

A woman with blonde hair is standing in shallow ocean water, her body partially submerged. She is looking down and to the right. The water is clear, revealing a rocky seabed with various sized stones and pebbles. The background shows a soft, hazy horizon where the water meets the sky.

# *Legends of Love*

*Luna Carrol*

*Mila Ramos*

*Mae Powers*

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Legends of Love  
*by Luna Carrol*

**Midnight Showcase**

[www.midnightshowcase.com](http://www.midnightshowcase.com)

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## **CONTENTS**

[Published by](#)  
[Legends of Love](#)  
[My Viking Bride](#)  
[The Seventh Legend](#)  
[Chapter One](#)  
[Chapter Two](#)  
[Chapter Three](#)  
[Chapter Four](#)  
[Chapter Five](#)  
[Chapter Six](#)  
[Silver Linings](#)  
[LEGENDS OF LOVE DIGEST AUTHORS](#)  
[Excerpt Roamin' Love by Luna Carrol](#)  
[Merlicious-1](#)  
[Excerpt from Merlicious 1](#)  
[Vamptations 2](#)  
[THE ALDAIRIAN ECSTASY](#)

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Midnight Showcase Fiction Presents

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[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Legends of Love**

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### **My Viking Bride, Luna Carrol**

Alvilda fights her marriage, she became a Viking to escape.  
But she cannot deny the feelings her husband stirs inside.  
Love him or betray her people?

\* \* \* \*

### **The Seventh Legend, Mila Ramos**

A children's tune states the key. A children's story holds  
the clues. Millennium has passed for the justice to be served.

\* \* \* \*

### **Silver Linings, Mae Power**

In Silvera, Kaden and Xera are use to cultural taboos  
amongst the Wysp fairies. Will they dare to shrug off  
strictures and follow their hearts?

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **My Viking Bride**

**by**

**Luna Carrol**

Alvilda fights her marriage, she became a Viking to escape.  
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Love him or betray her people?

Don't miss the excerpt of Luna's follow up novel

Roamin' Love at the end of this book.

Luna was born in Charlotte, North Carolina and doesn't live that far from Charlotte now. Her love of romantic and dark tales began in elementary school and earned her more than a few odd looks from the mothers of childhood friends.

It wasn't bad enough that she preferred horror and suspense movies to the more popular teenage girl movies, but she also had to dress the part for Halloween and frequent games of pretend with neighborhood friends.

Now living a very normal life in a small traditional town, Luna restricts her fantasies to pen and paper. In fact, she was leading down the path of an incredibly normal life until the death of her father. With his death, she decided to take pen in hand again to help her through this difficult time.

When asked where she gets her ideas from she laughs and says, "Life...and death. I want my readers to stop and think. They should be able to see themselves in my books even if they don't want to. I was a little tired of picking up a romance

novel and seeing the same plots repeatedly. After a while, I began revisiting the classic novels and realized that today's novel is missing a lot of that originality and deep thought. The characters, especially the villains, are all too often predictable and one-dimensional today. So, in short, coming up with an idea isn't hard at all. I just take ordinary people, plug them in extraordinary situations, search their souls, and expose their greatest fears and weaknesses. Not hard at all."

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **My Viking Bride**

**by**

**Luna Carrol**

\* \* \* \*

### **Around 850 AD**

Alvilda smoothed down her long, sensible dress and pulled her gray fur up closer to her face. The winds off of the Baltic Sea were picking up and a fine mist told of rain approaching. She nearly closed her eyes against the silver glow of the horizon. Winter would be here soon.

There it was. The longboat could be seen on the horizon. It's huge sail proudly displaying the colors of its country. She turned after a moment and walked back to the largest longhouse in the sea village. Passing through the tall wall made of erect wooden pikes, she continued to her father's longhouse. The King of Gotland would want to know of the Dane's arrival.

The village was a prosperous one. There were many longhouses, most large enough to support a smaller second story. Smoke rose from nearly all the wooden structures and children ran around the village with rosy cheeks and steamy air escaping their mouths. Yes, winter drew close and soon the children would find it hard to run freely in snow and ice.

Pushing open the heavy wooden door, she found most of the mid-day supper being cleared away and all, but a few of her father's trusted men, were gone now. The warmth of the grand room was a welcomed feeling.

Her father stood near the hearth of the large fireplace directly behind the table. Alvilda knew her mother would be supervising some new project in the house now that the biggest meal of the day was over.

He was a large man, much like all the men of Gotland. Tall, fair skinned, barrel-chested, the same light red hair of his mother was nearly gray now. The same red-gold color now adorned Alvilda's hair. He turned from speaking to another large man as she entered the room.

"He is nearly here, Da." She looked from her father to the older man he'd been talking to and nodded slightly.

"So, the Danish prince comes to Gotland to marry what he cannot take."

"Aethelgar, do you know this man to be like his father?" Olaf, the large man with Alvilda's father had always been regarded as a wise counsel man.

Groa, Alvilda's oldest friend, entered the hall from the back door. She stopped as she overheard their discussion. Vilda and Groa had been discussing the same topic in private since they learned of the Danes' interest.

"All the Danes and Swedes are alike, Olaf." Her father raised his voice.

He'd learned to hate the foreigners, just like his father had. War and plundering between the people of the Baltic was something that had happened for as long as anyone could remember.

"They take by deception and conniving. There isn't a true man amongst them." Aethelgar pulled his beard through his

hands while looking at his only daughter. "This prince will not take my only daughter."

