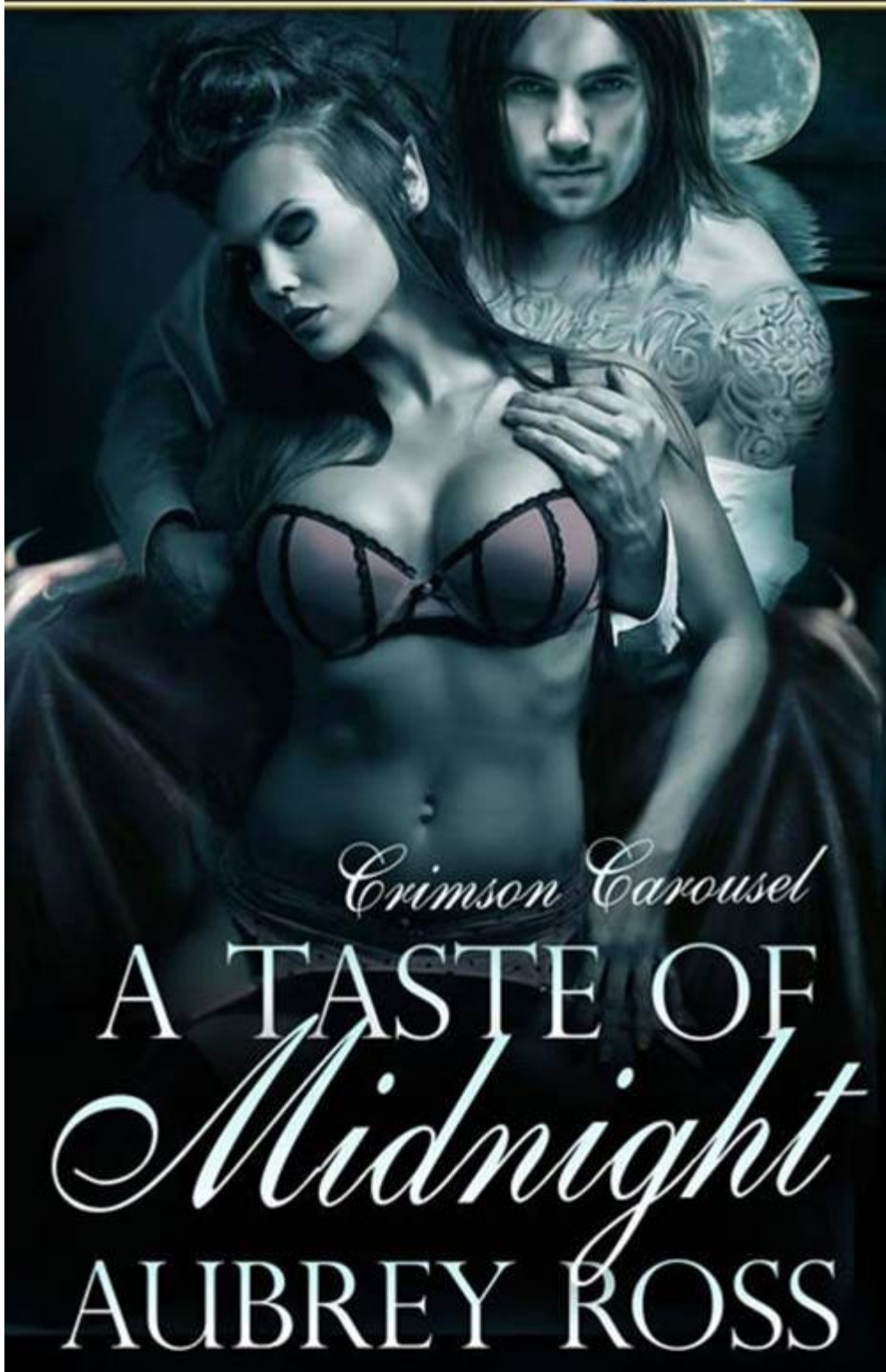


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Crimson Carousel

A TASTE OF
Midnight
AUBREY ROSS

A Taste of Midnight

Aubrey Ross

Crimson Carousel, Book Two

While a stand-alone, A Taste of Midnight is best enjoyed when read in series order.

Brenna Skyler, Mistress Air, chooses ambition over love. To become an Elemental, the most exalted position among the *Unseleighe Sidhe*, Brenna has to end her scandalous affair with Phillip Noir, a vampire. Although she never stops loving him, she is resolute in her decision, until now. A vampire is preying on Dark Elf females. And it takes a vampire to track a vampire...

Phillip is thrilled when Brenna comes crawling back to him. He's not used to playing the jilted lover, yet he's never forgotten the only woman who ever really touched his heart. He doesn't mind destroying a rogue vampire—it's the right thing to do—but Brenna needs a lesson in humility. She'll pay for her callous rejection with her supple body. And they will both enjoy her punishment!

Reader Advisory: As in A Taste of Twilight, the decadent Faelon, from an upcoming Crimson book, once again provides the needed third when Brenna and Phillip create a powerful blood bond through a sexual ménage.

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A Taste of Midnight

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A TASTE OF MIDNIGHT

Aubrey Ross

Chapter One

Ireland, 1738

Brenna Skyler stood on the riverbank and spread her wings. Cool evening air wafted across her body, soothing her senses and caressing her face. Her ordeal was almost over. Only five weeks remained in the required year. She had moved among mortals, overcoming every obstacle with cunning and skill.

Those who depend entirely on Sidhe magic are not worthy of the power.

The memory of her mentor's statement made Brenna smile. Thirty-five more days and she could return to the *Unseleighe* realm triumphant, secure in her accomplishment, ready to begin her formal training as a soul seer.

Releasing a long, steady sigh, she lifted her face and savored the silvery moonlight. Like all nocturnal beings, the *Unseleighe Sidhe* preferred the night with its sheltering darkness and velvet tranquility.

A scream rent the peaceful atmosphere, snatching Brenna from her revelry. Fury's acrid stench filled her nose. She shuddered as the noxious smell assailed her. Muffled voices reached her ears, but she was unable to make out their words. Desperation and fear combined with the anger until she could hardly breathe. She heard snapping branches and the unmistakable smack of flesh hitting flesh. This was no ordinary confrontation. Someone was fighting for their life.

Turning toward the scuffle, she furled her wings and ran.

"You vicious bitch!" Anguish caused the man's voice to hitch. "You will not force my hand."

A woman laughed. Brenna focused on the sound and hurried through the forest. At the edge of a small clearing she stopped, sheltering her body behind a massive tree. Two figures faced off in the clearing, one male and one female.

"Transform him, Rafael." The woman motioned toward a dark shape scarcely discernable against the leaf-strewn earth. "If you don't transform him, I will."

"No!" Rafael lunged for her, but the woman vanished, reappearing behind him like a specter. Brenna blinked, her heart hammering in her chest. Were they ghosts trapped in the moment of their death? She'd heard tales of such things.

"His heartbeat is slowing." The smug assurance in the woman's tone made Brenna want to slap her. Phantom or witch, this female was maddening. "You haven't much time."

Rafael knelt and gathered the battered body of a younger man to his chest. The second man pressed both hands to his throat as blood seeped between his fingers, soaking his tunic and coating his arms. Brenna covered her mouth with her hand, shaken and horrified. These were no ghosts. She knew the smell of blood.

Loosing abilities she'd suppressed for a year, Brenna studied the others. Rafael's soul strands pulsed with vitality. The colors were vivid, each strand richly textured. Threads of carnality and ambition were perhaps too prevalent, but his basic nature was good.

Brenna looked at the woman and shuddered. Her soul strands were frayed and thin, the intertwining threads nearly unraveled. Corrupted... Hers was an unstable soul.

Golden light gleamed from the woman's eyes. "Do it!"

"I will not force this on him." Golden light flashed from Rafael's eyes, and uncertainty tore through Brenna. They were obviously the same. Whatever this was, it had nothing to do with her. "The choice is Phillip's, not mine," Rafael insisted.

"The choice is *you* or *me*. Choose!" As the woman moved forward, her eyes burned brighter.

Phillip made a weak, strangled sound, drawing Rafael's attention. "You." He mouthed the word, his head lulling to one side.

With another infuriated roar, Rafael opened his mouth and bit into the side of Phillip's ravaged throat. Brenna staggered back. Blood drinkers! She grasped the rough tree trunk as the world spun around her. They were blood drinkers. The ancients spoke of these creatures, but none existed in the *Unseleighe* realm.

"That's right." The woman circled the men, moonlight revealing her cruel beauty. "Save him, transform him, make him strong." Each phrase sounded more sarcastic than the last.

Rafael raised his head, fangs bared as he growled. Brenna couldn't drag her gaze away. This wasn't something she was meant to see, but sorrow pulsed from the stranger, immobilizing her.

Rafael glared at his tormentor. "Why?" Slicing his wrist with the tip of one fang, he lowered his arm to Phillip's mouth. Phillip grabbed his forearm with both hands and Rafael cried out.

"Because you'll fail. You always fail." She crossed her arms over her chest and smirked. "He'll die in your arms as she died in mine."

"How was her death my fault?" He panted, tugging against Phillip's hold.

"Careful or he'll drain you." She laughed. "Phillip was always stronger than you. He'd never be content as my father's puppet!"

Phillip drank long and deep while Rafael mourned. His regret made Brenna weak.

Grabbing the back of Phillip's hair, Rafael pulled Phillip's mouth off the gaping wound in his wrist. "Enjoy the spectacle, Natalie. It's the last thing you'll ever see." He leapt into the air as Phillip collapsed on the ground.

Natalie lunged toward Rafael. They collided in midair. Twisting her upper body, she slammed him back against a tree. He grunted then hissed, light bursting from his eyes. She screamed and shuddered, losing her hold on his arms. He shoved her backward then kicked her in the stomach, using the tree for leverage.

Brenna shrank into the darkness. She must go, leave before they sensed her presence. Stories of blood drinkers were whispered in the night. They were powerful and *dangerous*. Association with such creatures was forbidden. Even seeking knowledge of them was discouraged.

A low moan drew her attention to Phillip as he writhed in the leaves. He wrapped his arms around his belly, his entire body shaking. Brenna started forward then stopped. What was she thinking? This man meant nothing to her. She had no reason to get involved. An animalistic snarl escaped Phillip. He tossed his head, long, dark hair streaming across his face.

Natalie cried out. Rafael had her pinned against the ground. She arched and drew up one knee, narrowly missing his groin. He grappled with her, capturing one wrist only to lose his hold on the other. Despite her slender body, she appeared strong and agile.

Phillip pushed to his knees and tore off his blood-soaked tunic. Brenna saw him clearly for the first time. Prominent cheekbones and a square jaw were softened by his full-lipped mouth. She swallowed hard. The wound on his neck was now a dark line, bisecting his skin from side to side. Compelling yet tragic, he fascinated her. His chest expanded with each ragged breath, his hands braced against his knees.

His soul strands came into focus, sparkling with hypnotic light. She pressed her hand over her pounding heart, captivated by the beauty – and the familiarity. She knew this pattern. The first time she'd ever seen soul strands they had formed this design. Trauma had emblazoned the image on her mind. She couldn't be mistaken, but it was impossible. Everyone with this arrangement was dead.

She tilted her head, studying the strands from different angles. This made no sense. He wasn't even *Sidhe*. Or was he? Had the blood drinkers captured a Dark Elf? She'd presumed he was one of them, some sort of novice.

He sank to all fours, panting harshly, his head lowered, hair streaming to the ground. Indecision tore through Brenna. A soul seer's primary purpose was reading

soul strands. If the pattern was authentic, she must do everything in her power to save him. If she so egregiously misread his strands, she'd be useless as a soul seer. Either way, she must act and act now.

The blood drinkers had reversed position. Natalie straddled Rafael's chest, her knees immobilizing his arms as she swiped her long nails across his face. He bucked and twisted, avoiding the worst of her scratches, yet unable to break free.

Brenna unfurled her wings and swooped across the clearing, snatching Phillip off the ground.

"No!" Rafael's cry echoed as Brenna took to the air.

* * * * *

What have I done?

Brenna stood beside the cot on which Phillip lay, her hands buried in the pockets of her gown. This was not the homecoming she'd imagined. By returning to the *Unseleighe* realm before her year elapsed, she risked dishonor and shame. Even her family would be shunned for her cowardice.

But she'd saved him from the blood drinkers. Was that not worth the cost?

This cottage was abandoned, buried deep in the forest surrounding D'Arcy Aiden. They should be safe here. She'd see to Phillip's recovery and avoid the city for the remaining weeks in her required year. She wasn't comfortable with the deception, but what choice did she have?

She'd done the right thing, the *only* thing given the situation. If her mentor penetrated her mind shields and sensed her return, she'd deal with the repercussions. Igniting the lamp on the rickety nightstand with a negligent wave of her hand, Brenna studied Phillip's pale face. Bruises marked his skin, and his wrists and ankles were abraded. How long had he been at the mercy of the blood drinkers?

His long lashes stirred for an instant then he opened his eyes. She took an instinctive step backward. He glanced around in confusion then focused on her face.

His eyes were a shade somewhere between amber and brown. Raising his hand to his throat, he slowly licked his lips.

"I know you're in pain. Unfortunately, I'm not a healer." She couldn't even offer him water. The cottage was little more than a hovel. She'd sent a cleansing pulse through the room when they arrived, but there hadn't been time for anything more.

Rolling to his side, he swung his legs off the bed and pushed to a sitting position. "Where...am I?" His voice sounded raspy and hoarse. She was surprised he could speak at all.

