tears of emotion rolled down her cheeks onto his greedy, lapping tongue as his desire raged for her.

"I need you so; come be mine, Dana, and I give you my word that I shall be a good mate. A typical Hunt male only begins caring after the first breach. You have no idea what it

costs me to go against my base nature and show consideration." He bent his head between her thighs and licked her. She started at the quick dart of pleasure.

She did not know that even this consideration was rare in a Hunt male. He bit her inner thigh, and it burned.

He lifted his head. "That was the first step in ensuring that in two weeks your body would be fertile for breaching. This is usually done only on that night, but I hope this would ease our first time together. The aftereffects of the venom are not pleasant, but I don't know what else to do. I can't bear to think of your suffering. This venom would ensure that your body is open to my caresses for at least an hour. I am willing to conduct this experiment if it could save you from the curse of the mate."

Dana was almost lost in the waves of pleasure she felt as they undulated over her quivering body. She shuddered at the desire he evoked in her. He was seriously sexy and she wondered if he could read her thoughts as he smiled and whispered, "I find you sexy, too."

Dana blushed furiously. He looked at her, as if reading her thoughts, and laughed delightedly. "What's so funny?" she asked.

He laughed again. "Let me help you. You don't need to hide your desire for me. No, it does not make you immoral that you have had naughty dreams about me last night. Glad I could help your body find release."

Dana was startled and annoyed that he could read her. "Let go of me. How on earth do you know?" she yelled, pushing him away.

He growled.

Stunned, she looked at him and saw to her horror that one eye was turning a golden yellow. He smiled and his incisors dripped a faint golden fluid which he now caught on his fingertip and rubbed across her dry lips. A burning feeling spread over her and she waited with bated breath, wanting to scream.

"Don't scream," he said, lightly flicking his fingers at her nipples. "It won't do you any good and will only make me claim you in a way you wouldn't want." His voice was soothing, yet disturbing as he spoke. "I am the Lord of the Hunt. As the middle brother, I get this privilege. I have to protect my clan from other Hunt clans. We are about twenty-five such clans around the world. I have to find my lifemate and father a son, otherwise the rival clans can claim our territory and the Lord of that clan put to death. My brothers would be then treated as slaves.

"For generations, our family has led one of the clans and I am not going to lose that. You are my mate—every Hunt male has only one mate and she is human. If he cannot get her, apart from what I have told you, suicide and madness are the only other options. If the mate is not claimed by the end of two red moons, she is vulnerable to rival clans, who will kill her." While she looked at him, flabbergasted with the information, he told her about the cycle of the red moon and how important it was. "I have to claim you that night as this is the second red moon since my finding you as my lifemate."

When he said 'claim', she blushed. "It sounds like I don't have a choice. I may seem meek to you, but I am my own

person. Don't forget I have been managing the company for a lot longer than you know."

He nodded his head and explained. "This is like the prey complaining that the hunter does not give it a choice. For goodness sakes, till I claim you, you are prey to me and I don't need consent to have you and ensure the future of my people. My bother Conan's wife is pregnant and my success is everything."

"You define having sex with me success?" she asked indignantly.

He retorted, "Sex it is, till you become my mate. Enough of talking," he growled.

He impatiently lifted her knees, his fingers lightly brushing their undersides. He was relentless, all the time teasing her and licking the nape of her neck, giving little nips that gave her more of his poison.

Dana moaned in the exquisite pain-pleasure of arousal. She couldn't believe that she was allowing him these liberties in front of anyone who cared to watch even if Leon had told her it was a parallel existence.

Oh God, he was so breathtakingly handsome. Had he bewitched her? Was she in a thrall that she could feel this electricity of desire running through her veins? She pushed her thoughts aside as she saw him watching her.

He winked at her and her breath caught. He had read her thoughts again! "Stop that," she demanded.

He nipped her lips. "I do it as naturally as I breathe and don't command me. You can only do that after mating." He continued to mark her most erogeneuous zones. She was

flushed and her eyes were glazed with the drugging pleasure of the venom and his expert caresses. He finally relented enough to stop his seduction, but began to move down her body.

He began laving her now exposed nipples and let her feel his arousal, which seemed monumentally huge. He thrust in a mock intercourse rhythm, rocking against her, watching her all the time, but she closed her eyes, shy of her body's ready response as she rocked in pace with him, still afraid of the unknown. He caught her chin in his hand and forced her to look at him. She knew her eyes had grown at his playing with her body with such calculated abandon. She shied away from her uncontrollable attraction to him.

Suddenly, he cursed and got up, pulling her up behind him and walked her home. He followed her up the stairs and into the house. He watched her for a long time, his eyes unwavering. He abruptly turned away and left her house.

She quickly went in and collapsed on her bed, completely unnerved by her experiences and quite terrified of this unknown future that Leon seemed to be hinting at with his every word and action. Her body was humming with pleasure. In less than an hour, her sense of well-being was followed by a terrible craving for him. Her body shook with her need for him and she called his name, her hands grasping the bedsheet as she willed her body to not want him.

She did not know that Leon jerked to her cry as he lay on his bed in his mansion, staring at the ceiling cursing and pacing restlessly. She could not know how close he came to sacrificing his immortality for claiming his mate outside the

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cycle of the red moon. She did not sense his distress and his helplessness which would forever remain his burden while she was lost to everything but her own needs. She fell into a tired sleep that without her knowledge was echoed in his exhausted and frustrated turmoil.

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Chapter Three

Morning saw Conan and Ronan in Leon's office. All three had passed Dana's desk on their way to his office this morning and were relieved to see her there, but they were concerned by how fragile she looked and wondered if she was ill. Only Leon knew that she was reacting to the poison and told his brothers, who looked at him, dumbfounded.