Alvilda nodded. The last thing she wanted to do was to marry a Dane. A man that would take her from her people and be hated by those same people. No, she would do what she had to in order to avoid such a marriage.

"It will be a test then, Aethel?" Olaf often shortened Aethelgar's name as he spoke.

"Yes. As it was with the others."

Alvilda hated the tests. She was locked into the sea room. A special cave used for these tests. Located at the edge of the sea, the tide fed into the cave, encircling her. Beyond the water's edge would be another trench. This trench, the first for any man to traverse, would be filled with vipers. Two vipers, said to be blessed by Loki himself because of their immense size. Almost as long as any good Viking boat, and nearly as thick.

Any man who could survive such vipers had only the icy waters of the Baltic Sea to cover. A task not so easy after one's nerves and metal were tested by the snakes. The temperature of the water could cause a man to cramp and sink while shivering.

Vilda would be trapped in the room herself, in the very center, until the water washed back out, and being trapped at the water's edge when the temperature dropped was nothing to relish. It could be day or night; since they had no way of predicting when the water would begin rising and it had to be deep enough to test a man.

Groa's voice brought Alvilda out of her deep thoughts. "I hear that this Dane shaves his face."

The look on her father's face was priceless. Alvilda started to chuckle, as did Groa.

"What will the Danes do next?" Wiping ash from the fire on his long leather breeches, Aethel sat down at the long wooden table before him.

"Perhaps it's how things are done on the mainland." Alvilda teased her father. "Their fashions are ahead of ours, are they not?"

A loud snort was all the man managed.

Laughing as she walked to her father, Vilda hugged his neck from behind. "You and I both know he will be too soft to pass your test, Da. Relax."

He nodded and pulled his daughter's arm tighter around his neck, again he grunted rather than spoke.

"I suppose we have to feed the Danes?" Groa looked down at her flour covered dress. Her sigh told the room that she was not ready to return to the kitchen.

Aethel nodded once curtly. "We will not have them return to their land with foul things to say of us. No, they will find no fault with us, only their prince when he fails the test.

Alvilda smiled. No way would a Danish prince take her from her father. The prince would, no doubt, be unsure of how to combat the snakes. She laughed aloud. He may not even know how to fight...period.

Patting his daughter's arm, Aethel stood. "You will be polite."

"Yes, Da." Although she no longer laughed, she still smiled.

Her father stared at her hard.

Alvilda dropped her smile and nodded once as she moved to join Groa in the kitchen house. Being in the kitchen and helping to feed the Danes was preferable only to being there when they arrived.

Alan Sigar harbored his longboat in the worst rain of the season. The bow was pushed up into the shallow waters far enough to be pulled the remaining way by very tired men.

The same rain slicked Alan's furs and caused the language of him and his men to be reduced to mere grunts and curt commands. He was in no mood to wait, and when no escort appeared to greet him he decided to waive the requirement of polite sea code and walk himself to the home of King Siward.

Alan's best man, Erick, trudged behind him. Erick was a full head taller and still wore the traditional beard of his people. Although he was as wet as Alan, Erick remained quiet and resorted to hard stares at anyone doing something he objected to.

Looking around the village, Alan could see the evidence of Vikings. He remembered the last Viking attack on a village on the Denmark coast. It had been unbelievable. Men brutally killed and women...well, he tried to push certain images out of his mind. But here, Viking longboats casually anchored beside smaller seafaring crafts. Shields adorned doors and more than one man looked as though he would be at home in battle.

Yes, Gotland was the haven for Vikings he had heard about. The wealth of the land was not to be refuted, and it's source obvious.

Two large men stood before Alan and Erick as they approached the largest longhouse. Erick moved to stand before his prince, but was quickly pushed aside by Alan.

"I'm Alan of Sigar of Denmark. It was said I would arrive." Alan stared directly into the clear green eyes of one of the men until the other man nodded.

Neither man spoke to Alan as they stepped aside. Alan was as tall as one, but not even Erick stood as tall as the other. Gotlanders were a large breed it appeared. Perhaps his bride would be large? His brows rose with the thought.

Upon entering the hall, Alan and Erick stood with their backs to the large door until acknowledged by the Gotland king. Alan knew that Siward would not be overly proud and keep them waiting long, but he did have to establish his role as king.

Siward looked to his equally aged friend, Olaf, and nodded slowly. He sat his goblet down in a strong and slow manner while looking at Alan and Erick.

"You come to my hall, Alan of Sigar?"

Alan stepped forward and nodded. As he did, he noticed that Siward looked as though he was surprised.

Siward laughed. "I thought the larger one would be son to a king."

Alan smiled. He stood a good six feet three inches, but he was used to the jokes. He wasn't as brawny as many of his

people, so the jokes came as no surprise. His darker brown hair and eyes encouraged more of the same.

"I am Alan of Siward of Denmark. My father sent me."

"So? It is your father that seeks the hand of my only daughter?"

"I come for your daughter."

The King's eyes turned a little colder? Alan wasn't sure, but he thought the king seemed a little different.

"You do not come of your own accord? You were sent? This would mean that you do not seek her for yourself."

He would have to watch his words around this crafty king. He would surely be looking for insult.

"I come with my father's recommendation. I am a man with much to consider. I have a people to look after. I know you understand this."

"You would become King of Denmark?" Siward laughed. A throne is not naturally passed to a son. He would have to earn it and he was much too small to be able to hold a throne.

"I will be king." Alan knew not to allow his eyes to sway.