What should she tell him? He might not welcome her interference. Still, she had to learn more about his soul strands. Did he realize he was *Unseleighe Sidhe*?

"Where's Rafe?"

"He was still battling the female when I brought you here. As soon as you're stronger, I'll return you to the clearing if that's what you wish. I just—"

He sprang to his feet, wrapping one arm around her with unbelievable speed. She struggled against his hold, trying to free her arms or unfurl her wings. Golden fire ignited within his gaze and Brenna went wild. Twisting and arching, she fought, damning her stupidity.

"I won't hurt you." Before she could do more than gasp, he lifted her and placed her on the bed, covering her with his big body. She writhed beneath him, terrified and furious. Her fists pounded his shoulders, but he hardly noticed. If she could just unfurl her wings... "I won't hurt you." She caught a glimpse of his fangs, a direct contradiction to his sincere tone.

He turned her head to one side and bit into her neck. She screamed, more from fear than the momentary sting. His presence eased into her mind, powerful and commanding. He released a wave of calm and her struggle ceased. Her shields were useless against his influence. She trembled and closed her eyes. Her training had barely begun. How could she hope to combat him?

I must feed or I will die. Do you understand?

Her hands clutched his shoulders as he pressed her down into the feather mattress. He slipped one arm beneath her neck and held her face with his other hand. She couldn't move, could barely breathe.

I'll take only what I must. The hand holding her face gentled, stroking her skin. If I give you pleasure while I feed, energy will saturate your blood. Do not fear me.

His fangs infused her body with heat, hardening her nipples and speeding her pulse. She rebelled against her instantaneous response. Only the depraved would find this...pleasurable. She panted and clenched her teeth.

He released her neck, but the sensations continued to build. His eyes gazed into hers, luminescent and mesmerizing. "Answer me truthfully. Are you a virgin?"

Tension banded her chest and she gasped for breath. He meant to fuck her, and she couldn't seem to resist. Fear rolled through her, combining with desire, then spiking into fear again. Her clit throbbed and her pussy ached. "Will you release me if I am?"

"No." The hint of a smile curved the corners of his mouth, sending shivers down her spine. "Why did you snatch me from the clearing?"

She swallowed hard. "To save your life."

"Are you still resolved to that end?"

She knew it was a trap and yet she nodded.

"For my transformation to stabilize, I must have blood and the essence of life. Are you willing to give them to me, or would you rather watch me die?"

Despite the urgency of his need, he apparently wanted her willing. She licked her lips. His physical strength exceeded hers. He could easily force this on her. She had accepted responsibility for his life when she chose to "rescue" him.

"I don't want you to die," she whispered.

"And I don't want to hurt you." He lifted his weight off her, supporting himself on his forearms and knees. "What's your name?"

"Brenna."

“Kiss me, Brenna. Let me taste your mouth.” He lowered his head and pressed his lips over hers. *Open for me. Inhale my scent.*

His voice was a seductive purr in her mind. She parted her lips and drew his breath into her lungs. This was madness. She should return him to the clearing and fly as far away from him as her wings would carry her. But his soul strands bore the pattern of an ancient *Sidhe* line. How could he be both blood drinker and Dark Elf?

Don't think. Just feel.

He brushed her bottom lip with his tongue. His fingers splayed against her neck, his thumb stroking the underside of her jaw. She ran her hands up his arms, across his shoulders and down his back, marveling at the sleek, muscular definition that shaped his torso.

Taking the kiss deeper, he explored her mouth and inhaled her breath. His lips moved over and against hers, his tongue sliding. She shifted restlessly, stunned by the ease with which she responded to a complete stranger. His life hung in the balance. She tried to reassure herself with the thought, but she didn't know him, had no way of testing his claim.

His hand slipped beneath her skirt, ascending along her thigh with obvious purpose. She jerked her mouth away from his and turned her face to the side. “I can't do this. I...”

His hand cupped her mound, his middle finger effortlessly finding her clit. He moved to her side, half on and half off her body. His arm supported her neck while his fingers continued their skillful play between her legs. Moist breath wafted against her neck. His teeth grazed her skin and his tongue traced her pulse.

In spite of her apprehension, she grew wet beneath his touch. His fingers slid between her folds and his thumb circled her clit. Her pussy tightened, anticipating the fullness and the demanding thrust of his cock. He teased her opening with his fingertips, accelerating her need for penetration. She arched, trying to bring his fingers into her core, but his leg held her down.

A sensation more intense than physical desire flared to life deep inside her. She struggled to define the feeling. Urgency, power and trepidation combined in a dizzying rush. What was he doing? This was unlike anything she'd felt before.

He pushed two fingers into her core, twisting his wrist so he could stroke her clit with his thumb. She clenched her inner muscles, pressing her lips together to keep from crying out. Her breasts felt heavy, swollen, and her undergown abraded her sensitive nipples. He wasn't even touching her there.

His fangs scraped her throat then sank into her flesh. Brenna screamed, more from surprise than the momentary sting. Even though he'd warned her of his intent, part of her hadn't believed him. His fingers slid in and out of her pussy, his thumb accenting each firm stroke.

The steady suction of his mouth intensified the pleasure building low in her belly. She should be repulsed, but this was how his kind lived, what they needed to survive.

A vivid image formed inside her mind. He knelt between her thighs, gloriously naked. She watched as he guided his cock to the entrance of her body. Long, thick and heavily veined, his shaft stretched her to the point of pain. He pushed half his length into her trembling body then withdrew all but the flared head. Grasping the backs of her knees, he impaled her with one forceful thrust.

Sensations burst within her and cascaded through her. Reality mixed with fantasy. He appeared above her, not beside her. His cock pounded into her instead of his fingers. The steady pull of his mouth prolonged her pleasure. Wave after wave of sensation spiraled through her body. Pinned beneath him, filled by him, she closed her eyes and soared.

Hot, aching need pulsed through Phillip. Her taste lingered on his tongue even as he withdrew his fangs from her flesh. *More!* He wanted more. Pain lanced through his brain at his slightest movement, so he held perfectly still. Her scent surrounded him, fueling his desire.

He eased his fingers from her slick pussy and opened his mouth over the wound in her neck. *His*, she was his. Her blood flowed through his veins, intoxicating and powerful. Stroking the wound with his tongue, he savored her taste without taking more from her.

“Will this...make me a blood drinker?”

Ignoring the pain, he opened his eyes. “I’m not strong enough to transform anyone. I was starving. You fed me. No harm will come from this exchange.”

He relaxed beside her, propping his head on his hand. Subtle colors gleamed in her night-black hair—blue, green and pink. He’d never seen anything like it. Spread across the bed in shimmering waves, the thick strands would reach her hips, perhaps her knees. Her vivid blue gaze met his without hesitation or guile. God, she was beautiful. Another burst of possessive passion spiked through him.

He wanted more than a shared vision. He wanted to feel her snug passage squeeze his aching cock as he drove her to orgasm after orgasm. His bloodlust was appeased—for now—but his physical desire was no less demanding.

Stroking her soft cheek with the backs of his knuckles, he studied her delicate features. A pert nose and faintly pointed chin were eclipsed by thick-lashed eyes. “Why did you take me from the clearing?”

She pushed down her skirts and averted her gaze. “Was I wrong to interfere?”

“I don’t honestly know.” He considered the question further as he studied her profile. He’d spent the past eight weeks at Natalie’s mercy. She’d tortured him, abusing him in ways he’d never speak about. Yet she’d always stopped just short of taking his life. “I was no use to Rafe as I was, but he is likely to put himself at great risk trying to find me.”

“Then he survived the confrontation with the female?”

He nodded. “I still sense him.”

“What is your relation to Rafe?”

"He's the nearest thing to a father I've ever known, but we'll come back to Rafe. Start at the beginning. What sort of being are you and where are we?"

"This is the forest realm of the *Unseleighe Sidhe*." When he made no indication that he recognized the term, she clarified. "I'm a Dark Elf. We are half a day's journey from D'Arcy Aiden, our capital city."

"What was a Dark Elf doing in the realm of mortals?"

She fidgeted, scooting back so she could lean against the wall. He sat as well, crossing his legs in front of him and resting his hands on his knees. The pressure in his groin wasn't going to lessen until he fucked her and fucking her was out of the question until he understood the situation. He might as well accept the discomfort.

"I applied to become a soul seer," she began. "Before the formal training starts, each applicant must spend one year in the realm of mortals. To prove our worthiness of the power, we must demonstrate our ability to survive without it."

"Have you jeopardized your training by becoming involved with me?"

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear—her *pointed* ear. "I don't know. I thought I had a valid reason, but it's far more complicated than I thought."

"Because I'm a vampire?"

Her gaze shot back to his. "Vampire. Is that how your kind is known in the human world?"

"Vampires do everything in their power not to be known in the human world."

She stared at him for a long, strained moment. It was almost as if she wasn't looking at him so much as around or through him. Were his eyes glowing again? He thought his bloodlust was under control.

"I obviously misunderstood what was happening in the clearing." She motioned toward his neck. "You were wounded. I thought the woman was trying to kill you."

This dainty elf had saved his life. He owed her an explanation at least. "I met Rafe sixty-three years ago. I never knew my father. My mother died and I had no other family."

"How did you meet him?" She drew her legs up under her full skirt and wrapped her arms around her knees. Her voice was soft, conversational, but she kept her expression carefully guarded.

"I tried to rob him." He smiled, remembering the incident. He'd thought he was so clever, so skillful and brave. He'd never seen anyone move as fast as Rafe. "When he realized I was starving, he offered me a position as his apprentice."

"What is Rafe's trade?"

"He's a musician, an accomplished composer. I was rather in awe of him." More memories rolled through Phillip's mind. Rafe was part father, part friend and part mentor. "He had no real need for an apprentice, but I was enthusiastic and had an aptitude for music." He shook away the memories. "This is all beside the point. Vampires don't age and it didn't take me long to suspect he was—different, something more. I confronted him with my suspicions, and he launched the second phase of my education."

"He taught you about vampires?"

"Yes or, more accurately, he left me with Faelon who saw to my education."

"Who is Faelon?"

He had no interest in spending the night talking. Desire still simmered within him. All it would take was a touch, a smile or a certain gleam in her eyes, and he would lose control. "There are two kinds of vampires, those who are transformed and those who are born. Faelon is an organic vampire."

"Did he transform Rafe?"

"Yes, but we're drifting off course." God, he wanted to touch her. Her lush, rosy lips begged for more attention. The scent of her arousal lingered in the air, making him

ache to taste her. "When I decided I wanted to be transformed, Rafe suggested we form a blood bond first. This arrested my aging and allowed me to consider a permanent transformation. It was during this time that Natalie captured me."

"The woman in the clearing."

"Yes." He stiffened. Brenna didn't need to know how long he'd been held captive while Rafe frantically searched, or the horrors he'd suffered at Natalie's hand. "As you saw, she used me to draw out Rafe. She knew Faelon intended to transform me and she wanted to prevent that from happening."

"She wanted Rafe to transform you instead?" Her brow creased as she finger combed her hair out of her eyes. "Why would she care who transformed you? I don't understand the significance."

Phillip scrubbed his jaw with his hand. Why did everything have to be so complicated? Each of her casual questions led to another story. "Rafe attempted to transform his lover and she didn't survive the change. He has refused to attempt a transformation ever since. Natalie knew this."

"She wanted you to die so Rafe would torture himself with guilt."

He nodded. "But she didn't count on a Dark Elf whisking me beyond her reach." He paused and looked directly into her eyes. "Why did you do it, Brenna? There's more to this than compassion."

She paused, obviously debating what to say. He couldn't blame her for not trusting him. He'd held her down and fed from her neck.

"I can see soul strands," she said in a hushed tone.

"I'm unfamiliar with that term."

"The various components of a person's personality manifest in visible threads surrounding their body. These strands weave together in patterns that define who they are. Each pattern is unique, but members of the same family often have similar designs. I'm able to see these patterns."

"This is how you see others, as a mass of interwoven threads?"

She smiled. "I have to intentionally look at their soul strands. I don't see them all the time."

"What does this have to do with me?"

"Your soul strands bear the pattern of a very powerful *Sidhe* family."

What nonsense was this? He narrowed his gaze on her face. "I'm human, or I was until Rafe fed me his blood."

"You never knew your father. It's possible he was *Unseleighe Sidhe*."

"The *Sidhe* can beget children with humans?" As if his life wasn't convoluted enough, she wanted to twist things further. "I know for a fact my mother was human."

"Do you?" Challenge shone in her wide blue eyes. "Many *Sidhe* appear completely human if that is their want."

He didn't care who his father had been or if his mother was other than human. The past had no bearing on the present. He shook his head at the inaccuracy of the thought. No one could outrun their past, but none of it mattered in the here and now.

"You thought you were rescuing a Dark Elf," he said with a smile. "Instead, you became food for a vampire."

Chapter Two

Brenna crawled off the bed and walked to the window. Opening the shutters, she stared out into the night. *Food for a vampire*. Her mind echoed the phrase. She couldn't look at him without remembering the pleasure he'd unleashed in her. Echoes of sensation tingled through her still. Yet it had been more than physical pleasure. She'd felt a stirring deep inside, an awakening nearly as profound as she'd experienced the first time she'd seen soul strands. Why had Phillip's touch affected her mystic powers?

"What troubles you?" His warm hands came down on her shoulders and she gasped. She hadn't heard him move, hadn't sensed his approach. He chuckled. "Are you always so skittish?"

Affronted by the question, she turned to face him, momentarily dislodging his hands. "I'm not skittish. You move like a wraith."

