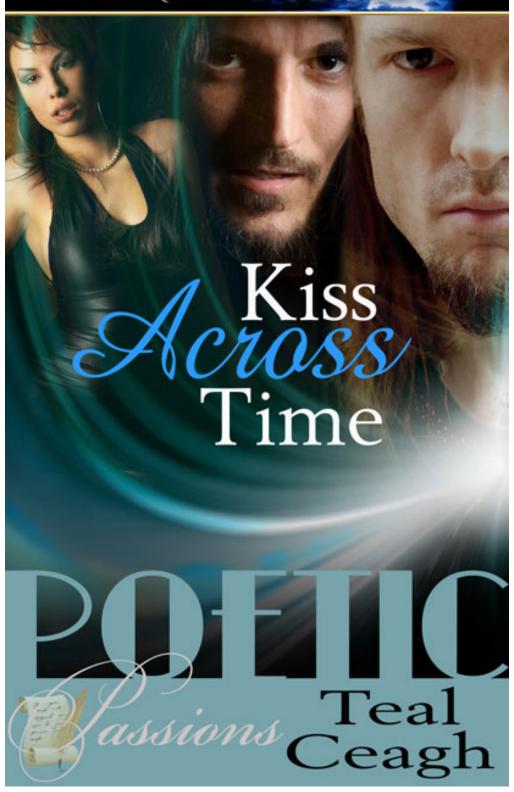
Ellora's Cave TWILIGHT



Kiss Across Time

Teal Ceagh

Taylor Yates just got fired from her university job for insisting that the fifth-century British poet and playwright, Inigo Domhnall, existed. When she hears the poet's lyrics in a death metal song, she engineers a meeting with the dark-eyed, dark-haired lead singer, Brody Gallagher. An unintended kiss sends them spinning back to the poet's time, when Saxons were pillaging King Arthur's Britain, and a warrior expects a proper farewell from his woman before he sets off for war.

Brody's all for kissing her again. More, he'd like her to try kissing his friend and lover, Veris, just to see what will happen. His tall, blond, blue-eyed *Saxon* friend, Veris.

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Kiss Across Time

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KISS ACROSS TIME

Teal Ceagh

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Amon Amarth: Johan Hegg, Olavi Mikkonen, Michael Trengert

Chapter One

"And blood-dipped spears waved beyond thy doors

Foretelling thy doom to me this day of days.

I knew of thy love before thee spoke of it to me

Say not of what is in thy heart for it must not be spake."

Taylor shivered as she listened to the poetic words, sung at a fever pitch, thundering out of dozens of speakers ten feet high, accompanied by the screech of heavy metal guitars, while fifteen thousand screaming fans pummeled and thrashed around her.

She really was here listening to this, she reminded herself. And she really had heard the words. It hadn't been her imagination. She gripped Andy's arm even harder.

"Told you," her next door neighbor yelled in her ear. "Can we go now?" He was anxious to get her the hell out of here before he was spotted with his uptight, anal and not-cool history professor neighbor. At least he could give her brownie points for trying to dress the part. She'd squeezed herself into a lace-up leather miniskirt and black leather bustier she'd borrowed from a Goth ex-student, poured on the black eye makeup and slid into black stiletto ankle boots. But she knew she stood out like a flamingo in the Sonora desert here. Mentally, she'd shrugged. At least she hadn't worn her usual business suit and put her hair up. That would have been even worse.

"Are you kidding?" she yelled back. "How do I get backstage?"

He looked like he was choking. "Are you fucking kidding?" He waved a hand toward the stage. "This is *Nocturnal Rain*! You don't just wander backstage!"

"I have to talk to them!" she screamed in his ear. "I have to find out where they got those lyrics!" He shook his head, mulish. "Not unless you fuck one of 'em, Taylor! It ain't happening. Not with their security."

Taylor gripped the railing of the first tier balcony and stared down at the stage in pure frustration. She had to find a way to speak to whoever had written the lyrics, because whoever that person was, they'd had access to the works of Inigo Domhnall and that made whoever it was her new best friend.

The lead singer was gyrating at the crowd and the mosh pit was going crazy. From where she stood on the second balcony, most of the pit seemed to be women and those women were showing a dazzling amount of cleavage.

A couple of wranglers were on the stage now, working on something behind the singer.

"Shit...damn." Andy turned to Taylor. "Stick your chest out, Taylor," he yelled in her ear.

"What?"

"I forgot about this. Look as fuckable as you can manage." Andy lifted his hands as if he was going to arrange her clothing to add to the fuckable quotient, then he dropped them, as if the task was beyond his capabilities. "What about just smiling, then, huh?" he suggested.

"Thanks," Taylor said, gritting her teeth and smiling. She turned to face the stage.

The singer had been attached to a pair of wires and now he began to soar into the air above the heads of the audience, out beyond the stage. The crowd went wild, screaming and waving. Everyone around Taylor began to shove and press closer to the balcony and she realized that they were trying to get the singer's attention.

And the singer was coming closer. The hysteria around her seemed to rise in exponential proportion. Now she could get a much better look at the guy. He was older than she had first thought. Perhaps it was her complete ignorance of heavy metal in general and death metal in particular but she had assumed that only teenagers and

people in their very early twenties would want to listen to the stuff or play it. This guy looked like he was his early thirties. That put him just a few years older than her.

And he was gorgeous. No wonder the audience was packed with women verging on hysteria. Dark hair, darker eyes, white skin. She classified the combination almost automatically as classic Celtic looks. He was broad-shouldered, defying what she was sure was supposed to be a wasted, frail look for head-bangers. Black jeans, black designer tee shirt, with designer rips and tears and chains looped across the open spaces. Touches of red among the black. A black iron belt buckle down low over an impressive bulge.

Then she blinked. He was looking directly at her. Floating on the wires straight toward her.

Andy was tugging on her arm. "Taylor, he's spotted you!"

She barely heard him.

The man's hand came up and pointed at her, obviously giving the people controlling the wires directions. At once, he drifted toward her and the hysteria around her intensified. Everyone was screaming, not just the women. Even Andy was banging on the balcony rail.

The man's hand curled around the back of Taylor's head. She understood that this was probably a standard ritual at these concerts and tried not to freeze or look bewildered, even though she didn't know for sure what was going to happen next. But her runaway heart had a pretty good idea and her suddenly throbbing clit actually thought it was a good idea, and that horrified her.

He kissed her and Taylor closed her eyes. She could still hear the screaming but it changed in quality and became fear-filled. That made her open her eyes again. Fear was not good.

She was not at the concert anymore. She looked around the rustic room, blinking. *What the hell?*

The singer had her in his arms still, yes. No balcony between them now. His hands slid into her hair, keeping her head still. "Not yet," he begged, sliding his lips down her throat, nuzzling her jaw. "There's time yet, Toiréasa," he murmured. "Time to say fare thee well properly."

"We should have returned to Ireland, Breandán," she whispered, as he loosened the ties on her gown and dropped it from her shoulders. The words came to her naturally, even as a tiny voice was raging in her mind, "What on earth are you saying, Taylor?" But that voice was being drowned out by the pure sensuousness he was stirring in her.

"Arthur would have been short a good officer if we had," he said against her breast, just before his teeth caught the nipple. His hands stripped her gown from her and in the soft morning light pouring through the cloth over the door, he lowered her to the bed in the little cot that had been theirs for the last few years. He unbuckled his sword belt and put it to one side, watching her as she lay waiting for him. He stripped his tunic, trews and boots. He was stiff and ready for her, his manhood throbbing.

He lay next to her and pulled her to him, his thigh thrusting between hers. She was moist and ready for him, aching to feel him slide into her. "Take me, Breandán," she coaxed, tugging at his hip.

His full lips curled in a smile. "Yer a wanton, Toiréasa, lass and I've always lo—"

She quickly covered his lips. "No. Don't speak of it." She shook her head. "Tell me later, you understand?"

His dark brows came together. "Later then," he said, his voice thick. He lifted himself and drove into her with a powerful thrust, his hand under her hip, the tendons in his neck straining with the effort.

Toiréasa gasped, her hands gripping his shoulders, her eyes closing. Breandán's mouth came down upon hers, his lips demanding, his tongue thrusting inside. She opened up to him in every way, knowing it might be the last time, even though neither of them could voice that thought aloud.

And outside the cot, the fear-filled screams of their neighbors went on and on, as the Saxons came closer.

Abruptly the screams shifted and changed in cadence.

Taylor blinked. Opened her eyes again.

It was the death metal concert. Nocturnal Rain. The lead singer was hanging from wires eighteen inches away from her. He had just kissed her. He was staring at her while eighteen thousand death metal fans went ballistic around her.

She licked her lips. What the hell had just happened? Did that happen to every fan he kissed?

The singer pointed to her again. He dropped his chin down and said something into a tiny voice pickup on his shoulder.

Andy was tugging on her arm again and she had a feeling she was going to be very sore tomorrow, thanks to his yanking. "You did it, Taylor! You did it! You got yourself a backstage pass!" He was screaming in her ear.

"I did?" Great. Now the last thing on earth she wanted to do was face that singer backstage. She never wanted to look him in the eye again.

Hands were on her arms, big ones. She was being hustled out of the audience by beefy security guys. Her backstage pass was being put into immediate action. *Fabulous*. Didn't she even get a say in this?

Most fans wouldn't think twice about this, she realized. A chance to meet the lead singer of Nocturnal Rain? And what the hell was his name? She hadn't asked Andy. She was going to look stupid now, when she didn't know. Then she shrugged. She wasn't even going to pretend to be a fan, so it didn't matter.

Was his name Breandán? Her heart thudded as she wondered about that. If it was, she was going to just about pass out on the spot.

The two security guys, wearing jeans and black tee shirts with "security" written on the front and back of them, eased her through the auditorium, out into the front foyer, where they relaxed a little. The screaming metal music faded to a pulsing beat and scratching throb.

"What's yer name, miss?" one asked, with a distinct Australian accent, letting her arm go.

"Taylor," she said.

The other security guy let her other arm go and waved forward. "This way then."

"To where?"

They both looked surprised. "Backstage," the Aussie said.

"Why?" she asked.

The other guy, the non-Australian, stepped back close to her and she shivered.

"Brody wants to talk to you," the Aussie said.

"Brody is the singer who kissed me?" Well at least his name wasn't Breandán.

"You're not a Nocturnal fan, are you?"

Taylor rolled her eyes at the Aussie. "I came with a friend. He'll be worried if I don't go back." The implied warning and the male gender were security stoppers of her own.

"The eighty-pound runt next to you? We'll make sure he gets home safely," the non-Aussie said.

So much for security. Taylor sighed. "Okay. Where do I go?"

They took her through a series of plain cinder-block and linoleum passageways, passing dozens of people who wore either jeans and black tee shirts, or gaudy variations of death metal fashion. Hangers-on, groupies, hopeful wannabes. There were some bored-looking media people, obvious by their equipment and normal street clothes. Eventually, the security guys opened a gray metal door and showed her inside. There were a few chairs and a coffee table. Mini fridge, coffee machine. Magazines. Very little else. "Please wait here," Aussie said.

She stepped in and they shut the door. She had a feeling that if she tried to open the door, she'd find them right outside it and she wouldn't get too far beyond it.

Taylor took a breath, organizing her thoughts. She'd wanted to get backstage, to find out who'd written the lyrics to that song. Well, now she was here. It wasn't the way she'd wanted to get here but she may as well capitalize on the opportunity. Just ignore the unwelcome whatever-it-was that had happened out there. After tonight, she never had to deal with this death metal world and this Brody person ever again.

Her decision made, she found it easier to perch on the edge of one of the uncomfortable chairs and wait. The laced-up sides of the skirt creaked as she sat and she kept her knees together. The skirt wasn't an aid to modesty.

After forty minutes by the clock over the door and twenty minutes after the throbbing music stopped, the door opened again and Aussie stuck his head in. "Taylor," he said softly. "Come this way."

She got to her feet and took a shaky breath. Aussie walked a pace in front of her, leading her through more passageways. They were far more crowded now, telling her she was closer to the center of power. Eyes followed her.

Aussie opened a door and ushered her into a room full of people. She looked around. There was at least one of the band members here. But not the singer. Aussie was still moving though, leading her through the room, around people who Taylor knew were measuring her and mentally stripping her as she stepped between them. She longed to be back in her apartment and dealing with just the ordinary problem of being suddenly unemployed. She didn't belong here.

Aussie tapped on another door, paused, then pushed it open and jerked his head, indicating she should go in. He made no move to enter himself and she knew that she'd reached the inner sanctum.

She stepped in and he shut the door behind her. The door was sealed against noise for the conversation on the other side instantly dropped down to a quiet murmur.

The room was empty. Dark colors on the wall, a bookcase in dark wood in front of her and low lighting from two lamps made it seem elegant and completely out of place compared to the concrete and linoleum decor she'd seen so far. A wide, comfortable sofa took up the width of the room to the left, a rose-colored wooden coffee table sat in front of it. There was a club chair pulled up beside the table and a suit jacket thrown over the arm.

Another door led off to the right and there was the sound of running water. A bathroom. The water cut off as she listened.

Taylor tried to tug her skirt into place but the leather stayed obstinately where it was.

The bathroom door opened and the singer stepped out, wrapping a silky-looking bathrobe around him. He halted when he saw her, his eyes narrowing.

"It was you," he said flatly.

Her heart squeezed. It was him. Breandán. In the vision, dream, whatever it was that she'd had when this Brody had kissed her. Long hair and everything.

"You even have a scar on your chest," she said and lifted her hand to touch, just under her own left breast. "Just like Breandán did."

His eyes widened. "Jesus," he breathed.

After a second or two he stirred. "I guess I don't have to ask if you experienced what I did out there, then."

She licked her lips. "That isn't...usual, then?"

He gave a low laugh. "God no!" He lifted a hand to her face but hesitated just before he touched it. "May I?"