Ronan said, "She must be suffering, damn it. Could you not have waited for the day of claiming?" Leon shrugged.

Conan was still speechless and finally blurted out, "This could make the claiming dangerous for her, not to forget. Do remember Senara's pain and how she suffered?"

Ronan was furious. "Really, Leon, what were you thinking? Now you have to inject her at least two more times with your poison before mating, otherwise she won't be fertile." Who knows if your experiment is going to be successful. By all that is holy, what if she still has to have three more injections on the claiming day? Can her human blood tolerate this concentration of venom?"

Leon closed his eyes and groaned. "I know, I know. I was able to leave her last night anyway, wasn't I?" he bit out. "She did suffer after I played with her and suffered a mate's curse. She stayed dry but for my saliva on my finger, and was in some discomfort, but at least this prepares her for the nightmare waiting for her. I hope that my poison will change the course of the breaching night. I can only try. It drives me mad that she has to suffer because of our species. Surely, as

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Lord of the Hunt, I should do everything to lift this curse. Damn it, this has to work! I'll be careful, so back off."

He sighed heavily and pressed the intercom on his desk. "Come in, Dana," he said. She walked in self-consciously, looking a little scared. He waved her to a chair, walked over to her, and placed his hands on her shoulders. Immediately he felt her begin to shake.

She stiffened, and her eyes filled with tears.

Leon halted. "I am so sorry for the discomfort that you had to go through last night," and he cursed and turned to Conan. "You explain it to her. I'm going out for a while."

* * * *

A bemused Dana heard everything from the brothers, who were gentle with her and calmed her fears. They pointed out that Leon was a wonderful man and had a big responsibility; he needed to establish his lineage and ensure the survival of the Hunt race.

Conan described the claiming as he had experienced it with his mate. "I could see with the human in me that she suffered, but the Hunt in me felt only triumphant. I only heard afterwards from Senara about the excruciating pain of it. Leon thinks that if he injects his venom thrice before the claiming, he can change the curse of the Hunt mate's claiming."

Dana tilted her head curiously. "Why was this curse given?"

"Ah, that's a sad tale. It is because one of the mates tried to kill her Hunt Lord after the claiming, because he had

kidnapped her. In those days, the claiming was normal and she would have only felt the pain of breaching."

Dana blushed to be speaking freely of such things with Leon's brothers. Ronan laughed. "No need to be embarrassed, little sister," he said. "The Hunt are very free in talking of sex."

Conan went on, "The Goddess of the Hunt cursed the Hunt mates for posterity for attempting this; she is our patron.

"The Moon Goddess?" Dana exclaimed.

Conan said, "Yes. Now, Leon has to inject you twice more. If he is right, and the experiment is successful, and I fervently hope it is, then you should not feel pain in coming together with Leon. If this does not work, I am afraid I can only ask you to be strong as after the breaching, you feel only pleasure."

"Just ask Senara," Ronan quipped. "He is not boasting!"

Conan turned to him. "Wait till you claim your mate and we will see if you are so cheeky."

Ronan paled and looked warningly at Conan.

"Is there something you are not telling me?" Dana asked.

"No, no," was Ronan's hasty response. "He knows I dread causing my mate pain. It is important that Leon's experiment works so we can avoid this whole pain curse."

Dana did not speak for a while. "Please tell Leon that I am sorry for being so afraid. I am attracted to him. I want to spend some time together with him. If he could only take the time to get to know me, I am sure it would make all this a lot easier."

Ronan smiled at her response and said nothing.

Conan quietly added, "It would be a good thing for you as you would be able to help Laura understand when Ronan claims her in three years' time."

Dana looked at Ronan, aghast. She was not sure that she was truly comfortable with her little sister feeling the disconcerting mixture of attraction and apprehension that she was experiencing.

"She is to be my mate," he confessed with a wry smile. "Of course, she will be free to pursue a career or further studies once she has given me a son. For three years our Hunt clan will be safe from challenges, and then I will have to bond with my mate. This final bonding of all brothers of our Hunt clan will ensure peace and prosperity for our people."

The Hunt got only sons and hence their partners were all human females, which also prevented inbreeding. "I give you my word that I won't touch her till then. I love her, you know. It's hard for Leon to say anything or be gentle now—that's the curse of the Hunt for the man. Though he can see and feel your distress, it only feeds his lust rage. We mate for life and after the first conjoining, you cannot ask for a better man."

Conan added, "Don't forget, you will have to have Leon's poison two more times from today." He got up and approached her, then gently drew her up. "I will ask my mate, Senara, to speak to you. Leon was such a comfort to her in the week after our first mating. I am sure that she will strive to be honest with you, and convince you that once mated, the pair do survive and are happy afterwards. Our family is very close and Leon, as its head, is wonderfully

considerate. I am sure you will find the happiness that you both deserve."

Dana, smiling, answered, "I can see that, Conan. I shall do my best to be worthy of Leon and you all. I guess I need time and the cool courage that Laura says I am famous for!"

They drove a tired and nervous Dana home and advised her to avoid animal protein, as this would only make her suffer more pain. After eating some salad, she crawled into bed and was only awoken by her mattress dipping as if someone had sat on it. She opened her eyes.

Before she could react with fear, Leon said, "It is only me. My Hunt genes allow me to teleport at will. I hope you understand a bit about our kind now."

Dana looked at him steadily and whispered, "I am still afraid."

"Of course you are, my love," he answered.

He pulled her over him and thrust his leg between her legs. He made her arch towards him as he gently caressed her tense body, and then, as if he thought she might protest, he rubbed quickly and suggestively against her.