"I move like a vampire." His teeth flashed in the moonlight, his fangs retracted. "You're no longer afraid, which pleases me. Still, your inner conflict is escalating."

"You're rather sure of my feelings." The accuracy of his observations annoyed her.

"I sense the conflict quite clearly, but I'm unable to determine the cause." His fingers curved around the back of her neck, his thumb caressing. "Why are you so upset?"

"I felt an odd sensation when you entered my mind."

One eyebrow cocked and his eyes sparkled. "You'd never felt that sensation before?"

"I'm not talking about the orgasm. I told you, I'm not a virgin. What I felt wasn't sexual. I...when you... Oh, forget it."

"What you experienced was the formation of a blood blond. The mind link will only be active for as long as your blood is in my body."

She accepted his explanation with a stiff nod. Still, the sensation had been so similar to her mystic awakening. She wasn't sure he understood what she meant.

"Then explain it to me."

Shrugging off his hand, she moved away from the window. His presence lingered in her mind. She'd suspected he could hear her thoughts, but he didn't need to be so rude about it. "There was a mystic battle for control over the forest realm. The Sutrotha Masters challenged the Raonull Order. My father was Sutrotha."

"How long ago was this?"

"Fifty-seven—no, fifty-eight—years. I was still a child." She glanced at him, gauging his expression while carefully concealing her emotions. Sorrow echoed through her heart whenever she thought of these long-ago events. He already had a full arsenal of weapons at his disposal. She didn't need to offer him another.

"Go on." He clasped his hands behind his back, his expression shrewdly assessing.

"Father came with his commander to say goodbye before the battle. Everyone suspected the losses would be great. He held my mother as she wept, and Commander Eronn distracted me with playful banter. Eronn was the most intimidating man I'd ever seen, yet his eyes were kind." Eyes the same golden-brown as Phillip's flashed through her memory. She'd been so focused on Phillip's soul strands she hadn't recognized the similarity. "As Eronn spoke with me, specks of light erupted around his body. The specks became threads and the threads interlaced. All the while I felt an intense vibration pulsating through me. We call this a mystic awakening. It was the first time I'd seen soul strands, and I can remember every color, every detail of the pattern."

"This pattern is what you see when you look at me?"

"Yes." With a deep, fortifying breath, she pushed away the past. "None of the mystics survived the battle. I think that's why the memory is so clear. That was the last time I saw my father, the last time he smiled or touched my face."

Phillip cupped her cheek, surprising her with his gentleness. "The similarity you see in my soul strands has caused you to equate me with these events. It's not surprising that the blood bond reminded you of this awakening."

She didn't argue. She'd never experienced a blood bond. Perhaps it felt exactly like an awakening. Somehow she didn't think it was that simple, but she let the discussion end.

"Is there a stream nearby?" He brushed her cheek with the back of his knuckles.

"Yes. Why?"

"I have blood in my hair. I want to bathe before we continue."

"Continue?" Despite her best effort to sound calm, her voice squeaked.

He traced her lips with his index finger as his gaze focused on her mouth. "Surely you didn't think I was finished with you. The night has barely begun."

Anticipation quickly smothered her spark of annoyance. The lamplight made his eyes appear more gold than brown. She stared into their depths, captivated by the hypnotic gleam. The golden glow had subsided. What she sensed now was the man, not the vampire. Intense and overtly seductive, the man was no less dangerous.

"I should take you back to the mortal realm." She glanced away, missing the warmth of his hand an instant after he lowered his arm. "You obviously need no rescuing."

"Don't be confused by the lull." The sudden bite in his tone drew her attention back to his face. Tension hardened his expression and his gaze narrowed. "The hunger will return."

Moonlight accented the fatigue etched into his features and compassion swelled within her. Turning her attention to his soul strands, she caught her lower lip between her teeth. She couldn't be wrong about this. The pattern was identical.

"Are you afraid we'll be seen? Is that why you hesitate?"

She shook her head. "Our location is secluded and I'm shielding our presence from my mentor. I'll show you the way."

The night embraced them with cool air and fresh scents. Stars twinkled in a velvet black sky. Forest creatures scurried through the underbrush as barren branches swayed. Brenna inhaled deeply. She'd missed the peaceful grandeur of her homeland.

"You said your time of testing was not yet complete. How much longer were you supposed to remain in the realm of mortals?" Like the night surrounding them, his voice was hushed and velvety.

"Five weeks." She looked straight ahead, afraid her expression would reveal more than she was willing to share.

"Is the risk greater if we return, or if we wait out those weeks in the forest?"

We. Her heart skipped a beat at the word. He'd connected them as if it were a foregone conclusion that they'd stay together. How much was she willing to risk for this man? "It's hard to say. Each time we pass through the veil it increases the chances that my mentor will sense my presence. Simply remaining in this realm does the same."

"What will happen if your mentor realizes you've returned?"

That was the least of her concerns. Her shoulders sagged beneath the weight of her decision. She'd brought a blood drinker into the *Unseleighe* realm.

"Blood drinker is accurate, but not very flattering. I'm a vampire, a close biological cousin to a human male."

She looked at him as they neared the stream. "I can read your mind just as easily as you read mine. We consider it an invasion."

"I apologize." He inclined his head. "I've always been able to speak mind to mind, but the transformation has greatly increased my abilities."

"Well, stop playing with your new toy. It's rude." He chuckled and she swept her hand toward the stream. "Your bath awaits."

"Aren't you going to join me?"

She unfurled her wings and transformed her gown in the blink of an eye. "I've been known to enjoy a long, relaxing bath, but submerging myself in a cold stream holds no appeal. My hair would take days to dry."

"I've seen Rafe turn into mist and reform in clean clothing. Unfortunately, I haven't figured out how that toy works."

"You said you can sense Rafe. Are you able to communicate with him?"

"Not yet. I'll keep trying." He tugged off his boots, shed his pants and strode into the water. "Damn, that's cold."

Trees lined the stream and moss-covered rock formations were scattered about the forest floor. Brenna walked to a large, relatively flat rock and sat facing the water. Phillip went about his bath as if she weren't there. Tall and lean, his body misrepresented the strength he'd exhibited. Curiosity drew her gaze downward.

Her breath hitched and heat gathered low in her belly. The image of his naked body was indelibly imprinted on her mind. He bent and gathered water in his cupped hands, inadvertently displaying the part of his body that made her heartbeat accelerate. Even without being fully erect, his shaft was impressive, both long and thick. She indulged in a naughty smile, imagining all the things she could do with that fabulous cock. He ducked beneath the water and she sighed.

Dark Elves weren't considered mature until they'd lived at least one hundred years. She licked her lips and waited for his dark head to break the surface. In her sixty-seven years, she'd had three lovers, two *Sidhe* and one human. None of them affected her as powerfully as Phillip, and they had yet to make love. He called to her on an elemental level. Perhaps it was the *Sidhe* blood he refused to acknowledge, or perhaps she was drawn to the danger in him. All she knew was her soul quickened whenever she looked at him.

He rose from the water and stalked toward her. Gleaming in the moonlight, his hair flowed away from his face and down his back. His features were cast in high relief,

angular and fierce. Their gazes locked, and her breath lodged in her throat as her body ached for his.

“You better take off that dress or it’s going to get wet.”

Phillip felt her gaze moving over his body and heard her approving thoughts. She didn’t understand the attraction surging between them, but she wanted him as much as he wanted her. She opened her mouth as if she’d protest then shook her head with a ragged sigh. Scooting off the rock, she faced him and dissolved her gown.

Desire slammed into his gut with staggering force. Dressed, she was beautiful. Naked, she defied description. Moonlight silvered her pale skin and intensified the iridescent quality of her hair. Elegant shoulders sloped down from her long, slender neck. The night wind teased her nipples, drawing them into tight, puckered peaks. Her breasts were high and round, nearly too full for her narrow torso. He glanced at her smooth mound and long legs before returning his gaze to her breasts. Better take this one step at a time or he’d disgrace himself.

“Unfurl your wings. I remember you swooping through the clearing like an avenging angel then I lost consciousness.” After a brief hesitation, her wide, scalloped wings fanned out behind her. Moonlight passed through the delicate membrane, causing color to undulate across the surface. Awed, he stretched out his hand only to close it into a fist before actually touching her.

“Go ahead.” She smiled, warmth shining in her eyes.

He stroked the firm, flexible upper edge then trailed his fingertips along one delicate scallop. Soft and velvety. He sighed. For some reason he’d expected feathers. “And I thought your hair was beautiful.”

“Thank you.” She moved closer, placing her hands on his chest. “Shall I take you for a ride?”

He chuckled and wrapped his arm around her waist. Her wings caressed his forearm as they moved. “Not tonight. Tonight I want to explore you.”

She retracted her wings and looped her arms around his neck. "So, explore."

Their mouths came together in a fevered kiss. Her fingers combed through his hair while he followed the delicate indentation of her spine, tracing the soft crease between her round ass cheeks until his fingers encountered the heat between her thighs. His cock rose against her belly, echoing the frantic rhythm of his heart. He longed to cradle her against his chest, yet he needed to crush her beneath his body and feel her moving over him—and he wanted it all at the same time. She excited him, challenged him and attracted him. He pulled back and gazed into her eyes. Was it just the transformation making him wild or —

She pulled his mouth back to hers. *Don't think. Just feel.*

Happy to accept his own advice, he framed her face with his hands and delved into the warm interior of her mouth. She returned the kiss with equal fervor, flooding his senses with her desire. Her longings were less defined than his yet easily as intense. A sense of wonder simmered beneath the breath-stealing urgency.

Separating their mouths, she peppered kisses across his features, down his neck, and onto his chest. Her descent continued and he curled his toes. He'd imagined her mouth pleasuring him since he'd awakened in her care. The wind played through his hair and he looked up at the stars as her hands found his hips, holding him steady as she slipped to her knees.

His cock bucked and arched, making his enthusiasm clear. She circled his flared cock head with her tongue then flicked her way down his shaft. He closed his hands into fists. Such sweet torment. Her lips brushed his balls, her breath warm and teasing. Cupping his sac with one hand, she worked her way back up to the ultrasensitive crest.

"Look at me," she whispered.

He looked down and felt the strength drain from his legs. At the same time, masculine power surged. It was a dizzying combination. Kneeling and naked, like an obedient supplicant, she kissed the head of his cock. Her gaze locked with his. He growled and took her face between his hands. A bead of moisture formed as his

excitement built. She caught it on the tip of her tongue. Her eyes narrowed as she savored his taste.

Panting harshly, he raised his eyes to the sky. "I can't watch you or I'll come."

"So, come." She swallowed his entire length an instant later, dragging a low groan from his throat. Her tongue flicked over him and her lips maintained a firm grip as her throat worked to accept his length.

Rich autumn scents drifted on the breeze and the stars winked down at him. Her fingers dug into his hips and she murmured softly, the vibration an additional stimulation. His fingers drifted across her soft skin, brushing her hair back from her face. She sucked greedily, her selflessness thrilling him more than he cared to admit. He had to see her, had to watch his cock sinking into her mouth. Focusing on her flushed face, he pumped faster. Her cheeks drew inward and her gaze glistened in the moonlight. Tingling heat erupted in his balls.

Her eagerness moved him yet surprised him. She'd adjusted to each development with amazing composure while keeping her emotions controlled. He touched her mind and found a hint of confusion mixed with passionate demand. Her senses blazed, but she didn't fully understand the frenzy.

His cock bucked against her tongue, and he tried to pull out of her mouth. She clutched his hips and sucked, her gaze commanding his surrender. He pushed to the back of her mouth and released his seed down her throat. His vision blurred and his body shuddered with spasms of pleasure.

He glanced around for a place to continue their love play. Why hadn't he waited until they returned to the cottage to start this? She pushed him backward, guiding him onto the rock where she'd watched him bathe. With a chuckle, he sat and pulled her between his thighs. He cupped one breast, teasing the nipple with his thumb, while he suckled the other. She combed her fingers through his damp hair and arched into his caresses.

Tremors shook her slender frame. The harder he sucked, the more violently she trembled. The scent of her arousal filled his head and reawakened his cock. "I want to taste you. Let's trade places."

"I have a better idea." Passion thickened her voice and gleamed in her eyes. She spread her wings and ascended.

He nuzzled her belly then gazed at her smooth mound as her wings took her higher. Wrapping his arms around her thighs, he pulled her against his chest, pressing his face to the juncture of her thighs. The rhythmic movement of her wings rocked her against him. His lips caressed her soft outer lips while his tongue searched for her clit. She jerked violently and he knew he'd found his target. Tight, firm circles soon had her moaning. It wasn't enough. He needed to drink in her pleasure and feast on her passion.

Easing away, he parted her legs and bent her knees. She looked at him in confusion then grinned, adjusting her position in the air. He angled his head and guided her onto his mouth, her legs rested against his back. The subtle rocking created by her wings only added to their pleasure. She hovered over his face, offering him full access to her creamy pussy.

He traced her slit, moaning as her taste coated his tongue. She cupped her breasts and canted her hips, her wings gently flapping. His hands steadied her as he licked and sucked, relishing her response. She wiggled and cried out, her cunt pulsing around his tongue.

Her first orgasm struck and her thighs tightened against his cheeks. She started to fly away, but he pulled her back into place. Flicking his tongue against her clit, he started a new cycle of arousal. He craved her cum just as much as he longed for her blood. The essence of life, the power of creation. Her taste, her smell, her cries of passion all fueled his desire and solidified the newly formed blood bond. He lapped up her cream, sucking and stroking her with his tongue as she found release again and again.