She appreciated his sensitivity. "Yes."

His thumb stroked her cheekbone. "Your name is not really Toiréasa, is it?" His voice was low.

She shivered. He'd been there. He'd really been there with her.

"Taylor," she said.

"I want to kiss you again, Taylor. I want to see what happens this time."

She focused on his full lips and she remembered him sliding his cock into her. Even though it had been a dream or a vision, or whatever it had been, she recalled it like it had actually happened. She could *feel* it. Her clit throbbed.

"Don't be afraid," he said. "I won't let anything happen to you."

Curiously, she believed him. She nodded.

His mouth touched hers hesitantly and she knew there was a pocket of fear in him too. Then his lips grew firmer, more demanding and his tongue thrust into her mouth. She forgot about visions and daydreams and simply enjoyed the kiss. Brody was a damn fine kisser and she hadn't been kissed in a long, long time. She threw herself into the kiss, letting herself be seduced by its power. She pressed up against him, enjoying the pleasure of simply being held by a man, the scent of a man. She wound her arms about his neck and rubbed herself against him with a soft little moan.

He gasped and lifted his head up, looking at her. "No visions," he said softly. "But both of us experienced it, the first time."

"Yes," she agreed. Then she realized that she was draped against him. Worse, his cock was beating between them, signaling his arousal in the most obvious way.

She tried to stand up but he held her still. "Wait," he said. "There's no rush, is there?" His hand was stroking the back of her thigh, making it quiver.

"I have to go home." She tried to make it sound convincing. But she really wanted to stay right where she was and continue kissing him. She had no idea who he was. She didn't even know his last name. But she already knew what his cock looked like and what it felt like to fuck him. And if the vision they had shared had any sort of truth in it, he had loved her once.

Before she had been fired two days ago, Taylor had been within half an inch of being a history professor. She hadn't believed in past lives and all that sort of bullshit. But right now she was willing to grasp it in order to give herself enough justification just to fuck the brains out of this man because kissing him felt so damn good. But that wouldn't make her feel any better tomorrow morning.

She bit her lip. "I can't stay," she said regretfully. "I would love to. I would. But that isn't a good enough reason."

Brody held up his hand. "Before you go," he said. "Would you do me one small favor?"

She stepped away from him. "It depends."

"I want you to kiss my friend. I want to see if it works on him."

Taylor laughed. "Why on earth would it?" Then something in Brody's expression registered on her. "Oh...he's your lover, isn't he?"

Brody lifted a brow.

"A very long-term lover," Taylor concluded with growing wonder. She tilted her head to study him. "What is his name?"

"Most people call me Veris, because they can't pronounce my real name."

She whirled around to face the voice.

He was sitting on the arm of the chair where the suit jacket had been a few moments before. Blond hair, blue eyes, six foot two inches of self-assured, very broadshouldered male.

"You!" She struggled for the name. "Dr. Gerhardsson. You consulted with me last week, about the Domhnall plays."

"Jesus, you son of a bitch," Brody said behind her. "You went and did it after all."

Veris smiled. "I did."

Brody brushed past Taylor and threw himself into the lounge chair. He looked at Taylor. "You're a history professor?"

"I nearly was," she said flatly.

"You don't look like one," Brody commented.

"Neither does he," she said, pointing at Veris. He was wearing leather pants and a sleeveless white cotton overshirt that made the most of the tanned, rounded caps of his shoulders and the bunches of muscles of his arms. Veris crossed his arms over his chest, which just seemed to multiply the amount of tanned muscle on display. His blue eyes twinkled.

Brody seemed more than mildly pissed about Veris' consultation, which had been utterly professional in nature. Dr. V. Gerhardsson had not indicated by so much as an inch that he even recognized that Taylor was a woman.

Even so, Taylor had been left feeling edgy and weak-kneed after the evening consultation and had fallen into bed and indulged in a rare session of masturbation that featured Gerhardsson and his blue eyes and broad shoulders and various parts of his magnificent anatomy, over and over again.

Brody glared at Veris now. "I can see now why you came home in such a muck-sweat that night...the seventeenth, right?"

Taylor jumped. That was the night.

Veris just shrugged a little. No pride lost there. "I have no objections to kissing the lady now, if that's what you want." He smiled a little but his eyes were dancing with merriment.

Brody glared for a moment longer, then gave up. Taylor knew he had tabled the argument for later. He sat forward on the seat and spoke to Veris. "I told you what happened during the concert. I want to see if it happens to you when you kiss Taylor, because of our bond. If it does, then we're going to have to tell Taylor."

Veris glanced at Taylor. "And that won't have tipped her off at all," he said.

"Like consulting her about the Domhnall plays won't have?" Brody shot back.

Veris grimaced. "I see your point." He got to his feet and walked toward her and Taylor knew that the equivalent of a nuclear explosion would have to go off before she would move from the spot.

Veris stopped in front of her. "May I?" he asked. He seemed to tower over her five-foot-six frame, even with her spiked boots.

She thought her knees would give out. "Yes," she said, her voice hoarse.

He slid his hand around her waist and the other under her hair. This close, his blue eyes were mesmerizing and she could feel her heart thundering. It hurt as it slammed against her chest. She gripped Veris' shirt almost convulsively, suddenly afraid.

"It's all right," he whispered, his lips brushing hers, his breath fanning her. "I have you."

He kissed her.

His lips were surprisingly soft. But just for a moment. Then his mouth hardened against hers and his tongue thrust inside, sweeping against her tongue and teeth, exploring.

Taylor moaned. She couldn't help it. This was better than she had imagined in her lonely bed last week. She spread her fingers over the cotton shirt to feel the muscles beneath, as she had longed to do all through the meeting. But instead of cotton, she felt leather.

She opened her eyes. The room was round and there was a hole in the middle of the roof. That was for venting smoke from the fire, she knew. Veris lifted his lips from hers, trailed them to her ear and thrust his tongue inside. Not Veris. Vidar. She groaned, her whole body blossoming with arousal. Vidar was home for such a short while. But they were preparing for all-out war. Even now the longboats were being prepared for the journey over the sea to Britain.

She thrust her hands into his hair, hiding her fear. "Kiss me again, my husband," she demanded, fumbling with the buckles on the leather chest plate he wore.

"There's no time." He brushed her hair from her temple and stroked her neck. His hand fell to her breast and stroked it through the material of her dress.

"There will be enough," she told him, sliding the second buckle undone, as the sweet pleasure from his hand transmitted to her clitoris and made her body begin to tremble and throb with desire. She was moist and ready for him.

She slid the third buckle apart and he tossed the breastplate over his head and onto the floor with an impatient shrug. He pushed her up against the wall, his blue eyes snapping fire. "You are ever an inspiration, Tyra," he growled. He grabbed the scooped front of her white dress and tugged. The fabric tore down to her knees and he pushed on it with his boot to get rid of it, pulling the sleeves off her arms as he did so.

Tyra stood naked before him, her breasts rising and falling rapidly, telling him of her excitement.

Vidar removed his shirt and tossed it onto the breastplate. As he turned away, she saw a long, writhing scar along his back, high up under the shoulder blade. Then he turned back and unfastened his trews, revealing his pulsing cock. He stroked it as he approached her, letting her see the tip of it in his hand. She began to tremble with anticipation.

"Hurry," she whispered.

He shook his head. "No." His voice was a rumble. He pressed up against her. "Not now." His eyes danced. "Ooooh, no." He dropped his head and licked her collarbone, sliding his tongue along the depression to the nape of her neck, making her catch her breath.

Then he slid it down to her breast and sucked the tip into his mouth and began to play with it.

Tyra cried out, her hands slapping against the wall, as the pleasurable sensations bombarded her. She was melting into a puddle of joy. Dimly, she felt Vidar's hands around her waist, holding her up, as his mouth switched to her other breast and continued the medley. She was gasping and trembling and aching to have him inside her. She reached for his head, twining her fingers in his hair, trying to coax him to rise, to press against her.

It was like trying to move a rock. And she was hazy and weak from the pleasure he was giving her, anyway.

"Vidar...fuck me," she said hoarsely. It was the wrong word, she knew that. But it was the only word she could think of right now. It would have to do.

He straightened and his hands around her waist lifted her like she was as light as his spear. She wrapped her legs around his waist, eager for his possession. Looking deep into her eyes, he thrust his long cock inside her with one deep, slow thrust. He groaned as he came to a halt, his swollen balls resting against her ass. "My woman," he growled.

"Yes," she said, as he thrust inside her. It felt so good, she was melting around him. She clutched at his shoulders. "Harder," she begged. "Faster."

He gripped her hips and thrust harder and faster, his pelvis kissing her clit, making her feel faint and swoony. Her climax was building, rushing at her. Her breath caught in her chest as the first convulsions of her climax washed over her. Vidar was slamming into her, driving her pleasure with his heated shaft.

Then she felt him spasm and his seed spill into her even as she shuddered against him. It touched off another powerful climax, one so deep and wrenching that she let her head fall back as she cried out, her eyes closing in ecstasy.

"Tyra. Taylor." Vidar's voice. Breathless. Close by her ear.

She snapped her eyes open at the use of her name. Her real name.

The room. The square room. Veris' face was a bare inch or so from hers. He watched her warily. "Do you know where you are?"

"San Bernadino," she said. "And you're Veris again."

He licked his lips. "And you're Taylor again."

Her heart was slamming in her chest, she realized. Then she grew aware of even more. She was pushed up against the wall. She was naked. And so was Veris.

And his cock was buried inside her.

She moaned.

"No, no, no." He rested his forehead against hers. "Shhhh...."

"Let me go!" She began to struggle.

He withdrew from her. There was little else he could do under the circumstances. He lowered her to the floor and she found she still wore her boots. That made it worse, somehow. She pushed past him and came to a halt. Brody was still sitting on the lounge chair.

"Oh god...you were watching?" she said. She didn't bother trying to cover herself. If he'd been watching, he'd already got a good eyeful.

Brody didn't bother looking embarrassed. "I didn't know what was going to happen," he said evenly. "When I realized, it was too late. After that, I thought it wise to simply guard the door. You two were blind and deaf to this world."

She felt something fall around her shoulders. Terry cloth. A robe. With jerky movements, she thrust her arms into it and tied it shut. Veris brushed past her again, wearing his pants and sat on the sofa. Like Brody, he seemed completely unembarrassed. Well, these two were lovers, after all.

Somehow, their complete lack of shame helped to stabilize her. She took a breath and looked at Brody. "We were...acting it out in front of you?"

"Language and all. It's been a long, long time since I heard the language of my enemies. I had a hard time just sitting here." Brody cleared his throat and glanced at Veris. "I knew you'd have it down but her? It was like she was born to it."

Veris shook his head. "I don't know what's going on. But for the time I was in it, I was home. Except for that one word." He looked at her. "You said 'fuck'."

Taylor nodded. "I knew it was the wrong word even as I said it but I couldn't think of the right one. It's like having a dual personality. A modern one and an ancient one." She sat on the edge of the coffee table and swiveled so she was looking at them. "I'm

right, aren't I? That was Anglo-Saxon we were speaking? And we were somewhere in Scandinavia, preparing to invade Britain?"

"Norway," Veris said flatly. "Or what was to become Norway. It was where I was born...in the year four hundred and thirty-nine."

Taylor nodded, absorbing that. *Right*. She leapt for the door but Veris was there before her, even though she was closer by a dozen feet. She had known he would be that fast, even before she made the move. Only something more than human could have ripped a leather skirt and bustier from her body.

"You have nothing to fear from us, Taylor Yates," he said softly. "Especially now I have tasted your flesh."

She moaned a little as her fear tried to take over. "Of course...it's both of you, isn't it?" She backed up until she could see both of them at once and that put her into the corner of the room. Brody still sat on the chair in the silk robe, unmoved but she knew that he could react as fast as Veris if he needed to. "I suppose you really don't need those wires they used tonight, huh?" she said.

"I'm a vampire, not a ghost." He seemed offended.

"Why didn't what happened just now happen out there?"

"Aren't you glad it didn't?" he responded, with a grin.

She wasn't sure where the giggle came from but suddenly she was laughing. It didn't sound like healthy laughter either. It was torn from her body, straining her vocal chords and making her head ache and her temples throb.

Veris picked her up. "That was one piece of information too much for you, I'm thinking." His accent was suddenly thicker than she had ever heard it, as if he was relaxing, letting her hear the real Veris. She was lowered onto warmth and heat. "Rub her. Keep her warm. She's hysterical."

"Yes, doctor." Brody's voice. Rumbling next to her. His hands were rubbing her arms, her thighs. Veris had dumped her in Brody's lap.

"I am not hysterical!" she screamed and burst into tears, proving that Veris was at least partially right.

Chapter Two

When her tears had dried, Taylor realized that Brody was still rubbing, still stroking and that she liked it.

The two men—vampires, her tired mind corrected but she slid over that one with queasy self-denial—were conversing softly in a language she didn't understand and wasn't even sure she could name. But if they had lived for centuries, wouldn't they know a few dozen languages and dialects that the world had all but forgotten? Hell, she had been speaking to Veris in Old English and there were less than a thousand people who could speak that fluently anymore.

"If you two were born as enemies, how did you become lovers?" she asked, lifting her head from Brody's shoulder.

They both fell silent. Veris glanced at Brody.

"Who said we were enemies?" Brody asked.

"When you kissed me, we went back to fifth-century Britain, Brody. I know that time. I'm an expert in it. I can speak the languages without having to kiss you and fall into some sort of spell to do it. I saw the building we were in and heard the language we were speaking. It was pure Irish, with local idioms for Britain of the time. And we spoke of Arthur. Arturos, in Celtic. King Arthur. You were an officer for Arthur and you were preparing for all-out war against the coming Saxons, after a period of settled peace. That has to be Camlann. Arthur's death and the Saxon victory." She looked at Veris. "Were you there?"

He took a breath. And another. "Yes." His gaze cut away from her.