Her breath caught in her throat and she closed her eyes. He bent and injected her throat with his poison, sucking her breasts hard, tonguing the nipples and teasing them relentlessly. He finally stopped and lay down beside her. "I hear from my brothers that you demanded we spend time together," he said. His eyebrow quirked as if wondering if she would clarify things for him.

She blushed. "I want to get to know you. It's important for me. I have always wanted to give my all to my husband. I

know that I can only do that if I trust him, respect him, and understand him." Leon sighed as he stroked her hair.

He gathered her quivering body and said, "Dana, I am not cruel; it is just the nature of our species. After we first come together, you will have no need to fear me and I will show you how much I can love. I will guard you with my heart and soul. For now, I am going to leave the work to my brothers and we can spend a lot of time together. I respect your wishes that we should get to know each other till you are settled in my family. I can do no less for my lifemate and can show you the real me, even if the Hunt is an indelible part of my being and wants to make your acquaintance too."

She nodded her head and tiredly let him pull her close to him. She whispered, "Leon, I know about the experiment you are trying. I do appreciate it and I will do my best for you—for us." She soon dropped off into the land of Nod, leaving Leon watching her.

Morning found her determined to go to work, but the phone call put paid to all that. The sheer, panicked look on her face prompted Leon to ask her sharply what the matter was. She responded dully, "Laura needs me—she's in the hospital. She has been rushed to emergency with appendicitis."

She looked at Leon, who jumped out of bed and made a few phone calls.

He said, "My jet is fuelled up and ready. Let's leave immediately."

When they arrived at the airport, the Lear jet was waiting with a very worried-looking Ronan. Recalling the curse of the

Hunt as described to her, Dana understood his concern as the Hunt men went mad and died if they could not unite with their mates.

They arrived at the university town and drove from the airport to the hospital. Laura lay in her hospital bed, coming out of the anaesthesia. Her appendix had been safely removed. Dana gently stroked her sister's forehead as she told a tired Laura how much she loved her.

Laura said weakly, "Thank you so much for coming and bringing Dana to me. It means a lot to me."

Both brothers cleared their throats uncomfortably and insisted they couldn't do less for almost family. While Laura stared uncomprehendingly at this strange declaration, Dana looked up to see Leon watching her closely and she blushed.

He smiled mockingly as if to acknowledge the disconcerting effect he had on her. His eyes held a secret message just for her.

Ronan lightly touched Laura's cheeks and both of them flushed. "There is something I wish to say to you. Rest now and when you are stronger, there will be time enough for all that."

Leon cleared his throat and drew Dana gently away. "We have to leave now."

Ronan understood and said, "Carry on, I'm going nowhere."

Dana looked at Leon and he whispered, "Don't worry. He won't do anything to her. He will wait. But I can't. Tell your sister we will see her in a couple of hours."

* * * *

Once they said their goodbyes, they took a taxi and drove for a while. Soon they arrived at the hotel they had been looking for and checked in. Even before the door closed properly behind them, Leon embraced her almost roughly. "This may hurt," he said.

He placed her on the bed and, for the first time, completely undressed her. He took a tube from his pocket and put some cream on his finger. He spread her legs apart, inserting his finger into her, then wiped his finger on her thigh. He lay gently on her, tilting her face towards him, and licked her lips. He sucked them gently, then slowly entered her mouth letting his moist tongue duel with hers.

Even as she felt her desire for him, she watched him closely. She was to be his mate. He had only shown her kindness. He was so very sexy and her heart pounded madly within her and seemed to call to him.

He stopped his intimate exploration of her mouth and looked at her.

Had he heard her call the previous night? she wondered.

"Yes, I did," he answered. Soon she felt a change in him; the golden eye called to her and she felt a fire race through her body.

She felt his Hunt growl within him in satisfaction and saw his arousal grew. He rolled off her and whispered, "Please lie still. I don't want my Hunt more excited. We'll take this venom injection slowly." As if sensing her need to cry he said, "Please don't cry; I will be gentle."

"If I cry, Leon, it will be because I am happy, despite my fears. There is something that makes me feel complete when I am with you." She could feel his heart, pounding in unison with hers.

Leon smiled. "You are already showing tendencies that mates show only after the claiming. This gives me hope."

"Thank you for bringing me to Laura," she said. "You know what she means to me."

Leon bussed her cheek. "No need to thank me. We look after our own."

He began tickling her, and they laughed together while she regaled him with stories of her sister and her in their youth. He chuckled as she described how a dog had chased Laura up a tree, and Dana had raced to save her. She had barked at the dog, which ran away, whimpering.

Even as they were laughing together, Dana turned towards him and kissed him fully on the mouth, biting down hard. He yelped and she laughed delightedly.

He pulled off his clothes and ran light touches over her body. He took his hard member in his hands and pushed gently between her thighs. "Shh. Don't tense, love. You know that I will only fully breach you in a week's time. Let's get comfortable together. Just get used to my touch."

Dana shook with emotion and apprehension. In a flash, Leon turned her on her stomach. He began sucking at her thighs, back, and the nape of her neck. As she braced herself, he inserted his huge penis into her once more, just lightly entering her while she froze.

"No, love, calm down. I am nowhere close to causing you pain. Trust me; I am bound to wait for the mating time," he said, and withdrew from her body. He put some more cream on his finger, slowly inserting it into her body, which instinctively protested his entry. He persisted soothingly, helping her relax, and pulled her up on her knees.

He put some cream on his penis and, holding himself steady, he pushed a little into her vagina. All the while, he spoke to her erotically, describing how he liked the feel of her female muscles clenching around him. "I can smell you. It intoxicates my very soul," he bit out against her back, the strain in his voice revealing the extent of his arousal.