“Stand...up!” She gasped out the order.

He stood and cupped her ass with both hands, guiding her downward. Heat and moisture trailed across his abdomen until their bodies aligned. He pushed into her snug passage and they both cried out. This wasn’t how he’d imagined taking her. He wanted to cover her, thrust into her as she writhed beneath him.

“Next time,” she murmured.

Clutching her to him, he prevented her from moving, needing to savor the union for as long as he could. Her inner muscles squeezed in demanding ripples. He just held her, reveling in the heat and the firm grip of her pussy. Banding her hips with one arm, he freed his other hand to touch her. He stroked her thighs and her hips, explored her ribs and her breasts.

“I need to move.” She flapped her wings, tugging against him.

“Not yet.” He held her firmly, refusing to be rushed. They might not understand the exact nature of the connection, but they both knew this was special.

Her thighs tightened around his hips and her cunt squeezed his shaft. Ignoring the stimulation, he reveled in the feel of her soft skin and the response of her nipples beneath his thumb. He knew he wouldn’t last long once he started moving, so he prolonged the pleasure in the only way he could.

She squirmed. Her body arched as her hair fluttered on the breeze. “I need to come.”

“So, come.” He chuckled and eased his hand between their bodies. Loosening his hold just enough to allow his touch, he stroked her with two fingers, one on either side of her clit. Her pussy throbbed in response to his relentless stimulation.

Her pleasure flowed across their bond, flooding him with sensation. Tension gathered within her, the intensity nearly painful. Her wings flapped faster. Her breasts quivered as she panted for breath. Releasing her hips, he let her drift back until only the head of his cock remained inside her, then he pulled her forward with one hard yank. She pulled back. He slammed her forward, never leaving her completely.

He braced his legs apart as their movements grew more aggressive. Her nails bit into his shoulders and she cried out with each forceful thrust. His pleasure built alongside hers. He passed the urgency across their mind link. She gasped and her cunt rippled with frantic spasms.

Throwing his head back, he thrust to the hilt and released his seed. His pleasure triggered hers and they shuddered together, clinging to each other as sensation rolled through them. He sank to his knees. She collapsed against his chest and furled her wings.

* * * * *

Three weeks passed as they indulged their carnal desires. Despite Phillip's assurance that the stirring inside her was part of the blood bond, Brenna wasn't convinced. Each time she took him into her body, the awakening grew more intense.

"We can't avoid the topic forever." Phillip lay between her thighs, her legs hooked over his shoulders. He'd just brought her to a shattering orgasm with his mouth. "Even though the distractions are delightful, we have to decide eventually."

Brenna groaned, covering her face with her hands. "Can't we talk after?"

"There never seems to be an after with us. We've hardly left this bed since we arrived."

"Except to play in the stream." She lowered her hands and smiled.

"You're avoiding the issue." He knelt then sat, drawing her up in front of him. After arranging his legs on either side of her hips, he wrapped her legs around his waist.

Since arriving in the *Unseleighe* realm, they'd shared stories of their past and spoken of loved ones. They'd laughed and slept naked in each other's arms. Yet each time they approached the question of what was to come, they found something else to occupy their time.

"I don't know what you want me to say." She lowered her gaze to his chest. "The transformation has stabilized. There's no real reason for you to remain."

He raised her chin and looked into her eyes. "If I wanted to remain, would I be tolerated?"

After a heart-rending moment, she shook her head. "To my knowledge, there has never been a blood – vampire living openly in the *Unseleighe* realm."

Another long paused followed then he asked, "Is it feasible for your kind to live among humans?"

She stiffened. This was so unfair. Why couldn't he admit he was *Sidhe*? If he embraced his heritage, there might be some hope for them. Even as the thought formed, she knew it was foolishness. It didn't matter if he'd been human or *Sidhe* before the transformation. He was a vampire now.

"These past few weeks have been wonderful." She forced herself to meet his penetrating gaze, meticulously shielding her emotions. "I've never experienced anything faintly resembling the connection we've made. But human females are not afforded the same respect *Sidhe* females enjoy. You're asking me to leave my home, abandon my ambitions and –"

He placed his fingers on her lips, stemming her words. "I'm not asking you to do anything. I was simply wondering if it was a possibility."

"My feelings for you are wild and wonderful. I never dreamed..." Her words trailed away as a distant rumbling shook the cottage.

"Was that thunder?"

She scooted off the bed and hurried to the window, throwing wide the shutters. Stars peppered the night sky and the breeze held only a slight chill. With a flap of her wings, she dressed and glanced over her shoulder. Phillip had pulled on his pants and was crossing the room to join her at the window.

"What's wrong?"

Before she could answer, a flash of lightning split the cottage in half. Brenna screamed, backing away as the thatched roof burst into flames. Phillip grabbed her hand and kicked open the door, leading her out into the clearing in front of the cottage.

Three figures awaited them. Brenna looked from one to the next, her pulse accelerating with each one. Tall, brooding Master Fire stepped forward, leaving Master Water and Master Earth a step behind.

"If he spills his seed inside you again, your essence will be irreversibly sullied," he stated without preamble. "We couldn't allow that."

Brenna clutched her throat, her mouth so dry she couldn't speak. What did the Elementals want with her? They seldom left their temple.

Phillip pushed her behind him and faced off with Master Fire. "Who the hell are you?"

Master Fire took a menacing step forward, his eyes igniting with inner flames. "You have no place here, blood drinker." He held out his hand. "Brenna, it's time to go."

"Go where?" she cried, stepping up beside Phillip. Her head spun and tension knotted her stomach. "Why are you here?"

"Mistress Air is dying." Master Fire's tone was solemn, but his expression revealed his impatience. "We haven't much time."

"I don't understand. I'm a soul seer. What does—"

"Mistress Air selected you before your birth," Master Water told her. "Ironically, your interlude with this blood drinker has released your latent powers. It has made you ready more quickly than we anticipated. Upon her death, you will succeed Mistress Air."

"Has she no choice in this?" Phillip objected. "You say it as if it's already happened."

"To be chosen as an Elemental is the highest honor among the *Unseleighe Sidhe*," Master Fire explained.

The Elementals protected and guided all the people of the forest realm. It was not just an honor, it was a calling, a lifelong commitment. Brenna felt as if she were drowning. She couldn't breathe, couldn't think. Her heart longed for a vampire while the Elementals demanded the rest of her life.

"I...how can I..."

Phillip turned her to face him, his hands firm upon her shoulders. "You don't have to do this. Come away with me. We'll build a life together."

Her heart screamed yes while her mind rebelled against any rash decision. The Elementals were living legends, revered and respected as no one else in the *Unseleighe* realm. How could she be expected to choose her life path in an instant?

"Your life path was chosen before your birth," Master Water said. "Come. It's time to go."

How could she possibly make Phillip understand the significance of this development? She could hardly believe it herself.

"I do understand." His hands slipped from her shoulders and sadness filled his eyes. "Thank you for saving my life," Phillip whispered then Master Fire returned him to the realm of mortals with the wave of one long-fingered hand.

Chapter Three

New York City

Present day

"What's going on with you?" Phillip didn't want to be an asshole, but he'd given the music to Eric three weeks before. "You haven't written *anything*?"

Eric shrugged and averted his blue eyes. "The melody is brilliant, as usual. I guess my muse is still on strike."

"My lyrics suck. We both know it. Rafe can string together a line or two in a pinch, but you're the lyrical genius behind our songs."

With a snort, Eric paused for a drink of beer. "My lyrics have been anything but genius lately. I don't know what's wrong."

Phillip smiled at the sultry blonde who'd been watching them for the past ten minutes. "Maybe you need a little inspiration."

Pyrite was scheduled to begin work on their new album after a much-needed hiatus. Their most recent tour had lasted over a year and spanned three continents. The party surrounding them was in celebration of the tour's success. Phillip and Eric seemed to be the only ones not celebrating.

"I figured if I told you in a public place you'd be less likely to beat the shit out of me," Eric grumbled. "I didn't come here to get laid."

"Explain that to the blonde in the corner. She's got 'fuck me' written all over her."

Eric glanced in the direction Phillip indicated. "Damn."

"With a capital D."

"Unfortunately, she's staring at you, not me." He made another derisive sound. "Can't imagine why."

Phillip ignored the tired complaint. Eric tended to get less attention than the other members of Pyrite, but he went out of his way to stay in the shadows. "She's been staring at both of us. I say we give her exactly what she wants."

"If you can talk her into a threesome, I'm with you."

Accepting the challenge with a confident grin, Phillip eased across the crowded room. Thane Burton, Pyrite's manager, had leased the posh dance club for the night. Phillip focused on the blonde, tuning out the noise and the crush of bodies. She crossed her legs as he approached, causing her dress to ride up to mid-thigh. The slinky garment hugged every curve and hollow of her curvaceous body, bright red to contrast with her golden hair.

"Phillip Noir." He extended his hand.

"Scarlett." She placed her hand in his and he pulled her to her feet. She licked her lips and looked at Eric. "Aren't you Eric King?"

"You tell me." He smiled. "If we're sticking with colors, I'll be Professor Plum."

Her laugh sounded a bit rehearsed. "I can't picture you in purple."

"How can you picture him?" Phillip slipped his arm around her waist and inhaled deeply. Her musk hung heavy in the air. Somehow he didn't think a threesome would shock this one.

"The possibilities are endless," she purred. "All we need is some privacy."

"I think that can be arranged." Phillip let Eric lead her toward the office tucked in the back corner of the club. They could take her to a hotel, but what was the point? He had no intention of spending the night with her.

A burly bouncer stood in front of the office door. Phillip didn't remember his name.

"Is it all right if we use the office for a few minutes?" Eric asked.

"Anything for you, Mr. King."

"See that we're not disturbed," Phillip told the bouncer before joining Eric and Scarlett inside.

Eric stood in front of a large desk, effortlessly flirting with their prey, a very willing prey but prey nonetheless. Phillip stayed a step back, discouraged by her provocative outfit and the ease with which she'd agreed to this escapade. She was either a working girl or a Pyrite groupie. Her nipples formed distinct peaks in her dress and she fiddled with her hair. She was obviously aroused, yet she made no move to touch either of them.

Phillip grinned as understanding unfurled. They had themselves a sub, a well-trained sub if he wasn't mistaken.

"Did you come to the party alone?" Phillip interrupted their polite banter.

"No, Sir." She automatically lowered her gaze. "My...companion was called away."

Odd. Why hadn't her Dom taken her with him—or her? "And how will your companion react when they learn you've entertained us?"

"He..."

"Go on."

"He would like me to record our exchange."

He looked at the blonde but sent his thoughts directly to Eric's mind. *She'll have it posted all over the internet before we get home. How stupid does she think we are?*

She's no stranger to recreational fucking, but I don't think she knows what we are, Eric responded. *Should we find someone else?*

Not a chance. I'll take care of the camera.

"I'm not camera shy," Phillip told her. "Just get it set up, get naked and get on your knees."

Her pupils dilated at the command. Oh yeah, she was definitely a sub. She pulled a slim, digital video camera from her clutch and set it on the bookcase behind the desk. After unzipping her dress, she shimmied out of the garment. A garter belt held up her lace-trimmed stockings, but she wore no panties or bra. Ready, easily accessible, like any good sex slave.

He glanced at Eric as she sank to her knees, her hands resting on her thighs. "Which end do you want?"

Eric didn't reply, instead he unzipped his jeans and approached the blonde, taking out his cock as he went. "Suck me, Scarlett. If you make it good for me, I'll make it good for you."

She angled her body toward the small camera then took Eric into her mouth. Moving faster than she could perceive, Phillip paused the device. The red light remained on, though it no longer blinked. Scarlett didn't notice the change as Eric moved in and out of her mouth.

Phillip watched dispassionately for a moment. Her ass was a bit too fleshy, but she had fabulous tits. Eric cupped them, teasing her nipples as he stuffed her mouth. She obediently tilted her head, taking him deep with each new thrust.

It was all so fucking boring. Phillip sighed. He'd tried every combination, every sexual position. He'd had young, nubile virgins. He'd fucked mature women who knew every trick in the book. He frequently shared his partners, gaining as much pleasure from watching as from participating. And still he was bored!

Eric pulled out of Scarlett's mouth, his cock shiny with her saliva. He turned her toward Phillip and smiled over her head. "Now suck, Phillip. He's having trouble concentrating."

That much was certainly true. Phillip took Eric's place, sliding his cock between her lips. Her mouth was warm, her tongue skilled, and his body responded predictably. She deep throated him and he felt a tingle of excitement. Her firm breasts more than filled his hands, the nipples poking the center of his palms. She was doing everything right. So why didn't he give a damn?

Pushing her back, he drew his cock out of her mouth. "I think I'm just going to watch. I'm feeling sort of woozy."

"Too much champagne?" She grinned. "Are you sure? I'd be honored to do you both."

Honored. The word irritated Phillip. Why would she feel honored to fuck a complete stranger, two complete strangers?

Eric lifted her to the desk and eased her down on her back. The camera was forgotten as he raised her legs to his shoulders. Vampires loved to eat pussy, which kept women coming back for more. Eric used his lips, his teeth and his tongue as Scarlett writhed and moaned.

Phillip sat in a chair, watching the display with analytical detachment. She'd been faking her pleasure as they began, but Eric was good. He focused on her clit until her gasps were real and her body jerked with each flick of his tongue.

She cupped her breasts, pinching her nipples hard. Did her Dom use clips? She seemed to need a little pain with her pleasure. Eric pushed his middle finger into her cunt, scooping out her cream.

You don't happen to have any lube, do you? She's got one seriously fuckable ass.