She lifted her head to look at Brody. "Were you?"

Brody was frowning. "Yes but not as a soldier. I was only thirteen when my father died at Camlann."

"Your father was a soldier?"

"No." Something in Brody's eyes shuttered closed and Taylor knew she would get no more information from him about it.

"You did not meet Veris at that time, then," she concluded.

"We met in Jerusalem, during the Crusades," Veris said. "By then, the stench of being Saxon was less of a burden than that of being anything but a Christian."

Brody's fingers were stroking her neck above the robe. She hated that she wanted to purr as he did it. "You've been together that long?" Even her voice was lower, thick with lust.

"On and off," Brody murmured. "Sometimes one of us will want to follow our own adventure and go off for a year or two."

"But he always comes back," Veris ended. His hand lightly touched her ankle and began to stroke and her heart fluttered. She realized then that they were seducing her in slow degrees, trying not to alarm her but intent on having her once more.

Both of them.

Her clit bloomed and throbbed at the thought. She left her head against Brody's chest as his fingers continued to stroke the nape of her neck and ease her robe off her shoulder. She had only a few minutes left in which to make any sort of protest, or it would be too late.

Then a cool voice spoke in her mind. Who was she fooling? She had already fucked Veris. And in her mind, she had fucked Brody. Because of some technical hitch, possibly the roadies hauling on the wires keeping Brody in the air, they hadn't physically consummated the act. But in her mind, she was guilty.

So why was she being coy now? Because she had discovered that they were vampires? Veris had indicated that somehow, the act of fucking her put them in a position of obligation and that made it safer for her to be with them.

So Taylor lifted her head again and deliberately kissed Brody, giving him as clear a signal as she could. She was delighted to hear his breath catch and his hand still. "*Mhuirnin*," he murmured against her lips.

Veris' hands were on her robe, loosening the tie, parting the thick toweling fronts and peeling it from her as Brody turned her in his lap so her back was against his chest. He was a tall man—not as tall as Veris but even so, sitting on his lap, her head still barely lifted above his.

Veris kissed her softly. He still wore his pants but she could see the top of his cock thrusting above the half-open fly. He was aroused and excited. He let her lips go and turned his head to kiss Brody with just as much gentleness.

Then, showing no sign of effort, he picked Taylor up around the waist, flipped her over and laid her over the big padded arm of the chair so that her ass was up in the air and her head was in Brody's lap. She saw Brody's already stiff cock twitch and his hand slid into her hair.

His hips gave a little helpless thrust up.

Veris was behind her, caressing her cheeks, spreading them, making her feel wickedly exposed and vulnerable.

She wriggled on the arm of the chair. "Fuck me," she begged, looking over her shoulder.

"I have a better idea," he told her. He slid a finger through the slick dampness of her cleft. She was shockingly wet. Dripping with moisture. For one ecstatic moment, he stroked her clitoris, making her moan and arch on the chair.

Brody's groan echoed hers as his hand clenched in her hair. He guided her hand to his cock and curled her fingers about the shaft and hissed as she slid her hand along its length, bumping over the flaring red edges of the head.

Veris brought his dampened finger to her anus and pressed it against the hole. Taylor gasped at the strange sensation. "You've never been fucked in the ass, have you?" Veris said.

"No."

"We want to," Brody said, his voice hoarse with longing.

Taylor struggled to stand up but Brody caught her face in his hands. "It's delicious," he told her. "For a woman, it's the most mind-blowing, powerful orgasm you've ever experienced. Two men inside you at once, both of them making you come. And we have a unique gift that makes it very special."

She searched his face but could see no sign of a lie there.

"I'm trusting you," she said.

"You can," he said flatly. He looked at Veris and nodded as she relaxed.

She heard Veris move away and the sound of a zipper and small rustling sounds. Then he returned. "Lubricant," he said softly. "Lots and lots of it for a virgin like you. Relax, Taylor. We know what we're doing. We've done this thousands of times."

Brody was smiling.

"With women too, hmmm?" she asked and caught her breath as cool gel touched her ass and slipped between her cheeks.

Veris pushed out his breath. "God that looks so sexy, sliding across your white flesh like that. Makes me want to eat you."

Brody chuckled. "He means that in the literal sense too."

She gulped.

Veris' lips touched the back of her shoulder and his fingers toyed with her nipple, making her arch and gasp. "He's teasing."

His fingers spread the gel around her ass and pushed gently into it and it *was* an odd but erotic sensation. She caught her breath and found she was pushing back, encouraging him. He drove more of the gel into her, sliding his finger around the muscle, stretching it. Then he pushed a second finger inside and opened and closed them, training her.

Taylor gasped, her eyes widening.

Brody kissed her, his hands capturing her breasts and toying with the nipples and tweaking them. The sweet sensations blended with the mildly painful ones and she began to writhe on the arm of the chair, panting into Brody's mouth as he controlled her pleasure.

After what seemed an eon, Veris released her and picked her up again, like she weighed no more than a rag doll—or his spear, her mind insisted—and kissed her quickly and hard on the lips. "Were but it my turn," he growled.

"Idiom, Veris," Brody snapped.

"The door's closed," Veris said, not even looking at his mate. He handed Taylor to him, lowering her down into his lap. "Hurt her and I'll kill you myself."

"He's a teddy bear, really," Brody whispered, his hands around her waist, as Veris crouched down before them and draped her legs on either side of Brody's thighs. As Brody's knees were already apart on the chair, it spread her wide open.

Brody lifted her up as easily as Veris did and brought her down carefully upon his cock. He paused with the tip pushed against her ass. "Take a deep breath and relax, Taylor," he said as she tensed. "Let everything open up."

She took the deep breath and magically, everything did open up. She felt herself relax as he described and his cock pushed inside. He didn't thrust inside but nudged in a fraction of an inch at a time until a few minutes later, she was resting with the full length of his cock buried in her.

Veris' own cock was throbbing, clear evidence that he found the sight of her impaled upon Brody highly arousing.

Brody turned her head and kissed her. "You're so tight and hot. I could come with the slightest jolt now."

"Your coming is not on the agenda, my friend," Veris pointed out with a growl.

"Why don't you make yourself useful, at least?"

Taylor gasped as Brody gave a hungry rumble and slid his hands up to cup her breasts. "With pleasure," he murmured, squeezing them and pinching the nipples.

"I have something else to do," Veris said. He stroked the insides of Taylor's thighs, making the sensitive flesh there quiver.

She licked her lips. "You aren't going to fuck me too?"

"Not this time," he said. "We don't want to overwhelm you all at once. And this one will take the top of your head off anyway." He grinned.

She caught her breath at the sheer devilment in his eyes but before she could question him further, his fingers slid into her sopping pussy. *Deep* in. She cried out, as the asymmetrical knuckles and broad fingers stroked her insides. His gazed locked with hers, as his fingers worked. "I can feel you, Taylor. I can feel you coming." His fingers were sliding in and out of her as he spoke, coaxing the climax along.

Taylor's breath was shortening. Brody's hands on her breasts were teasing, lightly pinching, his fingernails catching on the tips of her nipples and that alone would have been enough for her to squirm endlessly.

Add to that Veris' deep, thick probing with his fingers and Brody's cock in her ass and she was so close to orgasm she could barely think. She clutched at the big padded arms of the chair, gasping, her hips thrusting helplessly. "Please!" she begged hoarsely.

Veris' lips curled in a ghost of a smile. Her desperation pleased him. His gaze flickered toward Brody.

Brody's hand lifted to her neck and pulled her hair away. "Come for us," he crooned, his lips brushing the nape of her neck, his teeth scraping lightly over the flesh, making her hypersensitive nerves flare with silvery pleasure.

Veris lowered his head and his lips fastened over her clit, sucking it into his mouth. His tongue and teeth began to feast on her clit and lower lips, stroking them, sucking on them. His tongue flickered and probed.

Taylor clutched at his head, as overwhelming sensation slammed through her. Her orgasm was rushing at her now. As it built from her toes, she felt Brody's teeth pierce the flesh of her shoulder. For less than a second it hurt, not even that.

Then the orgasm shifted and became something else. Something better. Hot pleasure rushed through her like molten lava on an express train whistling past at supersonic speeds.

Taylor threw her head back and screamed, her entire body locking into the consistency of iron as the climax ripped through her nervous system. She bucked on the chair, her body clenching around Brody's cock and she heard him give a hard oath, his hands on her hips, as her spasming body and the power of this special orgasm brought on his own.

Finally, she fell limp and almost exhausted back against Brody's chest. Her nerve endings felt as if they were in tatters. Her heart was running fast and weak.

Veris withdrew his fingers from her pussy and sat on the coffee table, with a satisfied half-smile.

Brody brushed her hair from her face. "You see?" he said and he sounded just as drained as she did.

She giggled. This time it wasn't a precursor to hysteria. It was just a giggle. She put her hand over her mouth. "Lord, I haven't giggled like a schoolgirl for years."

Veris was smiling too.

Brody's hands gripped her hips more firmly and lifted her gently off his cock. He placed her on her feet. "I'm guessing you'll be wanting to use the washroom," he said. "Help yourself to anything in there, including the clothes. Veris owes you for tearing your own apart."

Taylor was grateful for the opportunity to clean up. The bathroom was a full one and she showered and cleaned every inch of herself, including the ten pounds of black eye makeup she was surprised to find was still more or less intact.

There was a rolling clothes rack against one wall. She went through the clothes hanging on it and found a black, long-sleeved tee shirt that was sized to fit a man of Veris' dimensions. It had the band's logo on it.

She slipped it over her head. It was a dress on her. She rolled up the sleeves then pushed them so they stayed above her wrists. The v-neck of the shirt came down between her breasts and could be called provocative—especially as she had no bra to wear.

She applied fresh makeup from the limited supplies in her bag and helped herself to the moisturizer on the counter. While she was doing that, she grew aware of voices beyond the bathroom door. Brody and Veris were talking quickly and it sounded quite heated. But she couldn't make out words and after a minute she realized they weren't speaking English. Old English? Irish Gaelic? Celtic? One of their intimate dead languages—it didn't matter. They would have chosen one they knew she couldn't follow. It seemed she wasn't the only one with an agenda.

She stepped out of the bathroom, her bag clutched in her hand and they both straightened up from their conspirative huddle. They hadn't moved from where she had left them. Veris sat on the coffee table, Brody in the chair. One blond. One dark. Ancient enemies, plotting together.

Taylor cleared her throat.

Brody stood up, wrapping the robe about him. "Arena management are shutting up shop. We actually live in Beverly Hills, but they make me stay in a local hotel for the night so fans don't track me back home. It's a security thing. Anyway, normally we...I would head back home—to the hotel, I mean."

"Alone, he means," Veris added.

Taylor nodded. "My friend Andy who I came to the concert with explained about the backstage pass. I realize I'm not the first fan to get a pass back here, Brody. I'm not about to break down and cry about it." "Didn't think you were." Brody grinned. His black eyes were dancing. "But you're not a fan, are you?"

She shook her head, aware that Veris was watching her intently with his blue eyes, missing nothing. "No."

"That's good," Brody said, crossing his arms. "Because we're not kicking you out. We're taking you back to the hotel with us."

Taylor squeezed the handles on her shoulder bag. "Plan on asking anywhere along here?"

Brody gave a short laugh. "No." He seemed incredulous.

Veris stood up. "Your sensibilities are unnecessary burdens, Taylor," he rumbled. "You came here with a purpose tonight and it wasn't to attend a death metal concert. Don't pretend that coming back to the hotel with us doesn't further that purpose. You and I both know what your mission in life is."

She licked her lips, her heart thundering. But this time it raged for a different reason. He *knew*. Veris was the source of the lyrics she had heard tonight and five weeks ago, filtering from Andy's apartment, when she had stood stock-still in her kitchen in astonished disbelief as they'd wafted through the paper-thin dividing walls. She'd listened and then dashed next door to bang on Andy's door and demand to know what the god-awful music was and where he'd got it and more importantly, who had written it?

Andy had managed to get hold of two tickets to the San Bernardino concert as a surprise for her, while she had researched death metal in general and Nocturnal Rain in particular and discovered that most of the best death metal bands seemed to come out of Scandinavia and while the music tended to be variations of screeching guitars and monotonous bass and drums, the lyrics—naturally—centered around death, dying, the afterlife and all things bloody and fatal.

Nocturnal Rain had appeared abruptly on the scene a few years ago, touring obsessively through Europe until their reputation was secure enough to tackle America.

By the time their first U.S. concert date was announced, they were already a heavy metal name in North America.

They were a typical death metal group and their songs were all standard fare. Taylor had checked the lyrics on all of them. The one glaring exception was "Kiss Across Time" which Taylor had to admit was only an exception to *her* eyes and ears. Andy hadn't thought anything odd about the song, except that it was a bit more sentimental and a bit less bloody than others on the album, until Taylor had got excited about it.

Even when she tried to explain *why* she was excited about it Andy still didn't do more than shrug. "These death metal bands use mythology all the time," he said. "Look at Amon Amarth. Their whole image is built on the Vikings."

"But Nocturnal Rain didn't just dip into mythology, Andy. They stole it, word for word!"

"Yeah but the poem is like, what, two thousand years old? Not like there's any copyright on it now, huh?"

Taylor had shaken her head and shut up. Andy had not understood. It was like trying to explain color to a man blind from birth. He couldn't even begin to understand what this meant—to the literary world and to the historical world. And yeah, to her career too.

Now she stared at Veris. Veris understood *exactly* what was at stake. He'd consulted her about Inigo Domhnall last week on a pretext in order to find out the extent of her knowledge on the man, she realized that now. If Veris had moved through time, the chances were, he knew far more about Domhnall than she did.

So why had he wanted to measure her knowledge of the poet?

The fifth-century Celtic poet.

Taylor could feel her jaw sag. She looked at Brody, who was Celtic. The natural question formed almost automatically.

But before she could speak a word of it, Veris was standing in front of her.