Holding her tight against him, he let his lips roll back and his dripping incisors were revealed. He bit down quickly and sharply on the nape of her neck and the sudden shock of the ensuing second of pain had her screaming. She heard his Hunt roar his victory over her. Dana swooned under the effect of the venom and slept deeply.

Leon watched his sleeping mate-to-be. "I implore you, the moon Goddess, for mercy." As she slept, she did not see his worry for her which was etched on every inch of his face. When they woke up nearly four hours had gone by.

"We'd better hurry up," he said. "By the way, that was the final poison insertion. I am bound by Hunt law not to offer you any lubrication on our mating night, but I know that you will find your courage and be ready for the inevitable."

Dana hugged him and he held her, rubbing the back of her head soothingly. "I am so worried for you, my mate," he said.

"Please, let's take this one day at a time, Leon," Dana said as she gently rubbed his face. She felt his pleasure at her touch and to her embarrassment she began to get wet between her thighs. *What is the matter with me?* she wondered. *Am I turning into a sex maniac?*

"I only wish that were true," Leon whispered teasingly, biting her ears seductively, and both of them were surprised to feel her climax. Leon withdrew from her and watched her steadily.

"Do you think your experiment is working?" she asked breathlessly.

Leon said quietly, "I beg the Goddess, it is so."

They had five days together, having left Laura to Ronan's eager care. They enjoyed their exploration of the city. If someone had told her that she would enjoy his company so much, she would not have believed that possible. Leon and she shared a common interest in business and their natural wit and business acumen made for many interesting conversations.

"I can see that I will have an able partner-in and out of bed," said Leon wickedly.

Dana blushed becomingly and leaned into his hard body. She was delighted to note that Leon closed his eyes at the sheer pleasure of her touch.

They spent many intimate hours together in bed and when Leon got adventurous, Dana expressed her trust by exploring together with him. Her sexual attraction to him went a long way in making her comfortable with him, her fear of the mating night a distant memory. They spoke at length while

waiting by Laura's bedside too, and Dana had assured him that she was eager to become his mate. She had made it clear that she would continue to work actively and Leon had agreed without a murmur.

"I promise you, you will have no cause to regret mating with me," he said gruffly.

She certainly wouldn't regret his delicious love-making. She giggled to herself.

"Well, you are delicious to me," he said, reading her mind and he laughed at her shyness as she hid her face against his broad chest.

"You are a handsome man," she said. "Your gorgeous face, your sexy smile and your hot body make me feel I am lucky."

He laughed and shook his head. "You are beautiful from the top of your head to the tips of your toes and inside—where I have been and not." She flushed and he hooted with laughter.

After that, he began to withdraw from her and she knew that the thought of the inevitable pain he believed he would cause her was beginning to plague him.

It was Ronan who then joined her for meals and spent time with her when he was not at Laura's bedside. She had often noticed Leon looking at them. Ronan's wicked sense of humour and refreshing lack of respect for his two older brothers resulted in him often imitating them to a tee and had Dana splitting her sides with laughter. Dana had chosen to tell Laura that she and Leon were getting married and it was a business arrangement.

Surprisingly, Laura had not asked any questions. She had only remarked, "Seeing the way Leon looks at you, my dearest sister, it is very clear that he loves you. I am glad that I convinced him to keep you on. Oh dear, I should not have said that."

Dana smiled, "It's okay, Laura, I am glad you cared enough to ask Leon a favour and I know he kept me on for the right reasons."

Dana sighed and prayed that it was true because she had grown to love him for his warmth, his generous nature, his sense of fun and fair play. His patience with her in bed, and his care in explaining as he prepared her for the mating day made him all the more loveable. Even though he had been motivated to experiment by the desire to cause her no pain, she was increasingly apprehensive about that night to come and wished she were not such a wimp.

"Don't call my mate a wimp," growled Leon.

"Please get out of my thoughts, Leon," she yelped, and he roared with laughter. She saw Ronan watching this byplay and if his face was any indication, he looked happy.

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Chapter Four

Dana found comfort in Ronan's friendship and the caring way he was with Laura. Ronan was demonstrative and had even hugged her as she had shed tears when leaving Laura at her university. He had quickly planted a kiss on Laura's lips, and Dana had seen the astonished look on her sister's face as she seemed to sense something in that kiss.

Leon had just hugged Laura and promised to bring her over for a visit shortly. They said farewell to Laura and flew back.

Leon sat quietly reading a business newspaper. He seemed far removed from the present.

Ronan looked thoughtful and turned to Dana. "When we land, Senara will be waiting for us. She said that she will take you shopping and get to know you."

Dana nodded.

Leon turned to look at her and she blushed. "Counting the days, are you?" he asked mischievously and laughed loudly when Dana turned an attractive shade of peach and flushed all over.

"I don't need to count, Leon. I know there are only three days left." She would have to listen carefully to Conan's wife, Senara, and hope for the best.

When they landed, Dana walked through the airport doors and saw Conan with a startlingly beautiful woman. This had to be Senara. She moved towards them and was enfolded in a warm hug by Conan, who made the introductions. After the

brothers had spoken together, Senara and Dana walked towards the waiting car. Apart from a casual wave and a tight hug which communicated his tension about the mating night, Leon had let her leave, for which she was very grateful.

Be at peace my love, she thought and was not surprised to hear the whisper of his, "You too, my love."

Senara pulled out of the parking lot and swung the car onto the highway. They talked shop till they reached the uptown shopping area. Senara took her to an exclusive-looking boutique and within the hour she was outfitted from top to toe in the latest fashion.

"When will I ever wear these clothes?" she protested.

Senara laughed. "Don't worry. There will be a whole load of social occasions a fortnight after your mating. The rival hunt clans will have to be invited to show the mate of the Lord of the Hunt."