The door behind Siward opened and two women entered both carrying huge wooden boards. Both women were tall and fair. One with red-gold hair and the other with nearly white hair. Both equally beautiful and near the same age. Maybe twenty?

Alan felt the eyes of the king on him again. He was smiling slightly.

"Pick out my daughter."

Alan's eyes widened.

Siward fingered his drinking horn slowly. Was its small legs made of intricate silver work? Perhaps the rumors of Viking silver being deposited on this island were truthful.

"If you are of good blood, you should be able to see good blood in others. Choose which of these beautiful women you would pick to be your wife."

Alan smiled. "I have only to choose her and she is mine?"

Both women stood perfectly still as they stared from the clean shaven man to their king. He couldn't be serious?

"I made no such promise, Dane, but I will not go further if you are not of good blood."

It was absurd. Alan knew it, but no one could force the man to continue if it appeared he was only looking after the best interest of his daughter. In fact, it was only pressure from several suitors that served to make the king see light.

Alan had heard of the test. He'd taken great efforts to find the only survivor of the test and hear his accounts personally. The man was now missing one leg and would have a hard life ahead of him.

It was clear that this king would go to any measure to keep his daughter close to him.

Alan looked to Erick and nodded to him as he walked closer to the beautiful women. He stopped just before Groa and admired her clear skin and large blue eyes. She was what he pictured Alvilda looking like.

Wanting to be sure he was making the right choice, he walked to the other one. She allowed her hair to hang lower over her face.

She was just as tall, but one couldn't be too sure of her features.

"Lift your head." Alan spoke with purpose and no gentility.

Alvilda lifted her chin proudly and met his eyes.

By the Christian god, she was beautiful. Gray eyes and hair that hung with curls to the middle of her back. Full lips and high cheeks. Her skin was as fair as the other's, but with a touch of rose to the cheeks.

Alan lifted a red-gold curl and stared at it for a long moment. He felt its silken texture between finger and thumb.

Her figure was healthy, not plump, not thin. She could have been a Valkyrie come from Valhalla itself.

"You are Alvilda of Siward." Alan spoke as though he needed no one to tell him he was correct.

"Vilda."

Alan smiled and nodded. "I am Alan of Sigar of Denmark. You are to be my wife."

"I would rather marry a Viking."

Alan wasn't sure of what to say. She would rather marry a...a what? Surely she didn't know what a Viking was capable of. And just what did she find to be wrong with him? He felt embarrassment creeping in as the room began to chuckle around him. He would have to say something.

"You will marry me." He turned and walked away from her as he spoke. Siward still smiled at him as Alan stood before him again. "You will hold this test tomorrow?"

"Perhaps you will require rest? It was a long journey?" Vilda laced her question with sarcasm and smiled.

"A night's rest is all any man should need." Alan watched Vilda as she sat the large tray of fish and cabbage before him. Dark bread and mead was sat down by Groa. Alan was pleased to see a dish of plums placed beside the tray of fish and cabbage. "Sit with me, Vilda. We should talk."

Vilda looked to her father in a pleading sort of way.

Alan sat before the food with Erick, as if he remained oblivious to the stares Vilda gave her father.

"There will be no flaw found in us, daughter." Aethel motioned with his head while taking another long drink from his horn.

Vilda sighed and sat before the Dane. She would sit with him, but she didn't have to enjoy it. She looked to the empty seat beside her and then up at Groa.

Groa smiled and took the empty seat. She always stayed by Vilda. They were very much like sisters and sometimes words weren't necessary.

Erick and Alan immediately began eating. Erick smiled openly at Groa as she watched how they ate. They used their knives, of course, but they actually took their time and never once allowed their mouths to open while food was in them.

Groa tilted her fine nose into the air and looked away from the Danes.

"I had heard that you shaved your face. It seems odd to me." Vilda half looked at Alan as she spoke.

Alan chewed his food and then pulled his hand across his cheeks. "I like it shaved. Does it displease you? I could grow a beard."

"Why should I care? You will be dead on the morrow."

Alan smiled and began eating once more. "I see you want my last meal to be a pleasant one then. Perhaps indigestion is the test?"

Vilda snorted. "If only it was that simple then mayhap a Dane could survive it." She stared directly at him. "Mayhap."

"I'll survive your test, Vilda." Alan smiled smugly. "Tell me of yourself, Alvilda of Siward." Alan took a long drink of mead and leaned back to look upon her as she spoke.

"I do not know what to tell you."

"Do you sing?"

She laughed. "Not when anyone can hear me."

Groa began to laugh. "And when someone does they immediately beg for mercy."

Alan and Erick both laughed.

"Then what other womanly talents do you possess?"

"My daughter is worthy of any man, Dane. She is not the one here to prove herself."

Alan lifted his drinking horn to Aethelgar. "I am sure she is worthy. You would not begrudge a man who is about to die for her the few moments it would require to get to know her better?"

Aethelgar grunted and took another long swig of his mead. He used the back of his sleeve to dry his beard.

Alan looked back to Vilda and smiled as if waiting for her response.

"I cook, I spin, I tend the gardens, I manage the livestock, and I do anything that my people need me to do."

"Not exactly the life of a princess, is it?"

"It is a noble life. One I am not eager to leave."

Vilda looked to Groa. Her best friend reached for the bread as if she actually thought of eating with them!

Groa popped a large piece of bread into her mouth.

Vilda gave her a look that said 'traitor'.

Groa shrugged and continued to eat another piece.