Vampire speed. She caught her breath in not quite a gasp.

"Say yes, sweet one," he murmured, his hand in her hair, his lips hovering by hers. "Say you'll stay with us. I am not tired of you yet."

"Way to make a girl feel wanted, Veris," she said tartly.

He blinked.

Brody laughed, behind them. "I apologize on his behalf," he said, coming over to her and sliding her out of Veris' hands with deft movements. "He's rusty. It's been too long since he tried to woo a woman with more intelligence than his own and when the stakes were so high."

"Are they?"

Brody's smile faded. "Yes," he said frankly. He brushed her face again and ran his thumb over her jaw. "Neither of us knows why this is happening, these vision things, but we both believe it is for a profound reason we cannot ignore. Which is why we want you to stay with us until we learn the reason. Will you, Taylor?"

* * * * *

The hotel was a five-star luxury high-rise complex complete with hot and cold running waiters and security staff. "I can't walk through the lobby looking like this," Taylor objected.

"We can't walk through the lobby anyway," Brody pointed out. "I'd get three feet and be mobbed." He sounded apologetic. "We'll be using the freight elevator and going in via the kitchen."

"How do you stand it?" Taylor murmured, staring at him.

"I've got an even five hundred thousand already staked he'll last another two years and have to bail," Veris said from the depths of the dark corner of the stretch limo. His face was in shadow.

Brody grimaced. "Don't stay it," he rumbled.

"I didn't."

Taylor tried not to smile. "'I told you so?'" she guessed.

Brody growled.

Security staff met the limousine as it pulled into the underground freight service area and opened the door for them. Veris was the first out and turned to hold out a hand for her. Taylor let him help her out, feeling quaintly old-fashioned despite the skimpy tee shirt dress and ankle boots. She shook out her hair and straightened up as Brody stepped out behind her.

The security staff didn't even blink an eye at her. They were apparently too used to handling rock stars and movie stars of all temperaments and types at their hotel. She relaxed.

They were escorted via the battered freight elevator to an unspecified floor that had only three hotel room doors leading off the elevator lobby and each of them were double doors with suite names rather than numbers on them.

The security staff opened up the Neeli Cherkovski suite door and while they stood outside with two of the staff, two others did a fast sweep around the suite. Then they stepped out and handed the key card to Brody. "Have a nice night, sir," one of them said and all four stepped back onto the elevator.

Taylor looked up at Veris.

"You get used to it," he said and held out his hand, indicating she should go in.

Brody followed her and Veris shut the door. She took a deep breath, nervous. The sitting room of the suite was elegant and unremarkable.

"Why nervous now?" Brody asked from right behind her. His lips touched the flesh of her shoulder, as his hands pressed against her arms. "I have tasted your blood and Veris your flesh. We have feasted upon you."

"Now who's using old idiom?" Veris growled. He picked up her hand and kissed the back of her knuckles. "Don't let him scare you. He's saying in his non-poetic way that because we've had sex, you're safer with us than you would be with a human boyfriend you've been dating for six months. It's the way of things, among us. Besides, we're so much stronger and faster than humans, there's very little that can get past our guard." He seemed to be searching her face, looking for signs that she believed him.

She licked her lips. "You don't seem at all troubled about revealing yourself to me. Your nature, that is."

"The visions made it necessary. We have to discover their meaning. And if you were to tell anyone about us and actually managed to make them believe you, well...we've had long practice dealing with that before." Brody shrugged.

She shivered again. There was a flatness about his voice that told her they had dealt with such issues with a ruthless swiftness that would shock her if she knew the details. She didn't want to know. They would not have survived unknown for over a thousand years if they had not jettisoned remorse and guilt a long time ago. "And you say I should relax," she said, trying to make her expression light. They had guaranteed her safety within the limits of their influence. She suspected those limits extended further than some of the most powerful men she knew, even those men who bought that power with money.

Veris tugged on her hand. "Are you hungry? Should we order food for you?" She shook her head. "I'm fine."

Brody stepped past her. "I need to clean up." He moved silently into another room and Taylor saw a light switch on, then the sound of running water, before a door shut.

She looked at Veris. "You shut me down when I was going to ask him about Inigo Domhnall, when you know very well there's a damn good chance Brody probably knew the man personally."

Veris didn't even blink. "Yes, I shut you down, for the same reasons it was I who consulted you about Domhnall, an ancient *Celtic* playwright and poet and not Brody himself, the one Celt in the room. Think about that and don't ask him."

Taylor felt words of protest begin to bubble to her mouth. They were automatic but then she remembered the moments she had first recognized Veris in the dressing room at the arena and the hot words Veris and Brody had exchanged.

Domhnall was known to both of them. Whether he was more than just the name of a poet who might have lived when the mythical Arthur did...

She gasped and looked at Veris. She had been so distracted by the dream of a Saxon world and sexual possession by her Viking warrior as a result of Veris' kiss, that she had failed to ask another, far more crucial question when she had emerged from it.

Veris' blue eyes were drilling into her now, almost blazing with knowledge. He knew. He *knew* what she was going to ask.

"Camlann," she said and her voice was hoarse. "You said you were at the Battle of Camlann." She found she was reaching for his shoulder, her knees suddenly weak. His big hands caught her arms and held her up. "You were there. You know."

He picked her up and carried her into the room Brody had gone into. It was a bedroom, as she had suspected it to be. He sat her on the bed but instead of standing up, he sat next to her, one long leg folded so he could face her. In the dark his eyes still seemed to radiate blue.

"Ask your question, Taylor," he said softly and suddenly his accent was thicker than ever she had heard it.

"The leader you were fighting..." She could barely make herself say the words. Hope was thick in her chest, tightening her throat. Veris' answer could vindicate her entire career, could validate her thesis and prove that she hadn't wasted the last seven years of her life researching a ghost. "In Brody's dream, we spoke of Arthur. And afterward, backstage at the arena, I mentioned *Arturos* and neither of you denied it. Yet historians laugh at the idea. The leader you were fighting at Camlann, Veris. Was it Arthur?"

It seemed to take forever for him to answer.

"Yes, Taylor. It was Arthur, although he was not the king the movies like to make him out to be. He was a warlord who held the tribes together against us for twenty years, until we found a way to break his defenses. We needed arable land. He would not treaty with us. So we were forced to take it."

"By treachery," she said. Her lips were numb. Her entire body felt stiff with the rush of cold adrenaline.

"Aye, by treachery," he said. "That one fact continues to preserve itself, when all the others have gone."

Taylor saw the touch of bitterness in his eyes. "If only your people had written their histories down as the Celts did, perhaps more flattering facts about the Saxon invasion of Britain might have been saved, hmm?" Joy was bubbling through her. Happiness. She had been proved right. Arthur did exist. She wasn't a flake, mad or pathetically romantic. Perhaps she could even get her job back now...

"If only it had been that simple," Veris replied. "But even the Celts' version of those days is lost to us, is it not? Or you would not be struggling so hard to prove your thesis."

But you were there. The words were right there on the edge of her lips. She nearly spoke them. She didn't have to struggle anymore. She had proof. He was sitting right in front of her, staring at her with a touch of pity in his eyes. A sad patience, even. Waiting for her to understand.

Taylor rubbed her temple, as the truth struck home. Her head began to throb. "I can't produce you as my proof."

He brushed her hair back and tucked a curl behind her ear, his big hands moving with gentle dexterity. "No."

The bathroom door opened behind her and the bed shifted as Brody's weight moved it. She felt him against her and the touch of his lips on her shoulder, through the tee shirt. "Is he upsetting you? I can hear your breathing has quickened."

"You can hear that?" She shook her head. "It's nothing. I'm being stupid. A product of only walking around this earth for a mere twenty-eight years."

Brody moved so that he was sitting where he could see both her and Veris. He smiled. "Don't let him get to you. He makes me feel like that sometimes and I'm a little bit older than you."

She couldn't help her smile. The understatement was so massive it was cheeky. She found she was laughing and leaned forward to kiss him. She meant it only to be a thank you kiss on the lips but Brody caught her face in his hands and took control of the kiss, his tongue rimming her lips and probing inside. His lips drew on hers, tasting them. She sighed into his mouth, her eyes closing in bliss.

This time she felt the transition and opened her eyes straightaway, looking around. The room was a lot bigger than the hotel room they had been in. She was standing now, not sitting on the bed they had been on. The room had painted walls. *Beautiful* painted walls. The ochre walls had frescos everywhere, with vines framing them, running up to the vaulted roof above, where an iron sconce hung, with old, unlit candles. Morning light filtered through doors that were thrown open to the day and she could hear birds in the real vines beyond the doors. How did she know they were vines? She knew, just as she knew it was her job to pick the grapes from them each summer.

Brody...Brendan was staring at her, holding her face steady. "Stay with me, Therasia."

Chapter Three

Her heart was thudding hard. Was it Brody asking her to stay in the dream? Or Brendan asking her to stay in the room?

Verinus rested his hand on Brendan's shoulder. "Let her go if she's of a mind to, Brendan." His arm was covered in a long-sleeved shirt, full at the wrist and of a rough linen and style that she found she was almost automatically cataloguing for its place in the annals of history.

She straightened up. She had apparently been pouring wine from the pitcher that was in her hands and Brendan had taken the opportunity to kiss her. She let the pitcher hang from one hand. Brendan was watching her anxiously with his black eyes. "Stay," he repeated and reached for her free hand. "Please." He cleared his throat. "Stay for me."

He was aware. She shivered suddenly. Brendan...was Brody and was as aware of the waking dream as she was.

She looked at Verinus. Was the twenty-first century Veris' mind in Verinus' body too?

The big man fell back into his corner of the couch, reached for his goblet and held it out for her to fill. "You'd best humor him, lass," he said. "For he's been called to Jerusalem by his king once more and he's of a foul spirit."

She poured the ruby red liquid into his cup and searched his face. There was no hint of awareness, no knowledge in his eyes. She glanced at Brody. *Brendan*, she reminded herself. His head moved in a tiny negative motion.

Taylor put the pitcher on the table next to the high-backed couch, an idea occurring to her. "My lord, would you permit me an indelicacy?" she asked Verinus.

His eyes narrowed, even as the corners of his mouth lifted expectantly. "Certainly," he said.

She lifted the heavy skirts of the gown and kirtle she was wearing and stepped between his knees to bring herself closer and cupped his face. "For a departing warrior," she murmured and kissed him. She kept her eyes open and saw his close as she poured herself into the kiss. His hands lifted to her hips and pulled her off her feet and hard against him. She could feel the steel rod of his growing erection against her hip as he held her.

She broke the kiss. "Look at me," she told him.

He opened his eyes but did not look at her. He looked around the room instead. His lips parted. "Florence," he breathed. "Jesus." Only then did his gaze come back to her. "Therasia," he said cautiously.

"Taylor," she corrected and stood up. She looked around the room. "You lived here? Both of you?"

Veris glanced at Brody. "Brody?"

"We're all aware this time," Brody confirmed. "I don't know why. Taylor just brought you to awareness with that kiss."

Veris pushed his hand through his hair. "Yes, we lived here," he told Taylor. "In 1191 Brody answered Richard the First's call for all men loyal to him to travel to the Holy Land and he went to Acre to fight by the Lionheart's side...and 'died' there." He stood up. "Because he was run through by a Saracen's sword, he had to die in the eyes of all men. I was called to collect his body and we were forced to leave this place and begin again with new identities."

Brody looked around. "I liked it here. Florence was beautiful."

"Still is," Veris growled.

There was a rattle of metal at one of the internal doors, heralding the arrival of someone new. Before Taylor could more than look up at the door, Veris reacted. He

shifted so that he was standing next to her and bent her over his arm. His other hand ripped both her gown and kirtle open so that her breast was revealed and he cupped it in his big hand, covering it. His mouth came down on hers as the door opened and shuffling steps entered the room.

"Excuse me, masters—" The wavering voice halted. There was a clearing of a throat.

"We're busy. Come back later," Brody said curtly.

"My apologies." The shuffling steps sounded again, heading back for the door.

"And keep the door shut!" Brody said, lifting his voice.

Taylor couldn't help it. She moaned and thrust her hand into Veris' hair. His hand on her breast and the sudden, commanding kiss were both affecting her. Her pussy was clenching and her clit throbbing. Bent over like this, she longed for Veris to slide his hand along the length of her stretched and vulnerable body. She ached for it.

Brody's hands circled her ankles and stroked and she cried out against Veris' lips.

Veris lifted his lips from hers and smiled. "So, you like the idea of being taken, hmmm?"

She could feel her face flush, even as her body leapt at the idea. His hand was stroking her breasts, his thumb tugging at the nipple, sending weakening waves of pleasure through her. Brody's hands were sliding up her legs, teasing the sensitive inner flesh of her knees and thighs, bringing the heavy folds of clothing up with them.

Veris brought her back upon her feet and Brody lifted the ruined gown over her head. The two men stripped her bare and Veris snuggled up behind her, his hands on her hips, his fingertips moving in light, gentle, teasing circles, while Brody stood before her.

"It's my turn to play," Brody declared.

"Here?" Taylor asked.

"Why not?" He shrugged out of the billowing rough linen shirt he wore, pulling it off over his head and tossed it from him. His wide shoulders gleamed in the low light coming through the open doors, surprisingly tanned and corded with muscle. His gaze was heated as it settled on her again. The front of his leather trousers was strained by his engorged cock. He untied the fastenings and opened it and she could see the blunt end of his cock jutting above the trousers as they curled open. His cock was red and pulsing.

She was on fire. She moaned a little, her thoughts growing hazy and indistinct, except for a strong need – the need to be taken. Veris' words whispered in her mind.

Taylor rested her head against Veris' shoulder. "Please..." she murmured helplessly. Her breasts were molten tipped and aching.