They went to the hairdresser's. Here, her hair was much admired and given a slight trim and texturing, until it hung in gorgeous waves around her face. She looked at herself in front of the mirror and had to confess to a delighted Senara that she was very satisfied.

They drove to a salad bar and sat waiting for their orders to be taken. Dana looked about her and slowly but surely, she began to feel panic overtaking her. She must have made some noise because Senara turned towards her, looking at her quizzically, and pityingly, it seemed to a distraught Dana.

She leaned forwards and said, "I have never been a good liar, so let me be straight. The mating night is hellish and you need to be strong, emotionally and physically. If there is any

consolation, it is that your mate will never ever be violent again. The love-making after this is so beautiful and the caring bond that is built is like nothing you can ever imagine. Believe me, after weeping for a week, I never wanted to parted from Conan again.

"Let me tell you honestly about your first mating. You will be in terrible discomfort as you will stay dry, so try not to resist when he touches you. On the night of claiming, he will be bigger than normal as the Hunt genes dominate, making him brutally selfish in wishing to claim his lifemate. He will take you several times and be locked inside you for hours; your body will protest the strain. He will be determined and your pleas will have no effect on him till the twenty-four hours are over. From then on it will be like normal intercourse. You will be free for a week before he reestablishes his connection with you. At the end of the week, you will be pregnant after the first normal intercourse. After this you will need each other frequently for eternity." She took in Dana's reaction and laughed. "Yes, the Hunt are immortal, and as mates we, too, become immortal after the first coupling."

Dana sat in shock and Senara patted her hand. They walked to the car. Immortality was a daunting but exciting factor. Laura, too, would have this once she was claimed. This would mean that they could live their lives without fear of losing loved ones, unlike their parents.

Senara went on, "Once a year, the Hunt gather in the North to partake of a ceremony to bond together as one huge clan. This is only for three days and as Leon will be mated, it

will ensure that he is welcomed eagerly for ensuring the future of the race by finding his mate and mating with her within two red moons. Let's get you home and rested. God knows you will need your energy in the coming days." They drove to Dana's house and after dropping her off, Senara left.

That night, after packing her things, Dana lay in her bed and wept for the past, missing her parents and her beloved sister as she faced the next day on her own. She knew the day after that would forever mark the future path of her existence. She cried herself to sleep and dreamed weird dreams that would not let her rest. The Goddess of the Hunt appeared in her dreams and seemed to be smiling mysteriously.

* * * *

The day had arrived. Dana dressed up in one of her new outfits. In a pale cream chiffon dress that lightly brushed her ankles, and lovingly caressed her fine figure, and tiny roses in her hair, she felt like a fairy princess. She hoped that she deserved her fairy tale with her prince. Her pale cream shoes with their spaghetti straps and stiletto heels made for a quiet elegance, which was carried through by her single pearl earrings and a gold chain with a single teardrop pearl on it—both gifts from her parents that she cherished. She clutched her bouquet of cream and red roses in her hands, and the fine green ferns that fell delicately from the bouquet against her cream gown only added to her sylvan grace.

Senara and Conan came to pick her up. "Oh, how beautiful you look," Senara said.

Conan added, "You do the Lord of the Hunt proud."

Dana thanked them. With misty eyes, she gazed out of the window as they drove her towards the mansion that all three brothers shared and where they would keep their mates for all eternity.

As the car approached the front portico, Dana was happy and overwhelmed to see her sister Laura waiting there. The car drew to a stop and Laura opened the door. They hugged and Dana felt more tears and a lump in her throat.

"I'm glad that you are getting married today, Dana," said Laura, and escorted her through the door.

Ronan stood waiting patiently and then enveloped her in a mighty hug. "Welcome, sister. We are happy to have you in our home, which is also yours now."

In the big lounge, Leon stood looking serious and debonair. He walked over to her and kissed her lightly on the lips. He traced a light finger down one jaw. He brushed his hands around her neck and then lightly cupped her face, staring into her eyes for a long moment.

"Remember," he said, "I love you and am truly blessed to have you as a mate. You give meaning to my existence. I only ask for you to understand the Hunt side of me. Please don't hate me for that."

Dana was in heaven on hearing him declare his love so readily.

"I, too, love you. I am scared of what is waiting for me. But your gentleness with me makes me confident that we can come through this together. I hope I don't embarrass you."

Leon hugged her tightly and she saw that his eyes glimmered like diamonds, before one of them turned leonine—a reminder of the Hunt within him.

Conan and Senara came and they stood in front of the couple. Leon and Dana exchanged their vows. The simple ceremony, in its quiet solemnity, made Dana breathe shakily, her eyes bright with tears of joy. She was to be a wife and mate soon. Laura hugged her sister and so did Senara.

Ronan came forward and added his congratulations. As she watched, he took Laura and led her out through the door. "We are off to the local posh restaurant," said Laura with a smile. "Ronan says it's time for me to try the real lifestyle instead of a mere student existence."

Smiling weakly at her, Dana waved back.

She turned to see Conan watching her. He gestured to her and she walked towards him as Senara walked Leon away.

"I am terrified Conan," said Dana helplessly.

He hugged her and without speaking, led her to a door.

"Go through and wait there," he said quietly. He pressed her hands comfortingly.

When Dana entered the room, she felt immediately that she had crossed over into the Hunt world. There was a kind of veil that prevented her from entering fully.

Soon it parted and Senara came through. She gave her a cup. "Drink deeply," she advised. "This may give you the energy to cope with your mate's demands."