"Still," he looked to his plate, "it would be good to have such a skilled woman in my house."

She was nearly to the limit of her patience. "I can also wield a sword and shield."

Alan's smug little smile returned. "You'll have no need for that in my home."

Vilda's eyes became mere slits. "Just as I thought, a boring existence is all you offer. Gotland women fight and are just as important as Gotland men."

Alan finished his meal in a slow manner and drank from his horn. Vilda knew he goaded her into a fight. He was about to get one too.

"Danish women are extremely important, and respected."

"Respected as milkmaids." Groa half laughed as she looked to Vilda who returned the chuckle.

"You will see." Alan didn't look at either woman as he stood. "I will sleep on my boat tonight."

"Are you sure you don't need a soft bed?" Vilda couldn't resist.

"I believe we should wait until we are wed, Vilda."

Erick's laugh was joined by Aethel's near stumbling to get up from the table.

Vilda rushed to help her drunken father to stand.

"I will kill you for that insult, Dane!"

Alan smiled. "No insult. I will care greatly for your daughter, Aethelgar of Siward. Until tomorrow." He left after a half bow and Erick followed him.

"I do not wish to leave with him, Da." Vilda watched as the huge wooden door closed behind the Danes.

"You will not. If the Dane should be blessed by Loki himself and survive tomorrow, you will not be required to leave with him."

Vilda looked horrified. "That would mean war with the Danes."

"I am not afraid of war."

He reached for his horn, but Vilda maneuvered him in such a way as to not allow him to reach it.

"I will do something else, Da." She looked to Groa for help in her decision.

Groa shrugged silently.

She looked to Olaf who had quietly stood behind his king the entire time. She looked at his thick arms crossed over his chest and the battle helm he proudly wore on his head.

"I will go to the sea."

Olaf raised an eyebrow.

Aethel was very near to falling over and Olaf reached forward to take his weight off of Vilda.

"My daughter wants to become a Viking?"

"Why not? Women have done it before. I can do it. I can do it for a time and then return after the tender prince has found his milkmaid for wife."

The king laughed up at Olaf. "My daughter, a Viking."

Olaf nodded. "She would be a fine fighter."

"She would be killed!" His drunken state was growing more unpredictable.

"Only if she was alone, King. I will be her shield." Groa stood close to Vilda and raised her chin proudly.

A sobering moment made him look to both women and back to Olaf. "You would go with them?"

Olaf nodded. "I would."

Laying his head on his old friend's shoulder, Aethel allowed himself to lose consciousness.

\* \* \* \*

The next evening looked much like the last eve. Cold, and grey. A thick fog rolled in across the sea. A fog that forbid any human eye to pierce.

Vilda and Groa walked together behind Aethelgar to the cave by the sea.

No evidence showed of Aethel's heavy drinking the night before, and Vilda did her best to make sure that no fear showed on her face. Both had been experienced before.

The water was rising. The men on guard watched all night to keep an eye on the water levels. There were no tides in the Baltic Sea. Only the wind determined the depth. As the wind picks up, so did the depth.

Entering the cave, Vilda was helped over the cleft that would prove to be the containment for the giant vipers. A large wooden bridge was laid over it.

The snakes would be flushed from beneath the ground by the rising water, and circle the trench for a time looking for food before slithering toward a higher opening to escape the

water. If the Dane waited another few weeks, the snakes would have disappeared beneath the earth for the winter.

She was left alone in the center of the dark cave. The small area she stood on was no more than ten feet in diameter and had only a chair for her to sit on. She'd been wise enough to bring some furs this time. At least she could bundle up against the dropping temperature.

Alan arrived with several men with him. Erick was at the foremost and smiled at the Gotlanders as he walked by. In return, the Gotlanders sneered or grimaced. Keeping his chin high, Alan never once looked directly to the crowd of villagers. He wasn't here for any of them. He had to remain focused on the prize. A Gotland princess not only meant political ties in a land that Denmark would like to improve trade with, but it could also give him the opportunity to hold the throne here. At the very least, it could improve the relations between his country and these godforsaken Vikings.

He stopped just before Aethelgar. The older man looked down from a short precipice and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Alan of Siga of Denmark, you wish to test yourself for the hand of my daughter, Alvilda?"

"I am here to do that."

Aethelgar stared at him for a long moment. Finally, he nodded and opened one arm to indicate the opening of the cave.

Alan looked from the older man to the cave. It seemed large but ordinary. He pulled free his straight sword and lowered his smooth helm to hide his face from cheeks up.

Erick handed him a lit torch and stepped back in line with the two other Danes.

The dark cave smelled damp. Alan could hear the water rushing in from the ocean. The waves outside crashed loud enough to cause an echo. The cave filled with the constant sounds of the ocean.

Rounding the tunnel deep in the mouth of the cave, he came to a stop at the trench he knew was to contain the snakes. He looked into the cavernous opening, but saw nothing but slick walls and a smooth, damp floor.

He tried to listen for the sounds of the snakes, but all he heard was that same repetitive noise from the ocean. The sloshing and crashing noises seemed louder now that he wanted to hear something as soft as a hiss.

There! He heard a sliding movement. But what direction did it come from? Even if he knew, he couldn't see well past the light of his torch. Was it to the left or was that just an echo?

First things first. If he could find a way across the trench then he wouldn't have to face the snakes at all. He snorted. As if every other man who ventured in here hadn't thought of that one. Still, he walked as far as he could along the sides of the trench.

The trench itself didn't make a full circle. On either end stood a rock wall, then the trench seemed to continue in the form of a tunnel through the walls.