Brody pushed up against her, his leather-covered shaft pressing against her mons. The pressure was perfect, scattering her wits even more and making her pussy quiver. Taylor clutched at Brody's shoulders, feeling flesh and iron muscle beneath. His dark gaze bored into her as he lifted her chin with his long fingers. "Why you, my beautiful one?" His voice was thick with lust.

"You find her pleasing?" Veris asked. His voice rumbled against her back. His hand lifted to her breast and stroked it, as if he were drawing attention to it but Taylor found her eyes were closing as her thoughts further scattered by his touch.

Brody's black gaze lifted to Veris' face. "You know I do."

Veris caught Brody's face in his hand. It was a gentle touch. The touch of a lover. "Then enjoy," Veris said softly. "Who are we to question fate, hmmm? After all these years, you should know better, *freond*."

Brody nodded, as his gaze shifted back to Taylor and grew heated even as his head lowered and his mouth covered hers. "Forgive me," he murmured, his lips moving against hers. "Angst comes naturally to me. My family were all poets." His tongue rimmed her lips, then probed inside, hard and insistent, as his hands held her face steady and his body pressed up against her.

Taylor trembled at the erotic pleasure of being pressed between these two tall, hard males. They had lived so long, seen so much, yet they wanted her. Taylor Yates, of the failed career and little life. She could feel Brody's hard cock against her hip as he held her. Veris' pants, pushed up behind her, were bulging and pushed against her ass in a way that made her want to push back and encourage him to thrust harder.

Between the two of them, there was an overwhelming rush of sensations. Their hands were everywhere on her body and she couldn't keep track of where they were, as they moved up and down in long sweeping strokes and brushes wherever her flesh was not already covered by their bodies.

And Body's kisses were sweet drugged wine to her. Taylor fought to keep her eyes open, for she did not want this waking dream to end but her lids grew heavy with desire. She clung to him, her legs weak.

"Brody, please," she whispered when he released her mouth.

"Please what?" His voice was thick and rough. He stepped back from her and Veris lifted her up and kept her on her feet, his big hands around her waist.

She couldn't put her thoughts together. She ached with need but couldn't find the words. She lifted her hand out to him. "Please...both of you."

Veris drew in a heavy breath. She felt his lips on her shoulder and the soft brush of his teeth. "You honor us." His voice too, was low, hoarse with a sudden longing and instead of his hands holding her, his arms slid around her and held her tight.

"Perhaps that's why," Brody said, almost to himself. He stripped off the last of his clothing. He was strong, his body hard and enduring and his cock was sharply erect. He loosened Veris' arms and brought Taylor against him, his hand against the back of her hip, pressing her pelvis so that their hips met. "I can't wait," he muttered. "Veris..."

"Come here, sweet one," Veris whispered to her and she felt his hands on her thighs, separating them, lifting her. Spreading her. "I will not let you fall," he told her and she knew that. She felt safer in these men's arms than she had ever felt in her life,

yet they could extinguish her life in a heartbeat and with less qualms than a human squashing a bug.

As Veris lifted her, Brody pressed in against her, his hands on her breasts, tasting her with his fingers, unable to let her go. His expression was fevered and hungry. Veris brought her up high enough for Brody to sink his cock into her and he barely hesitated. The blunt tip of his cock slipped into her narrow moist cleft and the thick shaft speared into her with a force that made her thoughts groggy. As Brody's hand tangled in her hair at the back of her neck and he pulled his thick cock out of her pussy in a slow, deliberate withdrawal, only to ram it back into her again, she realized she was drunk on pleasure.

Brody's controlled, hard strokes slowly shortened, became quicker and he pushed up against her.

"More," she begged. "Please, more."

His mouth brushed up against her shoulder. She felt the scrape of teeth.

"Brody," Veris said, his voice low. It was a warning.

Brody halted, his chest rising and falling hard, his face tucked against her neck. Finally, he lifted his head and kissed her lips. His eyes seemed totally black to her. "I think you could be addictive, Taylor Yates." He gripped her bottom. "Put your legs and your arms around me."

She wound her legs and arms around him, feeling the movement translated in tiny shifts of his cock still lodged inside her pussy. She found she was gasping as she moved.

"I have you," Brody assured her, his hands firm underneath her.

It was an erotic sensation. She looked up at him and licked her lips, feeling her pussy clench around him. "I know," she said, her voice husky.

She could hear Veris behind her, the rustle of cloth and knew he was undressing. Her heart raced. In less than a minute, she felt Veris pressing up against her from behind, his hands on her hips.

"And now you shall have both of us," he said. "As you wish."

His hands stroked her ass cheeks, smoothing over Brody's where they supported her and slipped into her cleft. She bucked at the sensation of Veris' gentle probing even as Brody was buried inside her and moaned. Her senses were beginning to reel. "Hurry," she begged, for she knew what he planned.

His fingers pushed at her anus and they were slick with something. Oil, she suspected. They slipped inside. *Sweet pleasure*. She felt him work the muscle, stretching it, preparing her. Dark excitement gripped her. She looked up at Brody, as her pussy clenched around him. Her breathing was ragged.

"Quickly," Brody said, his voice low and harsh.

The tip of Veris' cock replaced his fingers, pushing at the tiny aperture and Taylor fought not to close her eyes in response to the dizziness whooshing through her. Veris' cock eased inside her, slippery with the same oily substance. She felt every delightful inch slide in, until he was completely inside her and there was no discomfort. Just the feeling of fullness. Of delicate tissues being stretched. And of possession.

She could feel her thoughts jangling apart. "Hurry," she said, her voice husky. "Fuck me."

"As you command," Brody murmured.

As one, the two men moved together. Their cocks slid from her body, almost completely, before pushing back in. Veris' hands were supporting her too. She could feel them. Their cocks beat into her in concerted rhythm, driving the breath from her, scattering thought and meaning from her mind.

Taylor began to tremble violently, her climax already shuddering through her. "Too late," she whispered, clutching at Brody's shoulders desperately, her body clenching around them in spasmodic convulsions as it swept through her.

She felt their mouths on her shoulders, the sensitive skin of her nape. The brush of sharp teeth. Then the prick of fangs and with a silvery rush her orgasm burst upon her like a series of exploding fireworks. She threw her head back and screamed, her whole body tightening up in a column of gripping muscle. And even as she screamed, she felt a tongue—Brody—slide up the length of her throat.

Hot cum spilled into her. She felt it. Both of them came as she did and that tripped off another secondary climax in her, a small shock wave of surprise and pleasure as the two cocks jerked and spasmed in her channels. She clung to Brody and leaned against Veris, glad that both of them were there.

She knew before she opened her eyes that they had returned to the hotel room. Something about the air changed, grew smaller, warmer and more closed around them. The kind of air you only ever got in a self-contained room that was never opened to the outdoors.

Taylor opened her eyes, breathing hard, sadness touching her. "We're back," she whispered.

"Then you'd better speak English again," Brody murmured, in English. She could hear the difference. English was harsh, sharp and ugly. But until now, she had never noticed.

They were on the bed where they began and both men were on their knees, cradling her between them. Taylor turned her head to look at Veris. "What *were* we speaking?" she asked and it was an effort to speak English. She had to concentrate.

"Brody and I used the local language then, as we do wherever we go. Medieval Latin with a Tuscan dialect." He kissed her brow and gently withdrew from her body, as did Brody. They lowered her to the mattress, so that she was kneeling next to them.

"Will I forget it again?" She bit her lip. "I don't want to."

"We don't know," Brody told her. "There's too much about this we don't know." And he glanced at Veris.

Veris shook his head. "I don't know either." He spoke slowly, as if he were puzzling through ideas as he spoke.

Taylor stifled a yawn. Instantly, they both turned to her and gathered her in their arms. She was tucked beneath the sheets and their long bodies bracketed hers before she could gather the energy to protest. But she really didn't want to protest, if tiredness produced this result. She could hardly think of a more comfortable way of falling asleep.

She snuggled against Brody's chest as he stroked her brow, soothing her into sleep and looked up at Veris. "You're spoiling me."

"I hope so," Veris said, his eyes dancing. "How else can we convince you to stay?"

Sleep was already claiming her, or she was sure his words would have caused more alarm or at least more surprise. But instead she felt nothing but inevitability.

"Tell me, Taylor," Veris murmured. "The one thing you wouldn't share when we spoke last week. Why have you spent seven years on this academic fool's errand, trying to prove the existence of Inigo Domhnall?"

"You'll laugh," she murmured, her eyes slipping shut.

"After all we've seen in our lives? Try us," he coaxed.

She reached back in her mind to the old memories. "So long ago," she murmured. "My father's business partner. Twenty years ago. He would come to dinner and tell stories about King Arthur. Stories that I'd never heard before, or heard ever since. And he told me they were stories written by a man call Inigo Domhnall, who lived in King Arthur's castle. I remember those stories as if he'd told them to me yesterday..."

She must have slept a little for she woke up with a small jerk. She was alone in the bed and from beyond the room, she could hear Veris and Brody talking. Angry, low voices. From the shadows moving across the doorway, she could see they were gesturing too. Tempers were high.

But sleep was grabbing at her. She was too short on sleep and they had spent centuries resolving differences. Her problems would wait.

A little later she woke again and felt a big male body curled around hers. She didn't care which. She smiled, pushed back into him so that her ass was against his pelvis. A hand curled over her breast. Long fingers. Brody. She sighed. Sleep instantly reclaimed her.

She woke slowly, the third time, to the feel of Brody's hand on her breast, stroking the nipple erect, his lips nuzzling her neck.

"She's everything we could have asked for," Brody whispered. "And then some." There was a note in his voice than made her heart ache.

"I know, Brody." Veris' voice was filled with terrible wisdom. Then, "I think she's awake."

"I don't care." Brody's hand shifted, brushed her temple. "Taylor?"

"I am awake," she confessed and opened her eyes. "What time is it?"

"Eleven in the morning," Veris told her, his blue eyes drilling into hers.

"Aren't you going to ask what we're talking about?" Brody said, sitting up so he could look at her face.

"No, she's not," Veris told him, his gaze steady on her face.

She swallowed. "I can hear pain in your voices. Why would I add to it by probing?"

The pair of them exchanged another look.

"I see you two have sorted out your differences," she said sleepily.

Veris looked startled, then annoyed. "We woke you, last night."

"Yes."

"How much did you hear?" The question had an edge to it and made Taylor wake up a little more.

She tried to sit up and Brody helped her. "I deliberately didn't listen," she said. "Why? Was it about me?" Her heart lurched.

"Indirectly." Veris pushed his hand through his hair. "Taylor, we must ask you to do something for us. Something that is rarely done among our kind."

Taylor gripped her hands together, sensing that this was part of what they had been arguing about, last night. She drew in a breath that seemed thick and hard to swallow. "What do you want me to do?"

"We need you to speak to our queen."

* * * * *

The concrete canyons of the Los Angeles Financial District had never looked so foreign and yet so familiar to her. Taylor stared at them from behind the heavily filtered glass of the stretch limousine, her nervousness increasing. No one was paying much attention to the limo, for which she was grateful. Limousines were commonplace in downtown L.A.

"No one can see you from the street, so relax," Brody murmured, picking up her hand and kissing the knuckles. His lips tickled her flesh. He wore what she labeled his rock star disguise—the leather pants and black designer death metal shirt with heavy chains and hand-painted designs. It went with his long black hair and brooding Celtic looks but the tanned, healthy flesh and wide shoulders beneath the clothes did not. It was a good thing he was so tall, for it helped offset some of the width. He also wore a big pair of wraparound sunglasses.

"Besides, you look like you belong inside this vehicle," Veris said from the other side of the bench. He wore aviators with mirror lenses and the effect was disturbing. Of the pair of them, she had more trouble figuring what was going on inside Veris' head anyway. The glasses increased the effect. So did the black suit, black shirt and gray silk tie and black overcoat. He'd even tied his own collar-length blond locks at the back of his neck with a piece of leather. Veris' careful attention to his attire impressed upon her that they really were going to meet royalty.

That and their nervousness. The two of them had positively dithered over her appearance and preparations. A big flat white box and smaller boxes and parcels had arrived with the hotel bellboys along with the meal Brody had thoughtfully ordered for her. The pair of them had arranged for the delivery of clothes and accessories suitable for her to attend a queen.

Taylor smoothed her hand over the lace covering her thigh. It didn't cover very much of it...but that was what happened when men chose a dress for you. But she had to admit that these two men seemed to know something about elegance.

The dress was made of green stretch lace that almost exactly matched her eyes, with a high halter neck that looked like a polar neck cuff. The cuff was covered in white Swarovski crystals, attached in a waterfall of graduated sizes that looked like a necklace, that glittered as she moved and breathed. Beneath the cuff the dress split open to reveal her cleavage and the split swooped down to just above her waist. The dress hugged her figure, all the way down to her thighs, where it stopped short just below the top of her stockings.

The back of her dress didn't exist. It scooped out to just above her ass, leaving her back bare. It wasn't possible to wear a bra with this dress but there were built-in cups, for which she was grateful, for her breasts were at least a C cup and she needed the support. In addition, there were separate, tight-fitting sleeves to go with the dress, that slid up her arms and flared out over her knuckles.

They'd even ordered stiletto shoes to go with the dress—strappy sandals with ties around her ankles, also covered in crystals. And there was a thick crystal-encrusted cuff to go around her wrist, which showed every time she lifted her arm and the flared sleeve fell back.

One of the other boxes contained a replacement leather bustier and miniskirt for the clothing Veris had ripped from her the night they'd met. Nothing was said by either man. The box just arrived with the others. Taylor smiled when she saw what was inside, and put the box aside.

By the time she was fully dressed, with her makeup applied and her hair backcombed and sitting just right, Taylor felt sinfully sexy *and* incredibly elegant. She walked into the sitting room, feeling a touch nervous. "Will this do?" she asked.

Both Veris and Brody got to their feet.

"You look like a million dollars," Brody said, picking up her arm and licking her shoulder.

"All except for my neck. I don't have any cover-up for the teeth marks you guys left there." She could feel her face flushing hotly at the reminder.