With shaking hands, Dana lifted the cup to her lips and drank what tasted like elderflower juice and very sweet tea. Senara left, taking the cup with her. The veil disappeared and

Dana could see through to a huge bed. The pale silk bedspread looked unthreatening and she walked towards it, looking down at the bed but not daring to let her mind dwell on what would happen there soon. The moon outside was red and while Dana stared at the moon wonderingly, she felt his presence as the hairs on the back of her neck reacted.

Suddenly, Leon was there. His one eye was a golden hue and he smiled at her, letting her see his lengthening canines. He came over to her and held her tightly. To her utter dismay and humiliation, Dana began fighting him as she tried to run away. The space around the bed closed in on her and she could go nowhere.

He held her tightly and stroked her arms, not saying a word; surely he must hear her frantic heartbeat and willed hers to slow down. "Take deep breaths," he said as she trembled in his hold. She felt delicate in his arms and her fears made her stomach ache.

* * * *

Outside the room, Conan rubbed his mate's shoulders comfortingly as he felt her shuddering at the memory of their mating night. "It is only one day in an eternity of happiness my love," he whispered. "I know the very memory turns your blood. Let's go to our room then, and let me seduce the memories away," said Conan as he gently lifted his mate in his arms and carried her away towards their bedroom, where no noise of the Lord of the Hunt claiming his mate could be heard.

* * * *

Dana felt Leon lifting her through her overwhelming panic. He placed her on the bed and she began to protest. Her struggles were telling of her sheer nerves and Leon just looked at her.

In his deep gaze, she could see his Hunt. He lay beside her and growled in her ear, "I have been waiting for too long and the thought of making you mine excites me. Your fear upsets me and I really do not know how I can help you. Soon, the Hunt will come out fully, Dana, and then there is nothing either of us can do."

Dana braced herself and hugged him. Reaching a shaking hand to his face, she traced his lips lightly. "Do your worst," she said. "I am ready."

He kissed her looking as if he might protest at her using 'worst', but she shushed him. "Let's get this over with."

"Once my venom penetrates you, it will begin," he warned and before Dana could even think to brace herself, he bent and bit down on her shoulder, hard. She felt the venom and then all hell broke loose. Her body filled with a jolt of lust and it winged through her body, churning her blood and making her want Leon with an uncontrollable passion. She moaned in delight as he caressed her breasts and tweaked her nipples ruthlessly. As she squirmed in her desire, he began entering her deeply. She flinched and begged him for lubrication, fearing the pain of the curse.

He didn't bother to respond. Dana knew his mating lust rage made him deaf to any pleas as all he could do was to give in to his Hunt which needed to be inside her.

Even as Dana felt him entering her deeper, he cursed and suddenly withdrew from her. He was poised above her and his eyes glowed. His hands ran down the sides of her body, his lips kissing her from the jawline to the curve of her breasts. After what seemed to be hours of this erotic torment, no part of her had been left untouched by Leon's heated caresses. Suddenly, he nipped her ear and Dana reacted by murmuring in pleasure. Leon's body reacted to it as he shuddered in the mating frenzy, all the time softly biting her till she swooned.

He revived her by lightly kissing her eyes, and began gently rocking on her again till his penis entered her even more deeply. Then he used his finger to soothingly flick the little hood between her thighs, and watched as she helplessly accepted his invasion; hearing Senara's voice in her head prevented her from struggling. He removed his fingers and threw back his head, thrusting hard, stopping at her maiden veil.

He withdrew his manhood and pressed in again, inserting his huge organ into her tight body. Her virgin body's struggle to contain him seemed to excite the beast and she whimpered as he roared his pleasure. He continued this sensual push and pull motion, always stopping short of breaching her.

Dana was happy to see that he did not claim her immediately. She was inundated with pleasure and her skin was sensitive to his every touch. The contact with his body made her want to bite him and take her pleasure from him. She writhed under his caresses and Leon acknowledged her desire by kissing her deeply on her lips.

After a while, her passage was so sore that Dana was exhausted. He kissed her hard till their lips were numb, and then instructed her to go to sleep while he lay heavily on her, playing with her breasts. He suckled her and she moaned with his poison still zinging through her system, haunting her dreams, and when she woke, she was not alone. He lay by her side, still touching her body, his fingers moving all over her.

The sensory overload in her body kept her nerves on edge and had her pushing him away. She could not have believed that such pleasure existed. No one had told her that she would feel like this. Was this the Goddess of the Hunt's mercy? Maybe it was only the taking of her virginity which would be painful. Otherwise, this mass of acute feeling was driving her body to a the fine edge between extreme pleasure and pain. She knew now what would tumble her over the edge.

Suddenly, she heard Leon growl loudly. "Dana," he said through his teeth. "The time has come. Breathe deeply." Before she could prepare herself, Leon turned her on her stomach and placed her on all fours. He grabbed her waist from behind and thrust between her thighs all the way into her vagina—her wet, well-lubricated womanhood. Her maidenhead offered only pitiful resistance to his huge penis when he entered her.

She moaned at the brief sting of pain but soon her screams of pleasure deafened her ears while sending him into a mindless frenzy. He thrust deeply and she knew that his Hunt found her moist.

He screamed. She did not know if the Hunt was furious at being deprived of her pain or enjoying his sexual pleasure. Dana felt her womanly core become only more wet with the sexual penetration. The Lord of the Hunt went even deeper till her face was crushed into the pillows. This sent Dana over the edge and she struggled against this overwhelming pleasure.

It was almost more than she could bear.

She tried to twist away, seeking relief. She turned and saw her Hunt. She marvelled at his sheer beauty. He looked at her and she fancied she saw Leon's concern. Even before she could say anything or tell him that she wasn't dry or in pain, the Hunt screamed and howled as he bit her on the back of her neck. His penis swelled even more and she felt herself being taken again and what must be his semen start to seep through. He thrust continuously, for hours it seemed, and then came in massive spurts into Dana. The curse of the Hunt mating had indeed been broken.