"What's in here that could help me?"

He studied his environment. No wood of any kind, so no bridge. In fact, the only thing in this cave was some form of limestone. The stuff lay everywhere.

He smiled slowly to himself and laid his sword down. Walking to the largest of the rocks, he laid his torch down and began pushing the stone toward the trench. So heavy it forced him to pause several times to catch his breath.

When the rock teetered on the edge he looked down to see if any snakes were in sight below. Still no sign of either snake. With one final shove, the huge rock fell in front of the tunnel at one end of the trench. After the rumbling of the rock, and its echoes, simmered down he heard the hissing of the snakes. A very frightening sound that seemed to slide across his nerves.

Was that his heart pounding now? He couldn't allow fear to cloud his mind, he had to remain focused.

He hurried back and retrieved several more of the rocks. Two, three, four more, all dropped before the same tunnel. He felt satisfied the snakes could enter by only one direction now, as well as exit. Now he did not have to fight two snakes coming from opposite directions.

Just as the last rock dropped, he leaned against the wall to catch his breath. He closed his eyes and wiped his brow with his sleeve.

A shush-shush noise caught his attention. *Stop moving. Don't move a single muscle. It can sense heat.* Were snakes really deaf? Could it hear his heart? Could it hear the rustle of his horn and wood lamellar vest?

Alan opened his eyes and slowly lowered his arm.

As his arm lowered, the snake began rising up and out of the trench. Alan allowed his mouth to fall open. It continued to grow up and up.

He could easily hear the hissing now. His torch caused the reptile's eyes to glitter dangerously.

Alan raised his sword slowly and inched away from the wall.

The snake opened its mouth, its tongue lashing out to get a fix on his body heat. The light caused the snake's saliva to glisten like a wet spider web.

Just as the snake pulled its head back to a striking position, the second snake slid up and out of the trench. Its dark bands appearing black against a gray body. Both snakes possessed a flattened head and widened nostrils.

His heart pounded furiously now. The second snake was certainly going to circle him, and his fear of a two frontal assault would be realized. He licked his lips and tasted the salty sweat from his upper lip.

"Now I know why Vikings like beards."

Alan leapt to the right and away from the sliding snake, causing the one waiting to make its move and strike. As the snake's head dashed to his left, Alan brought his blade down and pierced the snake behind the head.

Alan struggled with the snake. It pulled away as he tried to drive the blade in further.

The second snake seemed to realize this was his time to strike. Rearing back into an s-like shape, its head held like a snake that would strike from the ground. "Viper," he whispered.

Looking to the snake that still struggled against his sword, he realized that this particular snake tried to strike downward, unusual for any snake that he had seen in his life. But the viper he knew. The viper, he understood.

Alan jumped to the side and landed just on the other side of the injured snake to avoid the viper's strike. Again, the viper struck out, but Alan knew it would strike repetitively. It was like that with the vipers he'd fought before.

He pulled his sword free just as it struck again. The injured snake drew its tail up to encircle its head in an attempt to fight off death. The movement tripped Alan and caused him to fall forward. Alan's sword extended in front of him, just as his arm did.

The viper lunged and drove the protruding blade into its upper lip and nostril area. It pulled back in pain, pulling Alan's sword with it. The snake vaulted around in agony, shaking blood down in a shower over Alan.

Alan laid across one writhing and dying snake, as the other slid to the wall and began rubbing against it in a desperate attempt to dislodge the blade. Crawling over the one snake, he tried to distance himself from the angry snake skewered with his sword.

Lying against the wall, he tried to slow his breathing. Rubbing the fallen blood from his eyes, he watched as the snake on the floor of the cave shuddered one last time and flopped to a dead still.

With the snakes dead, he now had to find a way to get across the trench? He pulled himself up, using the wall as

support, and walked to the edge of the trench where the limestone pile was beneath him.

Getting into the trench would be easy. Getting out would prove difficult. He rubbed his stubbled chin, feeling the blood of the snake again.

Looking back at the dead reptiles he realized he had a rope after all. A smile started and was quickly replaced by a grimace. He would have to handle the dead snakes.

Walking to the dead viper, he kicked it once to make sure it was dead before reaching for his blade lodged close to its poisonous mouth. The snake twitched as his body heat neared the pits of the viper, causing him to jump back as he pulled free the blade.

Pulling the snakes to the trench, he dropped them over the pile of limestone rocks and climbed down as well. Once there he began skinning the snakes and creating a rope from the skin. If he never saw another snake again it would be too soon.

Using his snake rope, he created a lasso and looped it over one of the limestones he could see on the side he now wished to get to. Although his tired muscles ached from moving oversized rocks and battling two snakes, he managed to pull himself up and over the edge.

He lay on the other side for several moments, then closed his eyes and breathed deeply. All he needed was just a moment to rest. He had completed the task. Alvilda would be his. He rolled over onto his arms and pushed himself up.

Once standing he looked back toward the entrance of the cave. No light shown in. The tunnel was too long and twisted, and the day too overcast.

Regretting the loss of his torch, he turned to the only other way into the cave and started walking. He couldn't see, but the ocean was growing louder. He knew he must be getting close to the water's edge, even the moisture in the air grew. His feet started to slosh through water, causing him to grow concerned. Turning a curve in the tunnel, the light began to grow even as the depth of the water grew.

If he was that close to water...He stopped. Before him was Vilda, but between laid a thick torrent of water. The channel was nearly twenty feet wide and moving fast enough to wash all but the strongest of men out of the cave and into the treacherous, rocky sea.