Phillip stood and moved behind the desk, pulling open the drawers.

"What are you...doing?" she panted.

He ignored her. Eric pushed his middle finger into her ass and her hips came up off the desk.

"Why, look what I found." Phillip held up a bottle of lubricant. "Guess you get a good ass fucking after all."

She squirmed and squealed as Eric flicked his tongue across her clit. He pumped his middle finger in her ass, a teasing preview of what was to come. Phillip tucked the lube into his pocket and pulled her hands away from her breasts. Bending over, he bit her nipple, pricking the tip with his fang. She cried out, her back arching as he drank from her breast.

I thought we weren't going to feed, Eric objected.

You say with your tongue up her cunt.

Her orgasm struck suddenly, shaking her entire body. Eric sucked greedily at her core while Phillip savored her blood. She whimpered, helpless within their thrall.

"Very good." Eric scooted her around, turning her sideways across the desk. He moved with her, his finger still wedged in her ass. Phillip tossed him the lube and then pushed his pants below his hips.

"I'd rather —"

"You'll do what you're told." Eric pinched her clit and she yelped. "Now open your mouth for Phillip and hold your legs up while I get you ready."

Phillip teased her with his cock, brushing her lips without pushing into her mouth. Eric prepared her ass and smeared his shaft with lube, ensuring he didn't hurt her. He pushed her knees to her chest, rolling her hips up off the desk. They synchronized their entry. Phillip filled her mouth as Eric stuffed her ass.

The rest was a blur of grunts and desire. Phillip accepted the stimulation of her warm, wet mouth while his mind remained detached. He grabbed the back of her neck, adjusting the angle of her head, so he could go deeper. Each of Eric's thrusts shoved her toward him. None of it aroused more than superficial lust.

She cried out around his cock. Phillip reached between her legs and gently rubbed her clit. She bucked, lifting her ass as Eric drilled her. Frantic, desperate, she wasn't getting what she needed.

Scraping her teeth against his shaft, she triggered Phillip's release. He held her face as he pumped his cum down her throat. Their timing was off. Everything about this was off.

Phillip pulled out of her mouth while Eric continued to fuck her. She cried out and tossed her head, pretending again.

You lost her.

I know. I felt her passion fizzle. Clasping her hips with both hands, Eric rode her hard and fast, coming in a matter of seconds. "So what do you get out of this, Scarlett?" His tone revealed his frustration. "Who put you up to it?"

"Turn off the camera," she snapped.

The men quickly righted their clothes then Phillip powered down the device. She scrambled off the desk then held out her hand expectantly. "What did they offer you for the recording?" He persisted. "Don't you know scandals are free publicity?"

"Scandal? Why would this cause a scandal? Fucking is what rock stars do." She retrieved her dress from the floor and glanced at Eric as she zipped it. "No one put me up to it. I want my fifteen minutes of fame. I'll leak selected frames to various forums then charge for the download."

"Not without a written release, you won't." Phillip closed his hand around the camera.

"You knew damn well what I was up to." She put her hands on her hips, breasts heaving beneath her slinky dress. "Don't be a jerk. You've got more money than Midas."

He shrugged and tossed her the camera. "Thanks for the blowjob."

She flipped him off and stormed across the office. Flinging open the door, she nearly collided with the woman standing there. "I hope you're not looking for these assholes. They're not worth your time." She brushed past the other woman, leaving her alone in the doorway.

Phillip stared at the vision before him, unable to believe she was real. "Hello, Brenna."

She didn't give him time to say more. With a disgusted sneer, she pivoted on the ball of her foot and disappeared in the crowd.

Unbelievable! Brenna rushed for the exit as fast as the crush of people would allow. The floozy who'd shoved past her literally reeked of sex. Fuck and feed, didn't vampires think about anything else?

"Brenna!"

She heard her name and knew it was Phillip calling her, but she didn't turn around. She'd burn in an everlasting hell before she asked that worthless blood drinker for help!

You're not the one burning in hell. Think about Maris and the others. Her nails dug into her palms and her back tingled. It had been centuries since she lost control and unintentionally released her wings. She shook her head as she slammed through the exit door. Why did Phillip rattle her like this? If he chose to fuck every human on the planet, what was it to her?

Her angry strides took her to the street corner before he caught up with her. His fingers curled around her upper arm. "What are you doing here?"

Blowing out an exasperated breath, she turned to face him. "For over two hundred years I've fought to keep you out of my mind. Ten minutes in your realm is all it took to remind me why."

His gaze narrowed and his nostrils flared. "You forfeited the right to bitch about my life a long time ago."

She gaped at him. How could he throw her decision in her face after all that had passed between them? "I had no choice and you know it."

"Maybe in the beginning, but you had plenty of time to consider the possibilities before you took your final vows."

They glared at each other in the moonlight. He was right, and it infuriated her. He'd fought his way back to her twice. The first time she'd welcomed him, needing the comfort of his embrace. By the second time, things had changed. They'd matured, learned the full scope of their powers, and she had accepted her calling.

"Don't let me keep you from your guests." Stray wisps of her hair had escaped their tight braid and curled against her cheeks. She tucked an errant lock behind her ear and squared her shoulders. "Nice to see you again. It's been—educational."

"You came to the realm of mortals just to lecture me?" He crossed his arms over his chest.

Maris' battered features flashed through her memory, checking her anger and helping her focus. The moon was at her back, allowing her to assess the changes in his appearance. His hair had been cut short. The bottom portion was shaped up and over his ears while the top had been left longer, a wayward strand caressing his brow. Tattoos decorated his arms, multiple loops pierced both ears, and a short goatee framed his sensual mouth. Only his eyes remained exactly as she remembered, thick-lashed and expressive.

"What's going on, Brenna? Talk to me."

She was Mistress Air now. No one dared to use her given name, yet she liked the sound of it on his lips. "I could try to explain, but it would probably be more effective if I show you."

His brows drew together and his eyes flashed with mischievous light. "So, show me."

"Try to keep up." She shot him a challenging smile, looked around to make sure they were alone then spread her wings.

She knew he could fly. She knew more about him than she had a right to know. Still, she wasn't here to rekindle their romance, even if pangs of longing echoed in her heart. Elvin females were dying, and it had to be stopped.

They soared across the night sky, undetectable to humans, even with their progressing technology. She didn't need to see Phillip to know he was near. Her skin tingled and her pulse raced. He'd always had this effect on her. If there'd been any other way, she wouldn't have put herself through this. Celibacy was challenging enough without seeking out temptation.

They left the city and flew north, following the contour of the land. She let the night wind cool her face and soothe her ravaged composure. Just thinking of Phillip with that groupie disrupted the rhythm of her wings. It shouldn't matter. It *didn't* matter.

With a forceful flap, she got herself back on track and located their destination. A rustic A-frame lodge came into view. She descended in a sudden swoop, gliding to the ground in front of the building.

"This is a little off the beaten path," he muttered.

She didn't respond to the comment. Instead she led him toward the lodge. Growls and muffled voices reached her ears even before she opened the door.

"What's going on?" He tried to insinuate himself between her and the door. She moved him aside with a look. He gasped and she quickly concealed her pleased smile. Her full potential hadn't been realized until she took her final vows.

Iomar motioned her toward the bedroom as they entered the house. "Hurry, Mistress. She's getting worse."

Phillip followed in her wake. Tall and lanky, Iomar did his best to look intimidating as he blocked the doorway. Brenna motioned him back, allowing Phillip into the bedroom. A slender young woman was bound to the bed with mystic cords. Animal hisses and growls escaped her as she writhed, yanking against the cords and tossing her dark head.

"Maris," Brenna inched closer, unable to conceal the anguish in her tone, "can you hear me, sweetheart?"

Maris lurched upward so forcefully the cords cut into her flesh. Her eyes gleamed with golden light and long fangs punctured her lower lip.

Phillip joined Brenna beside the bed. "How long has it been since she fed?"

"They thought it better if they didn't—"

With a muttered curse, he bit into his wrist and held the wound over the girl's mouth. Blood flowed across her tongue in crimson rivulets. She whimpered and panted, licking with greedy abandon. "Once the transformation is triggered, there's no stopping it. Didn't you learn anything during your time with me? Denying her blood

only brings the predator to the surface. She'll grow progressively more vicious until she finds a blood source or dies."

Maris sagged against the bed, her eyes drifting closed. Blood smeared her mouth and her tangled hair hid one side of her face. Grief twisted through Brenna. "The council thought denying her blood would slow the transformation and give me more time —"

"To what? Cure her? This isn't a disease. It's a genetic mutation." Hostility lingered in Phillip's whisky-colored eyes. "Their ignorance nearly cost this girl her life. Do you know who tried to transform her? There are penalties for this sort of attack." She shook her head, so he asked, "Who is she?"

"My sister." Her hands still trembled, but she'd gained control of her voice. "Her name is Maris. When will she need to feed again? What can we do to help her?"

"I cast her into sleep thrall. That should buy us some time. I thought Dark Elves stuck to their own realm. Why was she here?"

"She wasn't. She was attacked inside the walls of D'Arcy Aiden."

"That's not possible. Vampires aren't capable of inter-dimensional teleportation."

"I know." She heaved a ragged sigh. Here came the part where she groveled.

He shook his head, stepping away from her. "You expect *me* to fix this?" She wasn't sure if the tremor in his voice was disbelief or amusement. "Why the fuck should I care what happens to any of you? Your kind has treated me with nothing but disdain and arrogance."

"That's not true." She swallowed hard. "The Elementals treated you badly. You were welcomed by some of my kind."

"I was amusing to some of your kind, nothing more," he sneered.

She licked her lips. "This isn't about you and me. A vampire is...brutalizing our females."

He looked at Maris for a long moment before he spoke again. As if drawn by some undeniable force, Brenna slipped into his mind. She'd promised herself she wouldn't. Why subject herself to his bitterness? She got no farther than a superficial penetration before she hit his mental shields.

You're not the only one who has grown more powerful in the past two hundred years. His voice sounded clearly in her mind.

"You said females. How many victims have there been?" He crossed his arms over his chest, his gaze remaining on Maris.

"We're not sure. At least nine. Maris is the first to survive captivity."

"Captivity?" He raked his hair with one hand and exhaled an audible sigh. "You better tell me everything."

Phillip followed her into the main room of the lodge, watching the fluid sway of her hips. She'd been wearing black leather pants and a spandex top at the nightclub. When had she transformed her outfit? A sleek black gown hugged her body, accenting every delectable contour of her lithe form. Ribbons edged the neckline and hem, shimmering with the same iridescent quality as her hair.

"I was only made aware of this when Maris was attacked. The council, in their arrogance, believed they could resolve the situation."

He laughed. "Resolve the situation. How diplomatic that sounds. This bastard needs to be hunted down and killed. Why dance around the issue?"

"Fine." Her bright blue gaze bore into his. "This deranged blood drinker needs to die. Will you help me find him?"

"The council has no idea how he got to the *Unseleighe* realm?"

"No clue."

He shrugged with feigned indifference and dragged his gaze away. It took all his self-control not to rip her gown to ribbons and indulge in some much-needed sexual therapy. Boredom was certainly not a problem with Brenna in the room.

"Could be his first victim wanted a walk on the wild side and got more than she bargained for." Her eyes narrowed, but she didn't respond to his provocation. "When did the attacks start?"

"November. The victims were taken about three weeks apart to begin with and they weren't—savaged. For the past five weeks, the attacks have escalated in both frequency and brutality. The woman he murdered right before Maris was mutilated."

"In what way?" She glared at him mutinously. "It's not morbid fascination. I really need to know."

"They were all raped repeatedly and drained of blood. The last three victims also had multiple cuts on their faces. One had her face removed completely." She shuddered and turned around.

Phillip took two steps toward her before he stopped himself. She didn't deserve his comfort. She had severed all ties long ago. "How did Maris escape if his behavior is escalating?"

"Her current appearance is misleading. It took four of our best healers to stabilize her condition enough for me to bring her here."

He touched her shoulder, drawing her gaze back to him. "Why didn't you take me to her?"

"I knew you wouldn't come." There was no accusation in her tone, just a statement of fact.

A lump formed in his throat. Was she right? Would he have let an innocent woman die because of his bitterness? "Regardless of where he has chosen to feed, a rogue vampire is our responsibility. I'll contact Faelon and find out how this should be handled."

* * * * *

Brenna stared around the main room of the lodge, trying to contain her frustration. Contacting Phillip had been humiliating enough. Now she was surrounded by vampires. Phillip, Rafe and Eric were in the adjacent bedroom, completing the work the *Sidhe* healers had begun. She fidgeted in an overstuffed chair against the far wall. She was grateful for their assistance, but it annoyed her to think her sister's well-being depended on vampires.

Faelon sat on the sofa beside a blonde human Rafe had introduced as Jessie Curtis. Brenna glanced at the ancient vampire in secret fascination. His presence emanated power, and intelligence flashed in his penetrating gaze.

"What exactly did Etoro say during his interrogation?" Jessie looked at Faelon, her hazel eyes bright with speculation.

"Who is Etoro?" Brenna asked.

"It's a long story and it may not be relevant to these attacks." Jessie evaded the question without shifting her focus from Faelon.

"Jessie used to be a cop," Faelon grinned, "but we love her anyway."

"There's nothing more frustrating than trying to get a straight answer out of a vampire." Jessie scooted to the edge of the couch and pivoted to face Faelon. "Think about it. The attacks began in November, but they've escalated in the past five weeks. Isn't that a bit coincidental?"

"What are you talking about?" Brenna drew the blonde's gaze back to her.