Veris smiled. "There's a reason we picked that style of dress, Taylor. Don't cover up our markings."

Brody's tongue slid up her neck to her ear and probed inside, hot and wet, making her clit bloom and swell. "We want everyone there to know you're ours," he whispered in her ear. "Especially the queen."

Taylor blinked as the limousine came to a halt, dispelling the memory. They were somewhere in the financial district. San Pedro? She had been so busy with her own thoughts and nervousness, she'd failed to pay attention. She wrapped the faux fur coat around her. "I wish I had sunglasses," she groused.

"We need them. You don't." Veris picked up her hand. "Not for the next decade or so, anyway. And I'd rather see your eyes." He helped her out of the limousine as she processed his extraordinary statement.

"Aren't you taking a lot for granted?" she said at last, as they crossed the busy plaza. She saw from the corner of her eye that they were garnering startled looks and many people were tapping each other on the shoulder, digging their friends in the side with their elbows and pointing. Whispering to each other. Brody was drawing huge amounts of attention.

Then she heard a whisper as they passed a pair of women close by.

"Who do you think she is?"

"Gotta be a movie star," the other said.

"And look at the two men she's with...lucky bitch." A deep sigh followed.

Startled, Taylor nearly tripped as she lost track of her footing. Brody's hand was suddenly under her elbow. "I heard," he murmured in her ear. "Keep walking like you didn't hear it. Look straight ahead and don't react."

She was shaking. Veris' hand slid under her other arm, strong and supportive. "Do you still believe I'm being presumptuous, Taylor?" he said quietly.

"Appearances mean nothing," she told him.

"True. But you didn't go home this morning, did you?"

She couldn't think of an answer to that. This time yesterday she had been visiting her Goth ex-student, to borrow a leather bustier to wear to a concert she didn't want to go to because she had been fired two days before. Now she was here. "Life has had me on a carnival ride all week, Veris. I just have to see where I end up before the ride finishes."

They stepped into the building and Veris took off his glasses and put them in his breast pocket. "I've always said women were stronger, when it came to pure courage, haven't I?" he said to Brody.

Brody stabbed at the top elevator button. "There's a reason we have a queen and not a king."

The elevator doors opened and the people inside would have hurried out, except they all paused when they saw the three of them standing waiting for the car. There was a collective hesitation, then the occupants all carefully streamed past them, glancing sideways at them.

Once the car was empty, they stepped on and Brody produced an electronic key card that he slid into a slot on the control panel, before punching the penthouse floor button. The elevator rose swiftly through the floors and neither man spoke. Taylor could feel their growing tension. Brody took off his glasses and squared his shoulders. Veris smoothed his tie and fussed with the knot. Both of them looked exactly like high school kids about to face the principal for transgressions known and unknown.

What had they done that they were about to get busted for?

When the elevator opened, Taylor almost squeaked in alarm and that told her that their nervousness had communicated itself to her. She was wound up, just as they were, expecting trouble. But they stepped out into a perfectly normal foyer of a business suite, just like millions the world over. This one was a touch more elegant that most, given the address and it was empty except for a male receptionist behind a curved desk. He looked up from the computer he was working on but didn't show any surprise at their appearance. Instead, he simply nodded. "You're expected and everything is ready. Boardroom C."

"Thank you," Veris told him. He opened a door beside the reception desk and held it for Taylor. "This way."

She followed him, with Brody behind her, through wide corridors that were just as empty as the reception area, into a wood-paneled boardroom. The walls were hung with what looked like classic nineteenth century original art to her, that glowed in beautiful frames each lit by their own small overhead lights, while the cherrywood board table gleamed with pools of light from the overhead spotlights spilling upon it. The light in the rest of the room was very low, leaving shadows.

At the top of the table where the chairman would probably sit, a shapeless mass lay beneath a piece of soft white opaque plastic sheeting. One of the overhead spotlights was shining directly upon it.

Brody's hands were on her shoulders, removing the coat. Veris was shedding his, dropping it over one of the leather chairs lining the table. The room was utterly silent and empty except for the three of them.

Taylor was almost afraid to speak. Her heart was thundering but she had no idea why she should be afraid.

"Come," Brody murmured, tugging her arm, leading her toward the top of the table.

Veris pushed the big chair from well out of the way and stood before the nameless mass, looking at it. He glanced at Taylor as she stepped beside him.

"We owe you an apology, Taylor," he said softly.

She realized her hand was gripping her chest. "Why?" she breathed.

He lifted the almost weightless plastic sheet away from the thing beneath. "This is why."

It was a book. A very old, no—an ancient—book. Hand-written of course and illustrated with loving care by some monk at a monastery. Then her gaze fell upon the script and she automatically began to translate.

Then she realized what this was and began to tremble. "This is Inigo Domhnall. This is his work." She pressed her hands against the table for support. "He really did exist. He really was a playwright...oh my god..."

Brody's arm was there, holding her up. "Veris, she's gone white."

Veris' shoulder slid under her cheek, his fingers soothed her brow. "I'm sorry Taylor. I should have eased you into this."

She blinked as a tear stung in the corner of her eye. "He was real," she repeated, as Brody stroked her shoulder.

"Yes, he was real, my lover." Veris' voice rumbled against her, deep and comforting.

"They fired me at the university because they finally got too embarrassed about my thesis—I kept insisting he was real but I couldn't find any proof and it was here all the time." She clutched at Veris. "You knew, when you came to see me that night. You knew and you let me think I was chasing a shadow, just like all the other experts."

"I had to, Taylor," Veris said. "This manuscript was carried through history by us and can't be accounted for in a way that humans will accept. I came to you to see if there was another way—any other way than using this book." And his hand lifted toward the ancient manuscript lying on the table.

"Why?"

"I want Inigo Domhnall accepted into human history as badly as you do. I want his works discovered and acknowledged. I want him and his descendents remembered."

She lifted her head from his shoulder. There was something in his voice, a core of determination that she recognized. It was the steel of a man who would stop at nothing.

"What is Domhnall to you, Veris?" she asked. "You were the conqueror, the invader."

Brody turned Taylor to look at him. "Inigo Domhnall was my father."

Taylor felt her mouth open in a silent "oh!" as the unexplained motivations and behaviors of these two men fell into place with an almost audible click in her mind.

They were watching her now, to see what she would say. If it were possible for two large, strong men with little in the way of a human conscience to look sheepish, then she thought they carried a touch of guilt in their expressions too.

"And so," a woman's voice said from the end of the boardroom, "we have the beginnings of a conundrum that it seems I must step in to resolve. You two will forever vex me with your games, won't you?"

As soon as she spoke, both Verus and Brody let Taylor go, straightened up at her side and bowed their heads low.

This must be the queen, then, Taylor realized.

As the queen continued to speak, she moved further down the room and the overhead spotlights illuminated her as she stepped into their radius. She was tall for a woman, about five foot nine, and slender to the point of skinny. But she did not look ill. She looked radiant. Her skin was olive colored and glowed. Her black hair was

shoulder length and groomed in a fashionable straight bob. She was wearing a designer business suit. She had elongated, big, dark brown eyes that stared into Taylor's in a way that made her feel like the queen was scooping out her thoughts wholesale.

"It has been a very long time since a human ventured inside these walls. Veris assures me the matter is a worthy one. I hope for his sake he is right. But at first glance I can see why he believes you might be worth the fuss. You do me honor with your appearance, little one. Thank you."

Taylor scrambled to process the meanings and secondary meanings behind the woman's words, then gave up. Veris was going to have to explain to her afterward. And the queen had already moved on to Veris. "Now, how are we to clean up this mess you have created, hmmm?"

"What mess?" Taylor asked.

The queen turned and lifted a smooth brow. "You are unaware of the temporal loop they have created?"

Brody cleared his throat. "We hadn't got that far, ma'am."

She smiled, showing very white teeth. "Ah! I'm keen to see what a human woman would do to you when you impart such news. Go ahead." She moved around the table and pulled out one of the chairs and sat. "Tell her," she ordered with a wave of her hand.

Taylor turned to look at Brody and Veris, who were both showing distinct signs of discomfort now. Finally, Brody took a deep breath and rubbed his temple. "Taylor, twenty years ago, when you first heard about Domhnall. The man who was working with your father, who told you those tales and about Domhnall himself and about King Arthur...he left you with such a strong impression of those days, that you've basically spent your life trying to prove the existence of Domhnall and his manuscripts, yes?"

"Yes. And now I've been fired from my job, because I won't give up."

The queen gave a small laugh. "Oh dear," she said softly.

"It was Brody," Veris said, his voice low. "Brody was the man working with your father twenty years ago, Taylor."

Taylor stared at Brody, her heart creaking under the strain. "No... I would remember that. You don't sound like him, you don't look the same—of course you wouldn't but... No, it can't be." She knew she sounded pathetically like she was in denial.

Brody shrugged. "Roanoake, Virginia, 1987 to 1989." His voice changed to an Irish lilt. "Yer father was retooling the printing plant and brought in an Irish consultant for the new web press he bought, d'ye remember? I came over for dinner on more than one occasion and got to talk to his lovely little daughter Maggie Taylor Yates, who enjoyed a good story, nearly every night I was there."

Taylor moaned as the lilt in his voice triggered a flood of memories, of the man with the dark eyes murmuring his stories as she drifted off to sleep, while her father was on the phone dealing with problems at the plant, as he always was.

Taylor found herself backing up, away from them, until her knees knocked into the chair Veris had thrust away from the table, earlier and she fell into it. "It was you," she confirmed, clutching the arms of the chair.

"Aye, 'twas," Brody said softly. "I didn't remember it was you until you spoke about the man telling you bedtime tales last night, Taylor. You've changed of course...all except the eyes, now that I've recalled those times." He gave a shrug, a tiny lift of the shoulders. "There are so many humans and they move through my life so fast and then they are...gone. I learned a long time ago not to try too hard to remember them all. I'm sorry."

Veris was watching her, measuring her reaction to this telling revelation.

All she felt was sadness. She had never considered this side of immortality before. When you lived forever, what was it like watching those around you wither and die, knowing you would have to do so endlessly?

The queen sighed. "That wasn't nearly the reaction I was expecting. Perhaps you don't have the internal fortitude I expected of the one these two would mark, after all." She stood up and stepped around the table again but neither Veris nor Brody looked at the queen. They were watching her, instead. For what? Waiting for her to explode? Fall in a heap?

She felt numb. Her whole life, her life's work, was based on a...what? A lie? A mistake?

"This should never have happened," the queen said. "Your bedtime stories have put into action a series of events that have very nearly affected the course of history. Veris' attempts to have your father's name recognized are honorable, Brody. But you have stirred up history itself with your poems."

"They were just stories," Brody muttered. "For a little girl who couldn't sleep."

"And now here we are," the queen snapped. "Her life is essentially wasted because you couldn't keep your mouth shut. Are you enjoying that despair on her face, Brody? Because you put it there."

He swallowed.

"Stop it," Taylor said. "Please, just stop."

The queen turned on her heel to look at Taylor. "Excuse me?"

"He's suffered enough," Taylor said. "You don't have to flay him with it. He's the son of a poet and has the soul of a bard. Don't you think he hasn't already thought this through and figured it out for himself, including all the possible consequences?"

She stood up. "Don't you think Veris, the strategist and politician, didn't already lay it out for him last night when he realized exactly how badly Brody had screwed up? They came straight to you this morning because they knew it had to stop and they brought me with them, because they knew it was that bad."

Taylor stepped in front of Brody and turned to face the queen again. "You don't have to paint the picture for Brody, ma'am, because he's already imagined it twice as

bad as you could ever possibly explain it to him. I know that, because I know he lay beside me all last night and imagined what it would be like if he'd never met me and what it would be like if, after today, I go back to my life and they go back to theirs and we never meet again. I know your race doesn't sleep but Brody just went through one of the longest nights of his life, ma'am. You don't need to add to it."

Taylor heard Brody's harsh exhalation. His hand came to rest on her shoulder, the tips brushing over the bite marks on her neck. She felt him trembling.

The queen stared at her for a long, long moment. Then she smiled. "Perhaps I was wrong about you. You may call me Tira." She stepped back to the table and perched on the edge of it. "You are correct in your assessment, Maggie Taylor Yates. This is a very bad screw-up and it needs to be undone. Is there more to this tale that I have not yet heard? Veris' message implied that there was."

Veris nodded. "There is something strange that neither of us has ever experienced before. Waking dreams. Flashes of memories from our past that Taylor is experiencing with us."

Tira's eyes narrowed. "Explain."

Veris explained quickly and frankly and Tira's face became immobile as he spoke. Her gaze seemed to focus inward. When he finished speaking she sat silently for nearly a minute. Then she stirred, sighed and smiled sadly. "I know of this thing that is happening to you," she said softly. "For it once happened to me. Long ago. It does not happen often among us. I have not ever heard of it happening with a human, for their mind cannot usually cope with the span of history but your mate clearly has an extraordinary mind, capable of holding the leap of history and the chaos of centuries and languages without imploding upon itself."

"I have been trained to deal with that sort of chaos," Taylor said simply. "I have been training to deal with it since high school. That is one outcome of Brody's accidental nudging. He pushed me in the direction of studying history, immersing myself in it."

Tira nodded. "Fate has a way of ensuring these things happen as they should. Perhaps Brody's interference in history wasn't as ill-timed and unfortunate as we're assuming—at least not for you three, anyway. I'm not so far removed from my own humanity that I've forgotten that side of my nature, for all that it was over three thousand years ago." Tira smiled a little. "The waking dreams you are experiencing you should consider a gift from whatever gods still walk this earth and accept them for what they are."

"What are they?" Taylor said bluntly.

Tira blinked. "You do not see it?"

"No."

"Ah." Tira put her hands together in her lap. "Brody and Veris have been together for a long time. You are aware of that, yes?"

"Yes."