Vilda couldn't believe her eyes. The Dane had bested the snakes. His body was still covered in blood, bearing witness to his battling them and not just outsmarting the beasts.

No way on this earth did she intend on going with him! She quickly started thinking and then smiled.

"You're a fool if you try to swim across, Dane."

Alan smiled back at her. "No more foolish than trying to fight snakes for a woman that doesn't want me."

"No argument there." She absolutely must convince him his effort will be worthless. "Do yourself a favor, leave and tell of your glorious victory. Renounce your claim on me and my father will pay you well. You will be marked a hero, but a wise prince."

Alan laughed. "Silence woman. Do you not see I have to fight nature once more for you?"

Vilda turned away from him in anger. She was not going to go with him. Leaving with Groa may be her only choice. He couldn't marry her tonight. She could leave tomorrow before he awoke. *He will be too tired to awaken early, and with the task completed, he will see no reason to hurry.*

What was she thinking? He wasn't going to be able to fight the sea. Killing a living thing was one thing, but to defeat the sea? Not even a god could do that. She looked back to see what he was doing.

He took out his sword and knelt beside the water to feel it. He pulled his hand back and shook his head.

"Cold?" Vilda smiled.

"I've swam in colder." He smiled with a wicked twinkle in his eyes.

She tilted her nose up and away from him, but watched him out of the corner of her eye.

Taking his time, he studied her bank. Nothing of interest adorned her dais of land; she had spent enough time on it to know. It was flat and barren with the exception of herself and a wooden stool.

Watching him casually rub his chin and cheek thoughtfully, she began to smile. Then Vilda saw something on his face change. She didn't know what he saw, but he had spotted something.

The Dane turned and walked back in the direction he had come. Could he be leaving? Just like that? No, no he wouldn't.

Not after having just killed the snakes and behaving so smugly.

Sure enough he returned, but this time he was carrying a...a rope of some sort.

"You were forbidden to bring anything but your sword and torch, Dane!"

"I didn't enter this cave with my new rope, Vilda."

New rope? What was he talking about?

"Did someone leave it here for you yester eve? Is that how you defeated the snakes? You cheated? Perhaps you smuggled in help as well?" She crossed her arms over her chest in a victorious manner. "I will not be required to marry a cheater."

Alan smiled as he unfurled his rope. He walked to the edge of the rushing water and laid the rope down. Taking his sword, he thrust it into the ground as deeply as he could and secured the rope to its hilt. He then smiled at Vilda as he tied the strange looking rope to his waist.

"Are you ready to wed, Vilda?" He smiled as he plunged into the water.

Vilda rushed to the edge of the channel and looked for the fool.

He re-emerged with a resounding gasp. It was clear to Vilda he suffered from shock. The water's temperature would be excruciatingly cold, especially in such a dark environment. The light that spilled into the mouth of the cave from the sea only enough to cast a eerie type of light about the cave and cause the reflections from the water's current to move along the walls.

She was torn. Should she help him? No, she shouldn't, but he could die from cold alone.

He lost his footing and Vilda watched as his rope prevented him from being washed away. Reaching out, he grabbed the tip of a few jagged limestones barely visible above the water.

Vilda backed away from the edge. He was going to do it. Realization struck hard. He would survive the task. Him! A spoiled Danish prince! Then he'd expect her to marry him.

She saw him pulling himself on land. His dark hair slicked down and the clothing beneath his lamellar stuck to his body. He dropped to the dry land completely.

Vilda could see him shivering from the cold. She was unsure of what to do now. No one had even gotten close enough to speak to her before, let alone lay at her feet.

She would let him die of cold. She crossed her arms and started to turn away, but something told her to look back. He had pulled himself into a near fetal position. It reminded her too much of a sickly animal. She couldn't just ignore him.

Taking her fur coat off herself, she walked to the Dane and covered him.

His hand slipped out and grabbed hers.

She gasped.

"I'm surprised you would offer me warmth."

"I would take pity on a dying animal as well."

She tried to pull her hand away, but found that his grip was strong and firm.

"Then look upon me as a dying animal tonight, wife."

Her eyes widened. He couldn't possibly mean what she thought he meant, could he? He had just been in battle and

swam a dangerous current. He had to be much, much too tired, and besides, they weren't married yet.

When his mouth covered hers it caused her eyes to widen in shock. He was so cold that he chilled her. No, her shiver wasn't due to the cold, it was caused by him. His mouth felt warm and his lips, that should have been cold, were firm and forcing hers to respond.

That was it. He forced her to respond. There was no way she should be enjoying this.

She put her arms up between them, but with his patient and continuing kiss, she slid her arms up and around his neck.

He pushed gently with his body until she sat on her bottom. Standing, he held her furs around him and smiled down at her. He just looked too proud. Trying to stand, she found him placing his hand on her shoulder with just enough force to prevent her.

"Tell me, what type of wife will you make, Vilda?"

She couldn't believe his arrogance! Was he jesting? She used her opposite hand to push his off her shoulder. But before she could stand, he squatted before her.

His hand was gentle on her cheek. "Your kiss was promising."

"I won't be kissing you again, Dane."

He made a show of looking around them. "It would appear you are stuck with me. At least for a few more hours." When he looked back at her, she could see a dangerous twinkle in his eyes. "What will we do to occupy ourselves?"

"You made it across so I can, and there are no snakes to worry over. Unless you just crept by them and left them living?"