"Rafe and I have been trying to unravel Etoro's cryptic claim. We had about run out of options when Rafe remembered an obscure legend. Have you ever heard of the Raonull?"

The human obviously didn't know who she was, so Brenna let the question slide. "I was linked with Prince Lyell when he destroyed the last Raonull Master. What does this have to do with a rogue vampire?"

"Maybe nothing. Just hear me out." She shifted her gaze between Brenna and Faelon. "The night Rafe killed Natalie, Etoro claimed she'd found a way to rescue their son from death. Who knows more about cheating death than the Raonull?"

"But the Raonull Master was destroyed *before* the attacks began," Brenna reminded her.

"You think the rogue is Kyrel." Faelon stood and clasped his hands behind his back, pacing in front of the sofa. He glanced at Brenna. "Kyrel is the son Natalie claims to have rescued from death."

"Wait a minute." Brenna shook her head. "If she rescued her son, why did she slit Phillip's throat? Phillip told me the attack I witnessed was the result of her twisted grief."

"Natalie had two children," Faelon replied, "one human and one vampire. The human child died. That's when she tried to punish Rafe by killing Phillip."

"Her vampire child was Kyrel?"

He nodded, pausing directly in front of her. "Natalie claimed Kyrel was organic, that he was born a vampire. I've always suspected she transformed him herself, which is strictly forbidden by the Covenant."

Brenna rubbed her temples. They kept throwing out unfamiliar names and terms as if she was supposed to understand. Her sister was struggling for life in the other room and they expected her to memorize history!

"The Covenant is a collection of statutes by which every vampire is bound," Faelon explained. "Our society might be secret, but there are consequences for disregarding our rules. Kyrel was utterly insane. This is the main reason I believe Natalie transformed him. When a vampire transforms one within their biological bloodline, it can result in a wide range of undesirable mutations."

"And insanity tops the list," Jessie put in.

“Natalie managed to keep Kyrel’s behavior mostly in check until two years ago,” Faelon continued. “He raped and murdered eleven human females in a matter of weeks so the council ordered his execution. His heart was removed by one of the assassins, but Natalie disappeared with his body before it could be burned.”

Brenna shivered. Eleven women raped and murdered in a matter of weeks, that certainly sounded familiar. “The council didn’t pursue Natalie?”

“They did. She told them she was afraid his body would be mutilated, so she buried him in secret. No vampire can survive the removal of their heart, so the council considered the matter closed.”

“But what if that vampire’s mother had the help of a Raonull Master?” Jessie had obviously decided Kyrel was still alive.

Brenna’s mind spun with possibilities. Rafe and Jessie had killed Natalie, but no one was sure about Kyrel. If Kyrel was the rogue, perhaps they could identify a more distinct pattern in his violence. Her heart fluttered and she licked her lips. This was as close to hope as she’d been in the past two days.

“Kyrel disappeared two years ago.” Jessie resumed her supposition. “At that time, the Raonull Master was still alive. Maybe he agreed to bring Kyrel back to life if Natalie released Kyrel into his keeping.” She spread her hands and shook her head. “I can only guess at the specifics. But according to your account, the rogue’s behavior surged around the time the Raonull Master was destroyed and again around the time Kyrel’s parents died.”

Brenna acknowledged Jessie’s hypothesis with a nod. “Do all rogues—brutalize their victims?”

Before Faelon could answer, Phillip, Rafe and Eric filed out of the bedroom.

“She’s resting comfortably,” Phillip announced.

“I want to see her,” Brenna said immediately.

“She’s asleep.”

"I'll be quiet."

With a chuckle, he swept his arm toward the bedroom.

Brenna held her breath as she crossed the room. She and Maris had always been close. Seeing her abused body and bruised face had driven Brenna to her knees. Maris lay on her back, her hands resting lightly on her belly. Though still visible, the bruises had faded. Her color was much improved. The mystic cords were gone. How had the vampires dissolved them? Not wanting to disturb her sister, Brenna kissed her on the brow and left the room.

"She didn't escape," Phillip said as he closed the bedroom door. "The rogue purged her memory of everything he did then let her go."

"Why would he do that?" Jessie blurted out the question then shot Brenna an apologetic look.

"As near as we can tell, there are two reasons," Rafe said. "He wanted Maris to lead him to his next victim, and he needed a way to return to his home realm."

Brenna gaped, her stomach knotting painfully. "He used Maris to get to me?"

Phillip nodded and reached for her hand. "We're pretty sure he came through the veil with your party and we suspect you're his next target."

"Why?" She snatched her hand out of his, moving away from the bedroom door. "Even if the rogue is Kyrel, what would he want with me?"

"Kyrel, as in Natalie's son?" Phillip turned to Faelon. "You think the rogue is Kyrel?"

Faelon motioned toward Jessie. "Rafe's mate has posed a compelling case." He reviewed the facts for the others. "There is a suspicious parallel between the rogue's behavior and events affecting Kyrel. As the people who were able to control his behavior died, the rogue's brutality escalated."

"But Kyrel is dead," Eric muttered, shaking his head.

How do we protect Brenna?

She heard Phillip's voice inside her head and wanted to scream. Did they think the vicious bastard was watching and listening even now? She was Mistress Air, one of the Elementals! Yet this rogue vampire had manipulated her like a child. Shame rolled in on the heels of her indignation. She hadn't made such a galactic blunder since...since she let Phillip disappear from her life.

Rafe and Eric will stay here with the Sidhe guard. The crisis with Maris is likely over, but we will be vigilant just the same. You and I will take Brenna to the safe house and prepare to confront the rogue. Faelon's assertive tone made it obvious he was used to giving orders.

I'd rather stay with Maris, Brenna insisted.

That's not an option. Phillip moved toward her, a faint hint of gold erupting in his eyes. *You're the rogue's target. Anyone near you is in danger.*

Chapter Four

The safe house was actually a castle, complete with pointed turrets and crenellated battlements. Its location was known only to a select few vampires Faelon trusted implicitly.

"Where are we?" Brenna panted as her feet struck solid ground.

"It's better if you don't know," Phillip said. "Faelon and I can shield our thoughts from the rogue. You've had little practice over the past two hundred years."

Hurt softened her expression for an instant before anger wiped it away. "I've had other things to occupy my time for the past two hundred years. Communicating with vampires wasn't high on my priority list."

He paused and took her hand. "I only meant that it could be possible for the rogue to—"

"I understand what you meant." She pulled her hand out of his and followed Faelon up the stone stairs leading to the iron-banded door. He opened it with a wave of his hand and stepped inside. A cavernous room spread before them, mostly lost in shadow.

Phillip ignited the torches while Faelon conjured a fire in the massive stone hearth. A thick white fur had been spread on the floor before the fire. Brenna dissolved her shoes and wiggled her toes in the beckoning fur. He found her appreciation for such a simple pleasure charming.

"Where's your mate?" Brenna asked Faelon. "I thought you never traveled without her."

"Antonelli is in Italy with my sister. My sister recently gave birth to her first child, and Antonelli is enjoying her niece."

During their on-again/off-again relationship, Phillip had told Brenna more than he cared to admit. He'd convinced himself she was being held prisoner by the Elementals, so he bartered his way back to the *Unseleighe* realm. After greeting him with shock and excitement, she assured him the Elementals weren't forcing her to do anything. She just wasn't sure what she wanted out of life. They'd spent the next eleven years sneaking away together, treasuring every moment they could steal.

Master Fire appeared to Phillip one day and calmly made a dire prediction. "Brenna is meant to be Mistress Air. If she chooses her desire for you over her destiny, it will put all the *Sidhe* in peril." Phillip still remembered every word, though the full significance of what he'd learned wouldn't be revealed until much later.

"If she chooses me, then you'll appoint another."

Master Fire shook his head, his eyes smoldering with inner flames. "It doesn't work that way. As the guardian of each element fades, a new one is born. If Brenna turns her back on her destiny we'll have to wait for a new Mistress Air to be born. The Elements must be balanced. Horrible things happen when they are not."

"Earthquakes and famines, firestorms and floods?"

With his smoldering gaze burning into Phillip's, Master Fire said, "The last time an Elemental refused their calling the Raonull were born."

The term had meant nothing to Phillip, but when he mentioned the conversation to Brenna, she burst into tears and told him to leave.

Her warm hand touched his arm, dragging him back from the past. "What are you thinking about?"

"My conversation with Master Fire."

"Ah."

He caught her hand before she could pull it away. "I thought he said those things to frighten me away."

"He did. He knew it would drive a wedge between us. The Raonull killed my father and so many others. He knew it was the one thing I couldn't ignore."

Phillip had let her go. He had immersed himself in decadence for nearly a century before anger drove him back to the *Unseleighe* realm. He had to try one last time. He had to know she wasn't being coerced or manipulated. She'd changed, matured and flourished under the watchful eyes of the Elementals.

He'd been charming and seductive, he'd been earnest and tender, but in the end she'd sent him away. She looked him in the eye and announced that she knew who she was. She'd embraced her destiny. Three weeks later she took her vows and became Mistress Air.

"We do not have time for reminiscing," Faelon cut in. "We must solidify our strategy."

Is it possible the rogue can hear us? Brenna's voice was faint but understandable.

"This house is surrounded by the most powerful shields in this realm. Not even the ancients can see or hear what goes on within these walls."

"Why did you bring me here? I won't hide from this fiend. We must draw him out, discover his motivation, and then destroy him utterly."

Faelon chuckled. "I couldn't have said it better myself. Before we begin, I would appreciate it if you would clear up a few things for me."

"I'll do my best."

Phillip stood at the edge of the fur, arms crossed over his chest. What the hell was Faelon up to? He was seldom this courteous.

"Phillip has dismissed the possibility that he is a Dark Elf. What are your feelings on the matter?"

Her eyes narrowed. She glanced at him then stepped closer to Faelon. "Can we somehow use the *fact* he is a Dark Elf to our advantage?"

Phillip snorted. Two hundred and sixty-eight years later and they were right back where they'd begun. "I don't give a rat's ass what I was before the transformation. I'm a vampire now!"

Faelon raised his hand, warning Phillip to curb his tongue. "You spent eleven years together two centuries ago. Is that correct?" Brenna nodded. "Even if you formed a soul bond, which to my knowledge cannot be done unintentionally, the connection should have faded by now."

Faelon was right. Blood needed to be exchanged once a year with an ally to keep the blood bond active. Soul bonds lasted much longer but, without any contact between the parties, the connection generally faded in about a century.

"Why can I still sense her and hear her thoughts?"

"Precisely." Faelon turned back to Brenna. "Are the *Sidhe* able to speak mind to mind with all others of their kind?"

She shook her head. "Some *Sidhe* are telepathic and some aren't. Most can communicate with family members and those they have intentionally linked with, but it's different for each person."

"Did you intentionally link with Phillip?"

She shook her head. "A link must be mutually formed."

Faelon turned to Phillip. "Your telepathic abilities are nearly as strong as mine. You are more powerful than the one who transformed you and have been from the moment of your transformation. You can deny any connection to the *Sidhe*, but part of you was more than human long before you became a vampire."

"And how will this help us catch the rogue?" Phillip grumbled. Everything about the *Sidhe* made him think of Brenna, and Brenna had rejected him. She'd turned her back on their life together—and prevented her world from being tipped out of balance. How could he fault her for that?

"If the rogue is Kyrel, and I am ever more convinced he is, *Sidhe* magic brought him back from beyond. We will likely need *Sidhe* magic to return him to the afterlife."

"Kyrel is a hybrid, a twisted combination of corrupted *Sidhe* and unnaturally mutated vampire." Brenna looked into the fire. "There's only one way to survive this. We must reinforce *Sidhe* links with blood bonds and confront Kyrel as a united entity."

Brenna couldn't believe what she'd just suggested. Fuck and feed, that's what vampires did, that's how they formed their bonds. Could she really submit her body to these two demanding males? Heat curled through her torso and lodged between her thighs, bringing to life parts of her body she'd nearly forgotten.

"Aren't Elementals expected to remain celibate?" Phillip growled out the question.

"Elementals generally choose to remain celibate. There's nothing requiring the sacrifice."

"You've had no lover since Phillip?" The disbelief in Faelon's tone made Brenna laugh. Sex was such a large part of a vampire's life. It was inconceivable to forgo the pleasure.

"I've wanted no lover since Phillip," she admitted in a small voice. She glanced at him, needing to see if her words pleased him. His whisky-colored eyes burned into hers. Longing, passion, regret were all there for her to absorb. "Are you okay with this?" The question was out before she realized what it inferred. She cared about him, needed his support.

Possessive passion blazed in his eyes, but he remained silent.

"You know the bond is reinforced by emotion and the release of energy. We do not have time for the blood bond to mature. It must be strong from its inception." Faelon arched his brow, golden light building within his gaze. "We have shared women before. Why is this one different?"

Brenna licked her lips. She didn't want to hear Phillip confess his feelings at Faelon's insistence. She placed her hand on Phillip's arm and turned him toward her. "If our mutual pleasure will strengthen the bonding, then let's make it as powerful as possible."

His jaw worked as he clutched his teeth. "I've dreamed of holding you again for two hundred years. Never once was another man there to share the experience." He exhaled sharply and raked his fingers through his hair. "But Faelon's right. The connection will be much stronger if we abandon ourselves to pleasure."

Before Phillip could say more, Faelon swept her into his arms and kissed her. Phillip moved up behind her, surrounding her with male heat. She raised her arms to encircle Faelon's neck as Phillip pulled the ribbons from her hair.

"Spread your wings." Phillip moved back just a bit. "I want to see them again."