"And their lives, even before they met, stretched for many years longer than that of a human."

"I know the circumstances of their rearing. Both of them."

"The sum total of their experiences is so vast, young human, that your little life is but a blink of an eye to them. Yet they have chosen to mark you. To make you theirs."

Brody's fingers tightened against her flesh.

"We had experienced the dreams before they marked me," Taylor pointed out.

"It's a chicken and egg thing," Tira responded, nodding. "Don't get caught up in trying to resolve that issue. You never will, believe me, young one." Tira waved the point away with a flick of her slender hand. "These waking dreams, these experiences, are so real because they are as close to time travel as we will ever get. While you are in the dream, you can walk around that time and place and touch, feel and taste, hear and smell everything as it was. You already know that you can make love there, eat and drink. Be warned, all of you, that I believe it is possible that you can die there too. You

can be run through with a sword, or shot with a gun. You can be harmed, just as you can do harm."

"But why?" Taylor insisted.

"Because a bond is forming between you and your lives are being pooled," Tira said simply. "This is how the sharing is taking place for you. Instead of talking and sharing memories, like humans do and like vampires normally do, for you three, you actually experience each other's memories. They're distorted because the act of a second person experiencing your memory will change it. Even inside your memory Einstein's general theory of relativity remains constant." Tira smiled at Taylor. "The more this happens, the more you will begin to feel like you have lived for centuries, just as these two have. You will have shared their lives as symbiotically as they have shared each other's. You get to play catch up in a very real way."

Tira slid off the table and stood up. "All that remains to be resolved is the mess left over by Brody's meddling. What are we going to do about Domhnall being out there and a public name? He would never have been known if you had not woven your fairytales twenty years ago, Brody."

Taylor realized that Veris was suddenly standing a lot closer to them. A *lot* closer. His shoulder was almost blocking her view of Tira. Was he shielding her from the queen?

"Taylor has lost her job at the university, ma'am," Veris said evenly. "That aspect is no longer a threat."

Threat. Taylor focused on the word. He *was* protecting her. Her heart began to race. After all this talk of bonding, would the queen really kill her to put history to rights?

"True," Tira agreed easily. "But her research is on file. How long before someone else becomes curious and goes digging?"

"I'm a laughingstock at the university, ma'am. I doubt anyone in their right minds will seriously consider following in my footsteps." Taylor didn't have to embroider the truth to make it sound bad enough. "I was an embarrassment to them. That's why I was

fired. I refused to change my thesis despite pressure from the dean. He thought I was insane. They've probably buried my research in a deep dark hole and hope it'll never be found again."

"Do you intend to resurrect your research at another campus?" Tira asked.

"I can't," Taylor said simply. "The only proof I've ever found is in this room and I can't use it. The only reason I ever began the quest to prove the existence of Inigo Domhnall was because of the stories Brody told me as a child. Now I know that every influence and source connected with Domhnall is vampiric. It's a closed circuit." She grimaced. "It explains why I was never able to get any closer to the man using human sources. There aren't any."

"Not anymore," Brody said. "Veris' people burned them all as they came through the town. That book is one of the only things I was able to pull out of the monastery library before the roof caved in from the fire the Saxons set. I buried it in a box in a cave in the mountains nearby, where it stayed for the next fifteen years, because I was caught coming down out of the mountains."

"Caught?" Taylor asked. Then she recalled from her own research what that might mean. "Oh, Brody, you mean..."

"I imagine he means enslaved," Tira said, her voice without inflection. "Slavery was still the coin of the realm then."

Veris' shoulders lifted and settled heavily. A sigh.

"When I returned to claim the box once more, I was a vampire," Brody said. "Slavery is not an easy path for most. I made it harder for myself because I would not yield as often as they wanted me to. But I lasted twelve years in irons. Longer than they wagered I would."

Taylor looked at Veris, her eyes stinging with tears.

"Don't blame him, young one," Tira said, her voice harsh. "The Saxons were no meaner or softer than any other conquering race in any other land. They needed land to farm for food to feed their young. It was the way of survival and slavery was part of it.

We knew no better then. Besides, four hundred years later, Veris' people became the whipped underdogs when the Normans took their lands and treated them like diseased vermin. History is an interesting cycle of patterns, if you live long enough to watch for them."

Veris smiled grimly. "So all Taylor's proof is unreachable as far as she is concerned. That ends her thesis. It also ends my quest too. Domhnall's name can pass out of human memory."

"Human memory?" Tira repeated sharply.

"In a decade or two, there will be no human left who knows his name or that he even existed," Veris said quietly.

"You guarantee it?" Tira said.

"Yes, ma'am."

She nodded. "Then the matter is settled."

"Not quite," Veris replied.

"No?" Tira lifted her brow again, the brown eyes settling on him.

"There's the matter of compensation. By insisting that Domhnall pass out of human memory, you've neutralized Taylor's career and wiped out seven years of expertise. She's struggled for the last seven years to make a career out of a field of interest that technically doesn't exist, which we should compensate her for too."

"That second one is a result of Brody's mistake. You should be liable for that one," Tira said, her eyes narrowed as she concentrated. Her arms were crossed.

"In matters of keeping history straight, we report to you, yes?" Veris said smoothly.

"We came directly to you as soon as we realized the breach."

"Yes, you did," Tira admitted.

"Therefore, as our superior, the liability clearly falls on your shoulders."

Tira pouted. "Fine," she snapped. "Seven years compensatory salary, plus what? Another seven years until she has another career?"

"That seems fair," Veris said smoothly. "Plus punitive damages. Fourteen years out of a human's short life is a big chunk, ma'am."

Tira's eyes widened, then she took a slow breath. "How much?"

"Fifty percent of the compensatory salary," Veris responded instantly.

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"Twenty-five."
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"Forty."

"Thirty."

"Thirty-five."

"Northman," she said, her voice thick with frustration.

"My queen." He bowed low. When he straightened, he was smiling. "I'll be in touch with your finance minister when he rises."

Taylor was bewildered at the fast exchange but she could feel Brody was laughing silently, behind her.

"Go now," Tira said, dismissing them with a wave of her hand.

Brody bowed his head, picked up Taylor's hand and pulled her from the room.

Veris paused only long enough to pick up their coats.

Chapter Four

The limousine had been moving for three minutes and complete silence gripped the interior. Taylor stayed in her corner, the faux fur wrapped up under her chin, opposite Veris, who brooded behind his one-way mirror glasses in the other.

Brody was on the opposite seat, his arm along the back of it, his boot on the cushion, his knee cocked. She couldn't read his eyes behind the wraparounds, either.

Finally, he looked over at Veris. "I'm sorry," he said simply.

Veris shrugged. "It was the only way we were going to get her off our backs."

"It's not like I wanted the old bastard recorded in the annals of history anyway," Brody added. "I never did get why you were so set on it."

"Because we wiped your fucking people off the face of the Earth! For Christ's sake, Brody!" Veris sat up, pulling off his glasses. "People don't even know if Arthur really existed! We did such a great fucking job of it, they call it the *dark* ages!" He stopped and took a breath and Taylor was shocked to see that his hands were shaking. "You think I don't still remember them screaming, Brody? Or Taylor's expression back in the boardroom when she realized it was my people that sent you into slavery?" He thumped the cushions. "One key. *One* piece of proof. They're not stupid. That's all humans need to unravel history and figure it out. Domhnall could have been the key. He wrote about it all. Arthur, Saxons, Celts, the life at court, the life of peasants, everything. It was in all of his plays, all his poems, the lot. If I gave humans that, I could..." He stopped. Took a breath. "I could give them back what we took." He looked away. "Fuck," he muttered.

Taylor started to move toward him but Brody was there first. He tore his glasses off, knelt in front of the other man and held his face. "You cannot be the conscience of a whole race, Veris. It doesn't work that way."

There was pain in Veris' eyes. "For something like this, I'm happy to give up the role."

Brody kissed him, his lips hard and firm and Taylor caught her breath at the sight of the two men sharing such an intimate expression. Veris thrust his hand into Brody's hair, keeping his head steady so that he could return the kiss properly. When Brody moaned and snagged Veris' coat in his fist and dragged the man closer, Taylor drew in a ragged breath, her own excitement fizzing hot and fast in her veins. It was suddenly warm in the car. Too warm. Too bright.

She shrugged off the coat and glanced at the dividing window. It was closed up, locking them away from the driver, thank goodness.

Her attention was dragged back to the two men locked together in an erotic dance of lips and hands. She couldn't look away.

When they separated, they both turned to look at her. She licked her lips. "I'm sorry...I couldn't help but watch."

"You liked it," Brody said, his voice flat, thick with growing lust. It wasn't a question.

She nodded. She could feel her face heat but her clit throbbed even as she gave the positive answer, for both of them were looking at her with feral, hungry expressions.

Veris shrugged out of his coat and it dropped into the corner of the seat, forgotten. His suit jacket and tie followed. He was watching her as he stripped and her cunt clenched at the look in his eyes.

Even Brody was slipping the buttons out of his shirt, his gaze on her face, his eyes sleepy with arousal. The crotch of his pants was swollen with the thickness of his erection.

Taylor could feel her heart stutter and her thoughts scatter. Nerve endings sizzled as the power and potential of what might happen with these two occurred to her. Their dominant attitude filled the car and made her feel small, weak, feminine and

pathetically human. Her nipples hardened beneath the dress. She was suddenly very aware of the tiny lace panties she was wearing and how damp they were.

Veris stripped himself of the last vestiges of elegance, even removing the leather binding from his hair, returning to the ancient warrior he was. He turned to her, kneeling on the soft carpet and spreading her thighs. Even on his knees, his head nearly brushed the roof of the limousine. He gazed into her eyes. "You're ours, Taylor Yates, in more ways than you know."

She gasped. "There's such a thing as free will, Veris."

He shook his head. "It's an illusion. Fate takes care of that." His lips brushed over hers, making her lift her head toward him for more. "I'll have you scream 'yes' in agreement, Taylor," he added.

She drew back, shocked.

Veris licked her top lip. "Ah, you think I'm being cruel now. I just know you better than you think you know yourself."

"You don't know me at all," she shot back. "Eighteen hours does not make a relationship."

"It's enough to begin a bond. And I do know you, Maggie Taylor Yates. And we will make you scream 'yes' before this car stops." He caught her face in his hands. "I saw your face just then, Taylor. Oh...I know you, lover. I know you now." His voice was low and hoarse with erotic promise that sent a shiver through Taylor. He picked up her hand and brought it to his rearing cock. "Stroke it," he crooned. "Curl your hand around it. Do it."

The whiplash command in his last words made her reach out and take the velvety length of him in her hand. He hissed in a breath as she drew her hand along his shaft, his pelvis thrusting. He leaned forward, resting his hand on the back of the seat, his well-muscled arm thrusting forward to support him, as she stroked. His tight hips jerked in little twitches.

Brody sat on the seat next to her. He was naked and his cock was red and pulsing above his swollen testicles. His dark eyes were narrowed with excitement. As Taylor worked on Veris' cock, he reached up behind her neck and unfastened the cuff of her dress.

Her breath hitched unsteadily, her thoughts scattering. They were going to undress her...and do what to her? She could barely think beyond that. Her clit was throbbing and her pussy aching with empty need.

Brody lowered the front of the dress, revealing her breasts and Veris caught her hand and pulled it away from his cock. "Play with your breasts," he instructed, his voice hoarse. He placed her hand on her breast as Brody picked up her other hand and placed it on the other. "Go on. Let us see you enjoy yourself."

Brody was tugging at her dress, lifting her hips and Veris was helping him but they were both watching her. Taylor licked her lips. Arousal was coursing through her like electric current, in powerful surges she could barely stand and that finally was what allowed her to tug experimentally on her own nipples. The sweet rush made her moan and close her eyes and she heard both men groan in response. She opened her eyes again, surprised, and saw craven hunger on their faces as they stared at her breasts and what her hands were doing.

Encouraged, she closed her eyes again and let her head fall back. She rolled her nipples in her fingers and stroked the tips. Her hips jerked as the silvery streak of pleasure zapped through her and she moaned and gasped. Dimly, she felt her dress being tugged over her knees and down her feet. That left her in the indecent little panties and her stay-up lace stockings and stilettos.

Veris pulled her hips forward on the seat and spread her knees wide. Taylor pushed her hips forward. She desperately wanted to be fucked now. She was trembling with the need to have someone inside her.

She felt a hand on her wrist and snapped her eyes open and looked down. Brody's hand was on her wrist, lifting up her arm. "No, you don't," he said. His own voice was

guttural, thick with lust. And it took her a second to realize that he had spoken the Irish Celtic of his birth. His control was narrowing down to a pinpoint.

Her own control had slipped altogether. She had been reaching for her own clitoris.

"Hold her for just a moment," Veris told Brody.

Brody spread her arm along the back of the seat and held it down. Given his extraordinary strength, she might as well have been in irons. Veris picked up her other arm and pinned it in a similar fashion. "You're crumbling," he whispered in her ear and thrust his tongue inside. She gasped at the invasion and again as he slid it down her neck.

Brody began to mirror Veris' movements and Taylor knew then she really was doomed. Two tongues stroking the nape of her neck, the sensitive hollows next to her clavicle, the upper slope of her breast, then each breast in concert.

Then, heaven itself...each nipple at once. She cried out when their mouths latched onto the tips of her breasts and her back arched, thrusting her breasts upward in an involuntary motion.

When Veris' hand curled over her soaked panties and squeezed, she screamed and bucked. But she didn't say yes. He stroked her pussy through the lace with knowing fingers and Taylor writhed, crying and panting at the rough assault. She lost track of thought and time. She just wanted to come but Veris kept her on the edge with delicate expertise.

When the two men finally lifted their heads from her breasts and sat up, she was a desperate wreck.

"Say 'yes', Taylor," Brody told her.

She could barely breathe. "Just fuck me," she said. "Make me come." It took three breaths to say that much.