"The snakes are dead, but you are not crossing that water. The current is even stronger than it would appear."

"You're not my husband. You cannot tell me what to do." She started to stand once more.

"You are mine now. As my wife, you will do as you are told." His hand gripped hers possessively.

"You Danes. You all think like the puny people of the south. Women are not possessions. We are equal to men. And there has been no ceremony to marry us."

Alan smiled. "I didn't just risk my life to be denied what is mine, Gotlander."

With a forceful tug, he brought her slamming into his chest. She felt her ankle twist almost painfully as he crushed her to him.

She straightened herself and pushed against him.

"Do not dishonor me, Dane."

He touched her cheek softly and pulled a rebellious slip of her hair away from her face. "Never. We will have your ceremony."

He covered her mouth with his. Did he not know that he led to her dishonor now?

His mouth was just as tender as his grip was firm. The crashing of the waves were nearly whispers next to the beat of her heart. His hands burned hot against her chilled body.

He paused long enough to drop the furs to the floor and turned back to face her. There could be no mistaking what was on his mind.

Vilda's heart interfered with her breathing. As it pounded against her chest, she felt as though her lungs were constricting. He was going to take her. He was going to take her here and now.

"Wait! You can't be serious, Dane!"

"My name is Alan. I prefer it to Dane, and yes, I am serious. I have no intention of losing you now that I have risked my life to have you." He pulled her to him once more.

She could feel the evidence of his arousal pushing between her thighs. It caused a mix of shame and horror to surface in a deep red blush.

"Your father may try to declare the contest void for some made up reason, but if his daughter has already given herself to me he will have no choice but to see the marriage through."

"But...but I'm not giving myself to you, Dane."

"Alan." He smiled as he kissed her cheek softly. "Do not be afraid, dove. I will be gentle."

His mouth was in just a place on her throat to cause a shiver to run down her back. She twisted ever so slightly. Was she trying to get away or feel more? She was growing confused.

His hands gripped her slender waist and held her firmly in place. It was a good thing. She went weak all of a sudden. As if knowing how she felt, he slid one hand up to the center of

her back and kissed the front of her neck. She leaned back into his arm.

She had never been kissed. Never. Were all such kisses so warm, so delicious? How many women had he kissed? Why did that thought creep into her mind? Why did it bother her?

She felt her chest constrict once more as his free hand slid up the front of her dress and covered one breast. The word 'dishonor' screamed loudly in her mind.

The Dane covered her mouth in a deeper kiss. His tongue pushed into her mouth as she started to speak again. What was he doing to her? Why did it feel so pleasant?

She gripped his lamellar vest to hold close to him. Vilda felt herself being lifted off the floor and into his arms. Why had she not realized how well formed he was before?

Alan's arms weren't as large as the men she was accustomed to seeing, but they were strong and bulged with muscles. His shoulders not as broad, but healthy and reliable. In short, he wasn't a human barrel, but...but...oh so nice.

He lowered her to the furs and laid beside her. His eyes were a soft brown and seemed even darker now. She felt a blush come over her again as he looked over her face, breasts and narrow waist.

"You'll come to enjoy this." He pulled the hem of her skirt up slowly.

His arrogance! Why didn't he just keep his mouth shut? She shoved at her skirt to keep it lowered.

"You are an arrogant clod, Dane, and no, I won't."

He rolled over on top of her. Pinning both her hands above her head, he kissed her deeply.

Once more, she felt him pulling her skirt higher. Her legs grew colder when exposed to the air of the cave.

He pulled back slightly. "I apologize for the rush, but if you could see, you would understand that the water level is quickly dropping. Quicker than I thought it would."

She used her hips to push upward. If she could only get free of his grip she could get away. She could cross the trench now and run to her father.

He was doing something, messing with his own clothes. She couldn't see below his chest, but she knew instinctively that he was freeing himself from his pants.

He stilled for a moment. She stopped moving as he did.

"Don't." She whispered.

"You are my wife, Vilda."

Was that compassion in his voice? Could he be talked out of it now? Perhaps he had a small amount of honor.

"No..."

He kissed her. It wasn't a demanding kiss. It was tender and it coaxed a reaction from her. He placed both his hands on the sides of her face and she felt her warm tears slide down into his palms.

How could she want to get up, but enjoy his kiss? Nothing made sense anymore. Was she kissing him now? Yes. She was. She kissed him and wanted to kiss him deeper.

The smell of the sea covered him. The sea that quickly retreated while pounding the cave's mouth. His skin tasted salty and sweet at the same time. Odd how something she had smelled a million times before and took for granted now made her enjoy the taste of him.

A slight movement of his caused her to feel his nakedness against her most private area. His crisp hair mingled with her own. If she didn't stop him now she would be ruined for any other man. But what did that matter? She wouldn't want to marry any man now. The task was completed and she was free. Free to remain with her people if she could just get away from the Dane.

His hand slipped under her naked thigh and raised it higher, allowing himself to drop lower between her thighs.

"By the one god, Vilda, I wish I could go slower with you. Do not make the mistake of thinking every time will be like this."

Her forehead pleated with thought. Every time isn't the same? How could that be?

He covered her mouth with his, and she somehow knew what that meant. He was ready. She could feel his cock and began to panic. There would be no going back if he dropped his hips. She tried to pull back, but he held her firmly by the shoulders.

Something told her that he was holding back. Why? Wasn't this what was supposed to happen? Why wasn't he moving? His muscles were so tense that she could feel them bulging in his arms and shoulders.