She disintegrated her gown and unfurled her wings. Faelon released her suddenly and stepped back as well. "By the gods, I've never seen anything so beautiful."

"Don't let Antonelli hear you say that," Phillip said.

They circled her silently. An intoxicating mixture of power and vulnerability raced through her system. Desire burned in their eyes, their features tensed with ravenous hunger. Still, they restrained themselves with steely control. They might want to devour her, but neither would hurt her.

Faelon paused in front of her and started to kneel. Phillip grabbed his arm and shook his head. "I've waited two hundred years to taste her cream again. We've agreed to share this night with you, but you will follow me."

She smiled, pleased by his possessiveness. Faelon stroked her wings and pressed his chest against her back as Phillip worked his way down the front of her body. Four warm hands wandered over her flesh, teasing, hinting at the pleasure to come.

"Raise your arms and clasp your hands behind Faelon's neck." She hesitated. "It's not a show of weakness to submit. The pleasure must be as intense as we can make it, and vampires need to dominate."

Phillip guided her arms into position and she grabbed her wrists. Her back arched, thrusting her breasts forward. Phillip cupped one as he bent over the other. Faelon stroked her wings. So many different stimulations... It had been so long since anyone touched her intimately. Her pulse raced and she licked her lips, determined to savor every sensation.

"Are they sensitive?" Faelon whispered against her neck. "Have you discovered any erogenous zones upon these extraordinary wings?" His fingers trailed along the upper edge, pausing when she jerked away. "I see." Returning to the crest of her wing, he caressed the spot, sending frissons of pleasure across the entire surface of her wings. She moaned. "You like that."

Phillip rolled one nipple between his thumb and forefinger while he suckled the other. Faelon matched the circular motion of his fingers to the firm pull of Phillip's mouth. Tension built in her belly and she rested her head against Faelon's shoulder.

"Her scent is tormenting me," Faelon muttered. "If you don't enjoy her arousal, I will."

Instead of kneeling, as Brenna expected, Phillip lifted her and draped her legs over his shoulders. She gasped, uncomfortable with the helpless position. Faelon cupped both her breasts, supporting her against his shoulder. Phillip parted her outer lips with his thumbs and inhaled her scent.

They needed her submission, yet her pride demanded she object. Why had he chosen such a passive position? She wanted some control in this, some... His tongue traced her slit and scattered her thoughts. Their arms were strong. She was safe in their embrace, secure. Phillip kept his eyes open as he licked her, savoring her taste and her acceptance.

That's right, my love. Surrender. Revel in the pleasure.

He pushed two fingers into her passage and moved his mouth to her clit. His whiskers rasped against her flesh, gently abrading. Faelon tugged on her nipples, his fingers pressing harder with each slow pull. How did they know what she needed

when she didn't understand it herself? Phillip caught her clit between his teeth and flicked his tongue against the ultrasensitive tip.

She panted, the movement increasing the pressure on her nipples. Intense. Faelon had said the bond would be fueled by sexual intensity. Tension coiled deep in her belly. Her pussy flooded with liquid response. Phillip carefully sucked on her clit and the coil sprung. She cried out, her body shaking as Phillip scooped out her cream with his tongue. Over and over, he sampled her essence. Soon licking wasn't enough and he sucked. Echoes of the initial release kept her senses buzzing.

Faelon pulled her away from Phillip then handed her back to him as Faelon spread out on the fur. She snuggled against Phillip's chest, kissing him and stroking his face. The taste of her own passion on his tongue sent a strong pang of need through her core. They'd been parted for so long, and she'd missed him terribly. Why couldn't they be alone?

As soon as the bond is solidified, I'll make sure he leaves.

The bond will never be solidified if you keep her to yourself.

Phillip chuckled and joined Faelon on the fur. Sliding her down along his body, he guided her toward Faelon. "Straddle his face and offer him your pussy. I just want to watch for a minute or two."

Long and lean, Faelon's body nearly spanned the fur. His gold-streaked hair fanned out around his stark features, appealing despite their brutality. He held up his hand and helped her down, adjusting her position over his face. Still sensitive from Phillip's demanding mouth, she wasn't sure she could come again so soon.

Unlike Phillip, Faelon didn't tease her clit. His fingers dug into her hips and he thrust his tongue into her passage. She gasped, surprised by his aggression. Her nipples tingled and she cupped her breasts. Faelon parted her folds and circled her cunt before thrusting deep again. Despite her misgivings, desire began to build. Her inner muscles fluttered, accenting the slide of his tongue.

Phillip stepped up behind her and placed his hands on her shoulders. "Lean forward, but brace yourself on your hands. We don't want to smother Faelon."

"I thought...you were just going to watch." When she didn't move fast enough, he helped her down.

"I changed my mind."

Faelon's tongue continued its strong surge in and out of her pussy as Phillip knelt behind her, straddling Faelon's chest. What was he doing?

Phillip grasped her bottom with both hands and eased her ass cheeks apart. He paused for a moment, letting the cool air waft across her heated skin. Then he leaned forward and pressed his mouth against her puckered anus.

She wiggled forward, but Faelon's hands tightened. *Relax*, the men said in unison.

Phillip caressed her in a way she'd never imagined before. His goatee teased her skin while his tongue flicked and circled. Could she find pleasure with his mouth stroking her *there*? It felt strange, forbidden—arousing, like the secret fantasy one never admitted. Persistent yet gentle, their tongues stroked in tandem.

Tingles had just begun to mimic their movements when Faelon shifted his mouth to her clit. He flicked over the tiny nub far more forcefully than Phillip had. She stiffened, not sure if she liked the firmer stroke, then Phillip pushed his finger into her ass. Phillip pulled out slowly and thrust in fast as Faelon matched each movement with a flick of his tongue.

Her head swam. Tingles zinged along her nerve endings, yet underlying the pleasure was the realization that they were preparing her body to accept two cocks, to surrender completely to their mastery. Her pussy clenched around empty air, neglected and aching. She shifted her hips and Faelon nipped her clit. She cried out, shocked when a pulse of pleasure followed the sting. Faelon's pleased chuckle sounded in her mind.

Phillip finger-fucked her ass, his face buried in the silken thickness of her hair. Closing his lips around her clit, Faelon suckled firmly and sensation burst through her

abdomen. Her core pulsed and her ass clenched. Faelon covered her opening with his lips and sucked her cream into his mouth.

Stunned by the pleasure emanating from Brenna, Phillip didn't want to move. He craved the sensation of her pussy rippling around his cock and the hot taste of her blood flowing across his tongue, but her tight little ass was its own paradise.

Don't let her relax too much, Faelon cautioned, keeping his thoughts from Brenna.

Phillip pulled his middle finger out and brushed her wings with both hands. "You probably better tuck these away. The next part is rather tricky."

She furled her wings and he wrapped his arm around her waist, dragging her off Faelon's face. The master vampire leisurely licked his lips. *Enjoy it, asshole. It's the only taste you'll ever get.* The thought was out before he could repress it. Faelon only grinned.

Faelon rolled out of the way and Phillip held Brenna against him, savoring the simple intimacy of her naked body pressed to his. This was necessary, their best hope of stopping the rogue, but they would have the reunion they deserved. He'd make sure of it. Spreading out on his back, he pulled Brenna down on top of him. His mouth claimed hers, needing this to be more than sex, more than a ceremonial bonding.

She framed his face with hands and straddled his hips. *It will never be just sex with us.* The thought came across an unfamiliar link and he suspected Faelon couldn't hear her.

He found the path she'd used and shivered. It resonated *Sidhe* energy, so different from vampire. *I will make this up to you.*

Lifting her hips, she guided his cock to her entrance. Heat radiated from her core, making his balls draw up and tingle.

Faelon cupped her breasts, the backs of his fingers brushing Phillip's chest, a silent reminder that they weren't alone. She lowered herself onto his cock and Phillip groaned. Two hundred years without a lover had left her tight as a virgin. Desire

pounded through him. He turned his head to the side and gritted his teeth. The three of them had to come together or all this was in vain.

She rested against Phillip's chest, gently stroking his face, while Faelon lubed her ass. Her breathing hitched, but she didn't resist. Her surrender thrilled Phillip. She was one of the most powerful beings in the *Unseleighe* realm, yet she yielded everything.

"Ready?" Faelon whispered, and she nodded.

Phillip found her mouth again, hoping to distract her with a passionate kiss. Faelon filled her, stretched her so tight that Phillip gasped into her open mouth. Pleasure saturated his being, scalded his mind. She arched into Faelon's first thrust, dragging her body along Phillip's length.

Faelon pushed her back down as he pulled nearly out of her tight back passage. She shuddered, her fingers tangled in the fur on either side of Phillip's head. "Don't come yet, sweetheart. We must come together."

She nodded. They passed her back and forth between them, pushing her onto one cock as they dragged her off the other. Her pebble-hard nipples rubbed against his chest and her hair streamed all around them.

It was intense, savagely sexual, but Phillip longed for so much more. He wanted to savor her responses and relish the intimacy of joining with her body and mind.

Her cunt squeezed his cock, warning of her impending orgasm. *Now!* he ordered, and Faelon thrust to the hilt. Phillip sank his fangs into her throat as Faelon bit her shoulder. She cried out, clutching his head between her hands.

They held her on the brink of orgasm as they fed, suspended between one breath and the next. Sensation curled around them, washed over them, and surged through them. Faelon pulled away first, his wrist already pressed against her mouth. She accepted his blood as she'd accepted the rest, without hesitation or reservation.

Torn between pleasure and fury, Phillip sliced his flesh with his thumbnail and guided her mouth to the wound in his throat. It wasn't supposed to be like this. He

didn't want to fuck her senseless. He wanted to make love to her with all the tenderness overflowing his aching heart.

Each pull of her mouth was bittersweet. As soon as she had taken enough, they triggered her orgasm. She cried out again, shaking violently, as they completed the bond with their seed.

Chapter Five

Faelon left them alone before the fire. Phillip transformed into mist and back, cleansing his body. With the flap of her wings, Brenna cleaned herself as well. They sat, facing each other, and, for the first time that night, Brenna felt self-conscious. She wrapped her wings around her body and looked into the fire.

Phillip touched her chin, drawing her gaze back to his. "Please don't hide from me."

"Why do you look so sad?"

"I wanted more for you. You deserve better."

She shook her head. "Better than what? I suggested this bond. We have to find the rogue."

"I know. I just..." He pulled her forward, wrapping her legs around his waist. "I missed you, Brenna. Do you have any idea how much I've missed you?"

She didn't want to argue with him, but his question deserved an answer. "The link we formed all those years ago has never faded for me."

He cupped the side of her face, his eyes gleaming in the firelight. "I've tried not to think about you, but it's been —"

"That's not what I meant. I sensed every woman you took to your bed, every one-night stand, every groupie you fucked. I probably remember them better than you do."

He stared into her eyes and then slowly shook his head. "How? You said such a link would have to be formed intentionally."

"Each time we were together my powers grew. The connection became more binding. My abilities are unusual and your father was a powerful sorcerer."

He raked his hand through his hair and glanced away. "We're back to that?"

"There's no other explanation. My body inadvertently tapped into your energy — your *Sidhe* energy. You're not like other vampires and you know it. Why is it so difficult for you to admit?"

"Why is it so important to you that I admit I'm *Sidhe*? It changes nothing."

She levered herself off his lap and covered her nudity with her hair. If he found no value in his heritage, they had no hope of a future together. She had responsibilities to the *Sidhe*, and that would never change. Her heart ached for the possibilities crumbling before her eyes.

"Do you find your life fulfilling? Do you care for any of them?"

"I fuck everything that crosses my path," he snapped. "Why shouldn't I? You're the only woman I ever loved and you rejected me — twice!"

Loved, past tense, as in a feeling long dead. She turned and faced the fire, frantically blinking back tears. She'd made her decision long ago. She had no right to cast judgment on him now.

"The bond is formed." She cleared her throat and continued in a stronger tone. "What do we do now?"

"Rest until twilight tomorrow and then reveal our location to the rogue."

"My location, don't you mean? I'm the one he wants."

He wrapped his arms around her waist, splaying his fingers against her side. She hadn't heard him move. She never heard him move. The only being who could move more silently than an *Unseleighe Sidhe* was a vampire.

"I sense your reserve," he whispered into her hair. "You're shielding your feelings from me."

She turned in his arms. Resting her hands on his shoulders, she looked into his eyes. "I don't regret embracing my destiny, but I've never stopped loving you." He staggered back a step, his eyes huge in his pale face. Apparently that wasn't the

response he'd expected. She shook her head with a sad smile. "Make love to me. Touch me like you did before I broke your heart."

His lips parted as if he would say something then he swept her into his arms. She wrapped her arms around his back, pressing herself to the warmth of his body. Tuning out the rest of the world with ruthless determination, she focused entirely on Phillip. His scent, his taste, the strength of his arms around her.

They sank to their knees, facing each other. Firelight danced across their skin. She combed her fingers through his hair as he took the kiss deeper, stroking his tongue over hers. This was how it was meant to be, urgent yet achingly tender.

He caressed her face, explored her neck and her smooth shoulders. She sighed as his hand found her breast, his thumb circling her nipple. The hours remaining in the night would never be enough. This blissful interlude was just a taste of what she wanted, a lifetime with Phillip by her side.

His mouth left hers, his gaze suddenly angry. "If that is really what's in your heart, then why did you turn me away?"

"I had no choice. You couldn't stay with me and I couldn't abandon who I am."

"Mistress Air." He made the title sound like a curse.