The two exchanged looks.

Brody snatched at her panties and with a quiet rip, they tore away from her, leaving her soaked pussy bare to their gaze. Taylor moaned. "Please..."

"No," Veris told her. "Not yet."

She groaned.

He was spreading her thighs wider, exposing her delicate folds. Stroking them. She trembled. The blunt tip of his cock was mere fractions of an inch away from the entrance to her pussy and her cunt rippled at the thought of his thick rod thrusting into her. She looked up him. "Now. Please."

Veris tugged on her hips so that her bottom was almost off the seat. His hand cradled her ass. He bent over her again, his arm pistoning out alongside her head to prop himself up against the back of the seat once more. "Now you get to scream for us, Taylor."

She shuddered at the dark promise in his voice but her fear didn't last for long, for the wide cap of his cock speared into her pussy, pushing inside her, stretching her, demanding entry. She caught her breath as he drove in to the hilt, his balls slapping against her ass.

"So hot," he muttered, pausing.

Brody rested his hand on her pussy where Veris' cock penetrated her. "So lovely," he murmured. His long fingers slipped into the heated folds of her labia and nestled for one delicious heartbeat against her starved clit, then they were gone. She gasped. Brody leaned down and kissed her briefly, then turned his head to kiss Veris. Then he moved behind Veris.

Veris withdrew his cock, almost all the way from her, then slid back in, in a slow move that had her writhing in agonized pleasure. His blue eyes watched her every move, measuring her desperation.

Brody's hands settled on Veris' hips from behind and Veris' eyes closed briefly. He lowered his head to touch his lips to Taylor's forehead. "You like to watch," he said

hoarsely. "Then watch." He turned his head and jerked his chin at the smoked glass in the windows.

She looked and saw the reflections there. She saw herself on the seat, with Veris bent over her with his powerful shoulders holding her up, his cock pounding into her. And Brody was behind Veris, his hand on the northman's back, the other on his hip, his cock spearing the other man's ass. The look on his face was one of great intensity.

It was one of the most erotic sights Taylor had ever seen. Before she could even process it intellectually, her body responded. Her climax tore up from her toes, ripping through her nerves and shredding them in one pass. She shrieked, as her body locked tight in a convulsive, iron-hard throbbing peak.

"Say 'yes', Taylor," Veris gasped hoarsely, as he pumped his silken shaft into her. "Say it."

The chaffing of his cock against her pulsing cunt sent off another climax. She shuddered and screamed again and this time she felt Veris' cum spurting inside her as her rippling vagina milked his cock into an orgasm. Then his mouth was at her neck.

"God damn it, Taylor," he whispered. His teeth sank into her flesh and this, her third orgasm, made her vision swim and the world seemed to gray out around her for a while.

When she could focus once more and her heartbeat was steady, Veris was still holding her, waiting for her to recover. His eyes had a sleepy, satiated look but she sensed a dangerous edge to his expression. His cock was no longer inside her and Brody was sitting on the other seat, thrusting his legs into his pants.

She pushed herself up on her arms, so that she could sit on the seat properly and reached for the faux fur coat. Moving awkwardly, she slipped her arms into it. Veris leaned back so that she could get it on without hitting him but he continued to watch without comment, or without moving away from her. She could feel the anger pouring off him.

When she was fully covered by the coat, she picked up his one-way aviators and slid them on and looked at Brody. "Can you tell the driver I want to be dropped off at my apartment?" She gave him the address.

Brody considered her for a long moment. Then he lowered the blackened glass that divided their compartment and the driver's just enough to speak to the driver.

* * * * *

"And that's it?" Andy said with disbelief tingeing his voice. "Not even a tee shirt or a CD out of it? They just dropped you home?"

Taylor thought of the designer faux fur coat and crystal encrusted shoes in her wardrobe. "More or less," she prevaricated. "Andy, I didn't go back there to get fan freebies. I had a conversation with the lead singer, whatever the hell his name was, he said he had no idea where he got the lyrics from—some old poem he thought he remembered from when he was a kid. It was a dead-end. I thanked him for his time. He offered to sign a tee shirt, which I know I'd never wear to save my life, so I said no thanks. End of story." She put the sugar pot in front of him.

"But you disappeared for twenty-four hours!" Andy said, stirring sugar into his black coffee.

"No, you did that," Taylor pointed out, lying desperately. "I'm the one without a job who stays in her apartment. You're the one who doesn't check in on a regular basis. Remember?"

Andy frowned, looking confused. She knew he was trying to put together hazy, alcohol and pot infused memories of the last couple of days.

Her doorbell chimed and she was never so thankful for the interruption. She hurried over to the door, leaving Andy at the table while he sucked the spoon and worked things out in his head. She opened the door.

And stepped back a pace, flummoxed, as her heart seemed to simultaneously leap and fall into her stomach at the same time. Brody seemed to fill the doorway with his height and width. He was quite alone. The wraparound sunglasses and long coat did a lot to disguise him, as did the tied-back hair. The plain black jeans and muscle shirt did the rest. Any self-respecting death metal fan could walk right past him on the street and be no wiser.

Brody took off the glasses and narrowed his eyes against the afternoon sun streaming into her apartment. "We need to talk," he said simply.

"Oh holy mary motherfucker," Andy said at the table and jumped up, banging his thighs on the table and spilling coffee everywhere. "Oh, fuck," he added in dismay as the black liquid slithered across the table. He leapt for the cloth. "Sorry, Taylor!" he cried and tried to mop up the mess.

"Wait," Taylor told Brody and moved over to the windows and drew the shades. When she turned around, she found that Brody had moved into her apartment and was standing in the middle of it, looking around. Andy was in the kitchen area, watching Brody with his mouth open, his eyes adoring.

"Andy," Taylor said. "Shut your mouth."

Andy shut it with a snap.

"Hi," Brody said simply.

"Yeah," Andy breathed. Then he shook himself. He gave Taylor a dirty look. "I lost twenty-four hours, huh?"

She grimaced. "Sorry."

"No, you're not. I wouldn't be." He looked at Brody again. "Well...I guess I got things to do." He sidled past Brody. "Good to meet ya, man."

"You too, Andy."

Andy looked startled, then he lit up in a big smile. "She told you my name."

"She did."

Andy went out of the apartment beaming and gently shut the door.

"If only everyone was that easy to please," Brody said with a sigh.

Taylor crossed her arms under her breasts. "Why are you here?"

"Veris doesn't know I'm here," Brody told her. "He'd kill me if he knew."

She narrowed her eyes. "You're here for him?"

"For both of us, Taylor." His chest lifted and fell. "I'm not proud like Veris. I'm here to beg." He shifted his stance and she knew he was lying. He was every bit as proud as Veris but he'd subsumed his pride for this, for Veris' sake.

She cleared her throat. "I'm listening."

Brody reaching into his coat and pulled out an envelope. "I did an end run around Veris and snagged this from the queen's financial officer early this morning." He held it out to her.

It was an ordinary business envelope with a window. The document inside had her name on it. Puzzled, she opened the sealed envelope and pulled out the document.

It was a check. A very large check in her name. She counted the figures. There were eight of them before she got to the decimal place. Then her hand started to tremble.

"Is this a joke?" she asked and wasn't surprised when her voice came out wobbly.

"What did you think Veris was doing when he was negotiating with the queen for compensation?" Brody asked.

Taylor tried to get her breath back. "Selling me," she whispered.

Brody's jaw sagged. Understanding flooded his features. He shook his head. "Buying your independence," he corrected. "That's why he made sure it was the queen's money, not ours."

Taylor reached for the nearest chair and dropped into it.

Brody lowered himself to his knees in front of her and wrapped his hands around her waist. "Taylor, come back to us," he said, his voice low. "We had you for a day and you've been gone for nearly two and we already know we can't stand it without you. Veris is like a dog with a sore tooth and my chest aches all the time." He touched the check. "This means you can come back to us on your own terms."

She jumped. He'd touched on the one thing that had driven her from the limousine.

Brody nodded. "Yes, I know," he said softly. "Veris still carries some lingering traces of his heritage but I *was* a slave, so I saw what you were thinking in the car. I know what you were fighting, Taylor. You don't have to be afraid of it outside the bedroom, now."

Taylor bit her lip. "And the guarantee he gave the queen? In a decade or two, there would be no human left who knew of Domhnall?"

Brody nodded. "Stay with us and when you're ready, in ten years or so, we'll turn you, so that you can be with us forever." He got to his feet, leaned down and kissed her. "I love you, Maggie Taylor Yates and so does Veris although right at this time he'd rather chew razor blades than admit it. I think my father's poems were preserved this long just so we might find you. Don't let his heritage go to waste."

He dropped a business card on the table next to her. "Don't lose it. There's no other way to find us."

He closed the door as softly as Andy had.

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The Beverley Hills mansion rivaled anything that the Hollywood film stars could have dreamed up, including the security that greeted her at the Spanish wrought iron gates. Taylor got out of the taxi, clutching the coat around her throat and looked up at the big, armed guard nervously. "I'm not expected," she said hesitantly. "My name is Taylor Yates and I'm—"

"You can go right in, Ms. Yates," the guard said with a smile.

"Just like that?" she said.

"Just like that." He opened the gate and held it for her. "Straight up the drive. I'll let the house guard know you're coming."

She nodded, feeling winded and reassessed once more Brody's unscheduled and unaccompanied visit to her lowly apartment. He had taken a huge risk.

When she pressed the doorbell buzzer, a maid answered the door, opened it wide for her and waved her in. "Come. Come," she said with a heavy Spanish accent.

"I'm looking for—"

"Come," the maid insisted, waving her on. Clearly, English wasn't even close to a résumé entry for her. Taylor followed her as the maid hurried through the foyer into a room of staggering beauty. A library of books. Books. Taylor came to another astonished halt.

"Oh..."

Brody looked up from his sprawl on a sofa and his face lit up.

Veris turned around from examining the shelves and she saw him draw in a breath and let it out. He moved toward her very slowly, as if he was afraid he might startle her.

The door she had just stepped through shut softly. Taylor faced Veris, took a deep breath, and dropped the coat at her feet. Beneath she wore black lace-topped stay-up stockings, red and black French lace thong panties and a matching shelf bra, Swarovski crystals in her bellybutton and clipped to her nipples. "Yes," she told him.

She heard Brody's breath catch but she was watching Veris' face.

His response caught her by surprise even though she had deliberately baited him. Moving faster than human perception could follow, he came at her. She was swooped up in his arms, carried to the rug in front of the fireplace that crackled with a real fire and placed on her knees on the rug, facing the fire. His arms were around her and his fangs were out and piercing her neck, before she even realized what was happening.

Taylor fell back against him, as the erotically charged bite registered. She moaned in ecstasy, writhing in his arms. "Mine," Veris growled against her neck.

"And mine," Brody added, as he sank his fangs into her neck on the other side.

Taylor cried out as the double dose of aphrodisiac slammed into her system and she squirmed between them, her fingers raking across their bodies in a desperate bid to draw them into her. She was incoherent. Drugged with lust.

"Take me," she moaned. "Make me yours."

Veris' fingers trembled as they wrenched the panties from her. He bent her over and she felt the cool touch of lubricant and deep wicked excitement shuddered through her. "Hurry," she moaned.

His fingers pushed inside her, and gently stretched her, working the muscle. She closed her eyes. Even that simple touch was almost overwhelming. She was shuddering, her breathing uneven. Veris' cock pushed against her anus and she pushed back. There was a flare of pressure, then the slick feeling of being opened as he slid into her. She gave a choked cry.

But it wasn't finished yet. Veris was lifting her shoulders, bringing her up and Brody was stroking her pussy as he brought his cock up against her. She threw her arm around his neck. "Yes. Hurry." She was starting to shake as her climax drew near.

His cock eased inside her. There was no way to hurry it. There was so little room in her channel. But at last he was deep inside her. And she could feel the impending climax. There was no holding it back.

Veris turned her head and kissed her, even as her orgasm bloomed and her body clenched around them all. She screamed and they absorbed it into themselves, making it a part of them.

When she opened her eyes, they were elsewhere. A curtained bed with the curtain drawn closed. Medieval. A flickering candle, beyond the curtain.

She looked up at Veris, who watched her with cautious blue eyes, then at Brody, who held her, waiting for her to speak.

"And whose life was this?" she asked in a whisper.

They both relaxed and rained kisses on her face and whatever parts of her body they could reach. Her decadent lingerie and body jewelry had disappeared, for this was a memory of a time long gone. Brody and Veris lay her down in the bed and held her between them.

Veris stroked her brow. "You're here to stay, Taylor?" he asked and even she could hear the hope in his voice.

"Yes means yes, Veris," she told him gently. "You bought my independence. I've run out of excuses to stay away."

Brody stroked her stomach, making it twitch and spasm. "You shouldn't be looking for excuses to stay away, *leannán*. You should be looking for reasons to stay."

"I have reasons to stay," Taylor admitted. She turned her gaze away from them. "They scare me."

"Love scares you?" Brody asked, his voice a rumble.

Even hearing the word on his lips made her jump. She found her gaze dragging back to him. Brody was smiling.

"Veris and I made our peace with it a long time ago," he explained. "It's a tough old emotion, that one. You've a right to feel fear. Love gives no quarter and fights to the death."

Veris touched her chin and brought her gaze to meet his. "But know this, Taylor. You'll never be alone. *Never*. That's a guarantee no human can ever give you. You'll never be harmed while either of us walks this earth."

"I love you," she said. "Both of you, so much." She felt tears sting her eyes. "What did I do to deserve you?"

Brody caught her tear as it slid from her eye and licked his fingertip. "You believed in fairytales, once upon a time," he said. "And a poet called Domhnall."

About the Author

Teal Ceagh is a multi-published, award-winning author who still finds it a deep privilege that she's allowed to spend all day telling stories, and that readers are willing to listen. Romance stories are her favorite. She lives in northern America with her husband and several hundred "keeper" books.

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