He pulled out of her, her muscles letting go of him with resistance. Leon turned her on her back. She saw his face and he saw hers. She saw him smile at her.

"You do me proud," he mouthed against her breasts as he stroked inside her with his fingers. He began to enter her again. He grabbed her hands in one of his and placed them way above her head. She had no choice but to lift her body against it. He chuckled in glee at her helplessness and the unwittingly convenient position.

"Look at my eyes," he growled. "Watch me as I claim you." She lost her gaze in his as he looked into her very soul, it seemed.

He placed his hands around her waist and thrust into her fully. He made long, deep, hard strokes, all the time watching her. "My mate, how lovely you are. This excites me and my Hunt likes it. Are you in pain?"

Dana whispered through dry lips, "No, my Lord, your love is all I feel; you broke the curse."

He grimaced through his ecstasy. He kissed her lips hard, and pushed his tongue deeply into her mouth, mimicking his strong thrusts into her body. He pulled out of her and walked to the other side of the bed. He brought her the same drink that Senara had given her earlier.

She drank thirstily. "Leon, I need to stand. My back is killing me. Please let me do this."

He lifted her to her feet and asked her to stretch. She did so, feeling every muscle protest. Leon watched her and strongly rubbed her back to ease her discomfort, but she knew his Hunt was not finished.

He pushed her against one of the bedposts and asked her to hold on tightly. He pulled her lower half towards him. He entered her in one massive thrust, eliciting a helpless moan from her. He withdrew and lifted her onto the bed.

"I have to take you one more time and then it will be over. I love you," he whispered. "I love you with all that is in me. I am sorry, love. You have to brace yourself now. It is outside my control. My Hunt is not patient but raring for the finale."

Before her shocked eyes, he shed his human appearance for a thing of beauty, but recognisable as nearly human. His canines were dripping venom, and his one eye was shockingly

golden. He was much taller, far more muscular, and his manhood looked impossibly bigger.

Leon rasped, "On your back or on your face?"

"On my back. I want to see you," she whispered through lips swollen with passion. Leon turned towards the table and gently fed her more sips of the tea.

He acknowledged her request and his eyes devoured her. The Hunt lowered himself on her and lifted her legs over his shoulders till she was completely open to him. She felt his eyes on her ravaged body, and knew part of him had enjoyed her helplessness as the final session began.

Dana had been told this final onslaught would be the most painful; she hoped not as the curse seemed to have been broken. His penis secreted a fluid that made her vagina tight and she knew it was to ensure the cursed dryness of a Hunt mate's first copulation. His penis struggled to enter her and he had to use the strength of his arms to hold her shoulders down as he entered her.

The penetration was exhilarating. It gave only intense, mindless pleasure as her body produced even more lubrication. Dana looked at him steadily and panted heavily. "Leon, Leon, my Lord of the Hunt, I love you. Claim me, make me yours forever!"

She felt the power of the Hunt hormones pour through his veins as he prepared her for his progeny with pounding strokes that had him coming, his voice raw in his pleasure. Finally, he let her climax. Her wet passage enabled him to reach so high into her that she couldn't tell where he ended and she began. The depth of penetration brought him to the

mouth of her womb. After three hours of claiming her, he came with such force that the bed moved towards the wall and her body was lifted off it in response to his violent, uncontrolled thrusting, her climax mingling with his as they raced towards the pinnacle and fell down together. He gently nibbled at her throat and suddenly collapsed on her. It was over and Dana fell into a deep sleep.

* * * *

Dana slowly opened her eyes. She had survived and felt so sore. She wanted a bath. No sooner had the thought crossed her mind than Senara entered the room. It was clear that the room had been cleaned while she had been dead to the world. She placed a thin sheet on Dana.

Conan walked into the room and, despite her protests, carried her to the en suite and lowered her into a warm bath filled with rose petals. Dana winced and couldn't stop a faint cry from her lips. The sound travelled to an exhausted Leon, who had bathed and dressed and was seated in the corner of the huge en suite. He looked tired and his eyes moved over her greedily.

Dana was completely pale and almost lifeless. Senara walked up to Leon and gently touched his shoulder in a gesture of comfort. Dana was now sitting quietly, letting the water soothe away her emotional stress caused by her fear of the curse. Her physical exhaustion caught up with her and she began sobbing, not quite knowing why. Her tears moistened her cheeks.

Dana let Conan lift her out of the bath into the soft robe he held out to her. She put on the robe and tried to calm herself and hoped that Leon understood her sensitivity. A lot had happened. Her body and spirit were overwhelmed by all the emotion and passion that had been wrung out of her.

Conan calmed her and to her absolute shock, she began crying even more and loudly, her distress filling the en suite. Leon walked towards her and Conan stopped him with a glare.

Leon growled, "I cannot take anymore. Don't forget I am the Lord of the Hunt. I am changing our law regarding this. I love her and I can control myself. Let me carry my mate for I shall not mate with her for a week." He took Dana from Conan.

Dana's weeping had been reduced to sobs and Leon hugged her close. "The potion in the bath will help you sleep, my life," he whispered encouragingly as he carried her to their bedroom.

Dana said, "Oh, Leon, you broke the curse. On behalf of all future mates, I thank you. I think I am crying because I am so happy and overwhelmed by my love for you."

He placed her gently and lay down beside her, drawing her body gently into his arms. "I love you, too. You are safe, my mate. Sleep and heal. Your crying is a way of mourning the loss of your virginity. It is natural." He gently kissed her red, bruised lips.