"I don't want to fight with you. I want—"

He swept her beneath him on her back and knelt between her thighs. "I know what you want, what you've always wanted. I'm good enough to fuck but not important enough to complicate your life." He pulled her arms beneath her, holding them firmly at the small of her back.

"Stop it." She tried to twist away. He forced her legs wider.

"Tell me how much you love me. Tell me how you can't live without me."

He covered her mound with his mouth, stabbing his tongue into her slick cunt. She tugged against his hold, which drove her crotch against his mouth. He tongue-fucked

her until she stopped struggling then gently licked her clit. Taking her right to the brink of orgasm, he kept her perched on the precipice until she trembled helplessly.

Say it! His angry voice exploded in her mind, blaring across the fragile *Sidhe* strand.
Say you love me.

She turned her face to the side and sobbed.

He released her hands and grabbed the backs of her knees in one fluid movement. Before she could pull her arms out from under her, he pinned her down with the weight of his body. His cock found her entrance, rubbing against her without pushing inside.

"Say it, Mistress Air." The mockery in his tone brought her face back. "Tell me how much you've missed me, how you've pined away in your ivory tower, wishing I were there."

Unable to bear the hurt in his gaze, she closed her eyes and lowered her mental shield, flooding his mind with tenderness and longing.

"Stop it!" He rocked back on his knees, his cock still poised to take her.

"I *do* love you," she whispered without opening her eyes.

"Damn you!" His voice broke, and for a long time he did nothing.

She trembled, spread wide before him, waiting for him to take her in anger or surrender to the emotions she'd just revealed. His touch gentled. He slipped one arm under her back and raised her breasts to his mouth. Moving from one to the other, he worked her nipples into hard, tingling buds.

Raising her arms above her head, she conjured mystic cords, securing herself for his pleasure. His breath escaped in a ragged hiss and he went perfectly still. Dreading what she'd find, she opened her eyes.

His emotional barriers crumbled as their gazes locked. Tenderness surged through her with his first thrust. She tightened her inner muscles, not wanting to let him go, wanting him inside her for as long as she could keep him there. He filled her, stretched

her until he had no more to give. Then she pushed up with her legs, driving him deeper.

He cried out, his pleasure spiking through her. She matched him thrust for thrust, taking him as he took her. Straining and arching, she accepted him into her body and welcomed him into her mind. They melded, sharing their breath, mixing their emotions, and fusing their energy.

Pushing his hands beneath her bottom, he lifted her off the fur and thrust to the hilt. His cum spurted deep inside her and she followed him over the edge. The firm, rhythmic spasms of her cunt prolonged the pleasure as it passed from him into her and back into him.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, easing her down onto the fur.

She smiled into his eyes. "You have nothing to be sorry for." She wanted to say more, so much more, but she knew now wasn't the time.

* * * * *

Brenna enjoyed a quiet afternoon as the men slept. *Unseleighe Sidhe* preferred the night but, unlike vampires, they weren't restricted to darkness. Sleeping in Phillip's arms had been fabulous, a luxury she would treasure forever.

The sun set and the men awakened, refreshed and anxious to put their plan in motion.

"If this castle has been a safe house for centuries, do you really want to sacrifice it to this confrontation?" Brenna asked as Faelon prepared to weaken the shield.

"The only thing that makes the castle special is the strength of its shield. I'm not able to conjure one of this density alone. Once I've select a new location, I'll summon the same team who constructed this shield, and a new safe house will be born."

"So you weaken the shield so he can sense where I am. Then what? Is he going to just come waltzing in here and try to steal me away?"

Faelon chuckled. "I'd love for him to try. I thought perhaps you and Phillip could take a romantic stroll along the river. You won't see me, but I'll be nearby."

"He'll know it's a trap." She shook her head. "No one is that stupid."

"Then he should realize it's the only chance he'll ever have." Phillip slipped his arm around her waist and pulled her snugly against his side.

She couldn't offer a viable alternative, so she accepted their plan. They waited nearly an hour before Phillip led her out the side door of the castle. The river snaked through the landscape, shimmering silver in the moonlight. Leaves crunched beneath her boots as they followed the path across the sloping ground.

"Have you ever been here before?"

He nodded, his gaze wide and watchful. "After I left you—the last time—I stayed here for a while."

"How long is a while?"

"Thirty or forty years, give or take. Rafe finally knocked some sense into me and I returned to Ireland."

"Is Ireland the land of your birth?"

"I don't know. That's where I was when my mother died. I've always presumed she was Irish."

"Phillip, Brenna, come back. It didn't work. He's on his way to New York. We have to go!" Faelon stood at the top of the slope, motioning them toward him.

Brenna's spine tingled and her wings unfurled. How odd. That only happened when—

That's not Faelon. She passed the thought along the *Sidhe* link she'd used earlier.

Phillip took her hand. *I'm with you.*

They walked toward the imposter. Brenna studied his soul strands. They were thin and frayed, twisting without a distinct pattern or design. The muted colors and seething

rhythm reminded her of a long ago night, in an Irish forest. *That's definitely Kyrel. His pattern is similar to Natalie's.*

"Why would he head back for New York?" Phillip called when they were about halfway up the hill. "That doesn't make sense."

"It makes perfect sense. Hurry!" He motioned again, his body phasing in and out of focus.

Was he a shape changer or just an illusionist? Brenna tuned out his soul strands and concentrated on his false appearance.

"Who's the rogue?" Phillip slowed his pace. "Were you able to identify him?"

Brenna refused to drag her feet. Maris' rapist was right in front of them. This bastard was *not* going to escape again. Easing her hand out of Phillip's, she centered her power and prepared to attack. She sent a burst of energy at Kyrel with the powerful flap of her wings.

Kyrel shrieked, the illusion disintegrating like—*Sidhe* glamour? How was that possible? Head held high, wings poised for a second strike, Brenna approached him. "What do you want with me?"

Phillip moved into her peripheral vision, eyes glowing, fangs revealed. He passed her vampire energy, augmenting her *Sidhe* power.

"I don't know!" Kyrel shouted. "Your face won't leave my brain. I close my eyes and you're there! What do *you want with me*? Why won't you leave me alone?" His voice grew shrill and he clawed at his hair.

Faelon materialized behind Kyrel, but Brenna shook her head. Kyrel had no weapons. She could easily control this. "Why did you attack my sister?"

He laughed, madness gleaming in his eyes. "I thought I'd finally found you. Your face. I can't escape your face." He lunged. She slapped him to the ground with the vicious swipe of one wing. "No, Mistress." He cowered, holding up his hands to ward her off. "Torment me no longer. Now that I've found you, I'll be saved."

"Saved from what?"

"From the blood drinker." He whimpered, tossing his head and flailing his arms as he battled some unseen foe. Golden light burst from his eyes and the sickening crack of bones reshaping echoed through the night. His face contorted. His fingers extended into lethal-looking claws. He launched himself at her throat, knocking her backward.

Searching for footing among the fallen leaves, she commanded the wind to buffet him, encircle him, hold him. He screamed, vibrating with the force of the gale. His claws bit into her upper arms as his feet dug furrows in the ground. She swung her wings again and again, but his body was too close to hers.

Phillip rushed in from one side, Faelon from the other, encompassing Kyrel in golden light.

Merge our power with yours, Phillip called across their Sidhe link. We must do this together.

Without taking her eyes off Kyrel, she absorbed their energy and passed *Sidhe* power on to Phillip. The cloud around Kyrel turned golden, shimmering in the moonlight.

On the count of three, I'll release the wind and let you in. This time she passed the thought to Faelon as well. *One, two, three!*

The wind died as suddenly as it had erupted. Faelon wrapped his arm around Kyrel's throat, dragging him backward, as Phillip leaned in close to his ear. *Your fingers are relaxing. You are calm.*

Kyrel snarled and twisted, but his hands released Brenna's arms. The golden glow bled from his eyes and he shook his head. "Don't you know me, Brenna?" He smiled and her entire body went numb. "I promised I'd return to you. Am I worthy now?"

Faelon dragged Kyrel's arms behind his back. He didn't resist. His gaze bore into Brenna's, pleading and desperate. With one quick, accurate strike, Phillip thrust his hand up through Kyrel's abdomen and closed his fist around the stolen heart. Kyrel

shuddered, moaned, then made no sound at all. Blood ran down Phillip's arm and drenched the front of Kyrel's tunic. Kyrel's eyes glassed over and his body went lax.

Faelon lowered him to the ground and stepped back. Phillip incinerated the remains with one fiery burst. Brenna flapped her wings, directing the ashes up and away from them.

Phillip turned to mist and rematerialized a moment later, his clothing clean, all traces of blood gone. Brenna furred her wings and covered her mouth with her hand, sorrow infiltrating her shock.

"It's over, sweetheart." Phillip pulled her into his arms. "Are you all right?"

She enjoyed the comfort for a moment then eased away. "I know how the Raonull did it." Her mouth was so dry she could hardly speak.

"Kyrel was mad," Faelon said. "You can't put stock in anything he said."

"It's not just what he said, it's what he did." She turned, shifting Phillip's arm to her waist as she faced Faelon. "There was a lad studying at the temple who was a promising illusionist. He was obsessed with two things. His infatuation with me and the legends of the Raonull. I discouraged his interest in both as much as I could, but he was adamant. We eventually had to ban him from the temple."

"Something tells me he didn't take it well." Phillip moved his arm to her shoulders and stroked her hair.

"He told me he would become a powerful sorcerer and return to claim me when he was worthy of my love. He disappeared a few weeks later. We all presumed he left the *Unseleighe* realm."

"So the Raonull Master had an apprentice until Natalie made him a better offer." Faelon rolled his shoulders and sighed. "The power of an organic vampire for the heart of a Dark Elf boy."

Brenna shuddered, bile rising into the back of her throat. "He was searching for me. All those girls were attacked because —"

"Don't." Faelon's tone brooked no argument. "Kyrel's evil had nothing to do with you. My blood ran in his veins. Does that make me responsible? The Raonull Master is dead. Natalie is dead. And the person most responsible for the attacks was just dealt a swift and decisive punishment. It ends here."

Faelon turned toward the castle silhouetted against the night sky. Phillip interlaced his fingers with Brenna's and they fell in behind Faelon.

"What will happen to Maris?" Brenna asked. "Will she be a vampire now?"

"Once the transformation has begun, it cannot be reversed until it has completed the cycle."

Her heart gave a little flutter. Then it could be reversed. "How long does the cycle take?"

"A hundred years," Faelon admitted. He opened the side door with his mind and led them into the great hall. Torches erupted in his wake, but she didn't know if Faelon or Phillip provided the illumination. "If Maris wishes to return to her former state at the end of the transformation, it can be reversed."

"Which takes another hundred years?"

He nodded, his features sharp and unrelenting in the firelight. "Cellular mutation doesn't happen overnight. A century is an amazingly short period of time for someone to evolve into another species. At least she'll have a choice."

"And in the meantime?" Brenna pulled her long braid over her shoulder, fiddling with the ribbon binding the end. "Can she return to our realm?"

"That's up to your council." A hint of challenge sharpened Faelon's tone. "I was under the impression 'blood drinkers' were not tolerated in the *Unseleighe* realm."

"Odd that you should bring this up." She glanced at Phillip and smiled. He watched her closely, but said nothing. "The council is concerned with the influx of... immigrants from other realms. Our population has dwindled and the younger generation is mixing more and more with other races. It was the council's suggestion

that we establish an emissary, a sort of liaison who can bridge the gap between the old attitudes and the new."

Faelon chuckled. "Our council was having a similar conversation a few weeks ago. Apparently the phenomenon is not isolated to Dark Elves."

Brenna looked at Phillip again. He held his features in an expressionless mask. Couldn't he guess where this was leading? "They suggested several candidates who are uniquely qualified for the position."

"What qualifications are they looking for?" One corner of Faelon's mouth quirked. He had obviously figured out the purpose for the conversation.

"People with mixed blood who have interacted with beings from multiple realms."

"You want me to quit Pyrite and become — a diplomat?"

Okay, so he was paying attention. "It's just a suggestion." She shrugged though her heart pounded within her chest. "You must admit you're ideally suited for the position."

"But I'd work for the *Unseleighe* High Council. How lame is that?"

She laughed. "Many rock stars are politically active these days. Look at Bono and Sting."

His dark brows shot up and he turned to face her directly. Faelon melted into the shadows. "I thought you were unaware of anything that happened beyond the walls of the temple."

All playfulness fell away. She gazed into his eyes and opened her mind, pouring love and longing across their telepathic link. "I'm Pyrite's biggest fan."

"Then why are you trying to steal their lead guitar player?" He brushed one corner of her mouth with his lips and then the other.

"Because I need you more than they do." She wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned into his warm body. "I've lived without you long enough."

Their mouths came together in a deep, consuming kiss. All the wasted years, all the frustration melted beneath the intensity of their hope.

He slipped his arms around her waist, pressing her firmly against him. "If we do this, Mistress Air, be warned right now, the combined power of the Elementals won't be able to tear us apart." They kissed again, the fire leaping higher as their passion built. He pulled back, a mischievous smile parting his lips as he said, "And *you* have to tell Rafe."

About the Author

Aubrey Ross writes an eclectic assortment of erotic fiction. From power struggles between futuristic clans to adventurous mystic guardians, her stories are filled with passion and imagination. Some of her recent awards include an EPPIE finalist, two Passionate Plume finalists and a CAPA nomination from the Romance Studio.

With a pampered cat curled on the corner of her desk, Aubrey dreams up fascinating words and larger than life adventures – and wouldn't have it any other way!

Aubrey welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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