She noted Senara and Conan leave quietly. She'd heard Senara say that she couldn't believe that the curse was broken.

Conan's murmured words to Senara of comfort and promises of her pleasure brought a glowing feeling of hope to her own heart.

When Dana woke up after nearly ten hours, she was still rather sore. Again, she was given another bath and Leon fed her. He whispered words of love all the while. "I am relieved to see that you're smiling and teasing me like before."

The days passed quietly and with every day, Dana and Leon enjoyed quiet, intimate moments for their love to commune together. Dana enjoyed touching him freely as they spoke about her mating experience. Their love for each other was expressed in laughter and silence, in gentle exchanges of lovers' words and in the solid bond of friendship.

On the seventh day, they joined Conan and Senara for dinner. They enjoyed a wonderful spread and Leon took Dana for a drive in the new car he had gifted her.

"You are forever buying me gifts. It is not necessary," she explained to him patiently.

He laughed. "I love indulging you, in bed and out of it." She blushed fiercely and he only laughed away her protests.

As they neared the coastline, Dana saw that Conan and Senara were driving behind. They all stopped at the local Italian café for coffee. When they walked in, Dana saw Laura and Ronan.

Dana cried with happiness. "Oh, Leon. thank you," she said, all smiles.

"Anything to see your enchanting smile," was his flirtatious response.

The sisters were thrilled to be reunited. "It must have been a wonderful honeymoon. You look sensational," said Laura.

Dana flushed as Leon laughed loudly. "You could say that," he said wickedly.

"Love conquers all," said Leon cryptically. Dana just hit him as she blushed.

Soon it was time to leave. Ronan was flying Laura back to university. "I love you, my dear sis," said Laura as the sisters hugged tearfully.

"Enough of the waterworks," said Ronan. "You both will be meeting frequently, if I have anything to say about it."

"You are not to disturb her from her studies," chided Dana and was entranced to see both Ronan and Laura blush.

"Rest assured, my new sister, I respect that her studies are important," said Ronan and quickly kissed Dana's cheek.

Hearing a growl behind her, both Ronan and Dana turned in surprise towards Leon. Laura said, "Did someone hear a growl or am I hearing things?" This set them all off laughing and Ronan dragged her away, completely embarrassed.

"Ooh, how thrilling, my Lord," teased Dana and had her hair twiggged by a still irritated and possessive Leon.

Senara said, "Don't worry. After the first week, he won't do that."

"I just find it so sexy," Dana said, and earned a smart tap on her bottom from Leon.

* * * *

When they reached the Hunt mansion, Conan and Senara were not behind them.

"We have the house to ourselves," said Leon. He carried Dana over the threshold to their bedroom. He whispered softly, "You know I would never lie to you. There is nothing to fear. We are equal in the bedroom as in all aspects of our life. In fact, I am hoping you can teach me what gives you much pleasure and I will be happy to oblige."

Leon watched his mate as she slept peacefully with his love bites clear on her neck. They had shared much tonight. She had found pleasure in his embrace and could finally leave behind any worries about the curse of the Hunt mates. He held her tightly close to him. Theirs was now a love for eternity, and he sighed as he thought of how his sons would carry on his line. He fought hard against Morpheus' call.

Senara, too, was pregnant and enjoying the early stages of her pregnancy. Once Ronan claimed his mate, their Hunt clan would finally be safe. He began kissing Dana, who responded, and soon the conflagration of their passion left them helpless in its grasp. True to his word, he proved a sensitive and generous lover as he demonstrated what could only be described as exquisite, sensuous and skilful lovemaking. When they climaxed simultaneously, their cries filled the mansion and the future of the Hunt was ensured.

Love had certainly not come laughing by for these mates but it had definitely arrived. Outside, the moon climbed steadily in the night sky.

* * * *

Ronan lay on his bed. The third Hunt brother needed every trick in the book to woo his mate. He was going to use every

one of them. His mate would see reminders of him everywhere for the next three years. Ronan laughed as he lay watching the moon and tongued his canines as his leonine eye glinted. He would certainly claim with joy what eternity had planned for him and the unsuspecting Laura. He must speak to Leon. He hoped that the Lord of the Hunt had been successful in his experiment. He wanted no pain in his claiming his mate.

In the early hours of the morning, the three brothers met outside their house and bared their teeth as they lifted their faces to the moon, shouting out their call of the Hunt. It was a signal that said all was right for this trio of brothers, and Hunt clans elsewhere were warned off under a golden moon. The Goddess of the Hunt looked on and smiled at the thought that her protégés would soon complete the magic trio circle and ensure their continuance.

Dana smiled in her sleep and her dreams were woven with strands of eternal happiness, sounds of children laughing, and the handsome visage of her Lord of the Hunt.

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About the Author

Katina was born in Chennai, July 8, 1963, South India and is now a Danish citizen.

She lives with her husband and two sons in The Faroe Islands which are a part of the Danish kingdom and lie north of the Shetland Islands.

She is a lecturer in English and Business Studies and believes that teaching is a calling. She suffers from posthumous love for poet John Keats. If she ever had a fantasy it would be being captured in a time warp with a thirty-year old Clint with flint eyes Eastwood who is madly attracted to her—an impressionable 23 year old!

Katina loves dreaming, writing poetry, and reading romances-and began reading Mills & Boon at the age of thirteen. She kept a record of the titles read for fifteen years and then foolishly threw them away. She believes that in the midst of "toil and strife," there is and should be time for romance. There is nothing better than reading a romance novel lying on her husband's lap while he is watching TV with the kids happily playing their games.

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A hearty cheer to supportive friends who have not laughed at my endeavours.

Fellow romances fans—let's drink a toast to Venus. Long may her reign continue!

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