Whimpering, she hoped he would know that she wanted more of him. When he looked down into her face he wasn't smiling. Instead there was a deep and dark look to his eyes. He wasn't angry, he was incredibly erotic. Vilda watched as the man she should hate in this moment closed his eyes and

knew it was time. Lifting her hips, she allowed him to push through her maidenhead swiftly.

Grabbing his shoulders to ease the pain and to feel him more. After grabbing him so fiercely she found she only wanted to feel closer, maybe even taste him. Placing her open mouth on his neck, she held his skin between her lips. His salty taste and tightened muscles caused her to want even more of him.

His groan sounded so deep. It was just beside her ear. She wanted to hear it again. She licked his neck just slightly and received the desired groan.

He rotated his hips and she felt him move deeper within her. The pain wasn't a pain really. It became sweet, lasting pleasure. Pulling back, he dropped down again and again, causing Vilda to moan as her body grew more accustomed and began wanting more.

A new feeling was growing. Something she couldn't understand, but was real none the less. She bit her lower lip to prevent herself from saying his name. She should hate him for this. His body should be repulsive and...and it wasn't. How could she want this? And what was this building sense of pleasure in her?

"More," she whispered the word as if it would mean less, but the whisper seemed to say more than if she had screamed it.

Alan smiled. Lifting her legs slightly he pushed harder, but not too quickly. It was as if he wanted each thrust to penetrate her whole body.

She couldn't hold back her moans any longer. She didn't care. All she could think of was how she wanted more of him, more of what he was doing to her.

"By Odin, Alan!" She climaxed without fully understanding what it was she felt. So complete was it that she closed her eyes and twisted the furs at her side with her fists.

Alan watched his wife scream his name in her delight and smiled. She was beautiful, more beautiful in that moment than anything he could have imagined. His wife. The words resounded in his head as definite as the waves echoing behind them.

Increasing his thrusts, he was determined to fulfill every need of hers. With several deep and satisfying plunges, he groaned and grew still.

Puzzled, Vilda was still for a moment. "Alan?"

"Shhh, dove. All is well." Pulling himself up and off of her, he laid beside her and pulled her close.

Vilda laid quietly in his arms. She couldn't do this. She couldn't betray her parents and all of her people. No, she wouldn't marry the Dane. What life could he promise her?

Looking down at the powerful arm that encircled her now she thought of how strong and warm it felt. How easy it would be to think of only herself and forget the history of her people and the meddlesome Danes.

His breathing was growing regular even as it felt wet and warmed her neck. She closed her eyes and waited to make sure he slept.

She gently peeled his arm off of her and stood as quietly as she could. Looking to the trench to make sure that the

water's level was low enough, she decided to make her way back to her parents as quickly as possible.

She ran passed the snakes with barely a thought. He surely had help defeating them. Not once did she examine them closely, time was too limited.

Once in the open air she saw that only her father's guard stood waiting to see who surfaced. As with all the other times, she was alone.

The guard hung his head and shook it solemnly.

"He survived." Her breath came in a white mist against the chill of the dropping sun.

The guard's demeanor changed immediately. "You are to be married? To a Dane?" His voice betrayed the horror of it.

She shook her head and ran to her home without answering the guard.

Bursting into the longhouse, she searched the crowded room until she found her parents and Olaf. Groa must have been watching for her, because she raced to her side.

"The Dane is dead?" Groa's voice betrayed her relief.

Alan's men circled closer to hear Vilda's response.

"No. He isn't dead." She looked to her father and Olaf as she spoke.

Her father nodded to Olaf, who in turned nodded to his king.

Groa nodded.

Amongst the sounds of celebration, Vilda managed to sneak outside to meet her parents. Groa and Olaf were there to do their part.

Vilda's mother hugged her, but shed no tears.

Olaf alerted his longboat and men who had been awaiting their orders.

With Groa as her shield maiden, Vilda stole away into the night. Olaf ordered the men around, but often looking to Vilda for her opinion.

Within two days, Vilda began to bark orders before Olaf could. He stood behind her every decision and would nod his agreement or remain quiet when he disagreed. Soon the men sought her out instead of Olaf. Olaf would merely say it was as it should be. She was the princess.

Groa stood by her side nearly every minute of the day. A better guard was never bred. Whether through fogs too deep to navigate safely or docking in less than desirable places she stayed her ground.

A little over a week later, Vilda's ship docked on the northern end of Gotland. It was as close as she dared to return home. Instead of familiar and welcomed sights of her homeland, she was encountered by a half drunk, slovenly, and disorganized band of Vikings.

"What is their story, Olaf?" Vilda stood on the bow of her longboat and surveyed the haggard crew and their ship, which was a great deal larger than her own.

Olaf clasped the back of an equally large man. "Armod here says that their captain was killed on the shore of Denmark." Olaf's smile grew. "Something about the Danes taking to the sea to hunt down all Vikings."

Vilda laughed. "Of course they would. They're very nearly like the southerners who have no spines."

Armod smiled and nodded. "You speak as though you know the Danes well."

"She is Alvilda, daughter of Siward. She knows the Danes."

Armod nodded. "You are now Viking?"

"I am." She smiled. "I am and seeking a crew. Would you and your men being willing to follow a woman?" She lifted her foot to the bow of her longboat.

Armod appeared to think deeply while stroking his beard. "We are doing nothing here but rotting with our store of salted meat. We will join with you Alvilda."

Vilda surveyed her new ship, had it cleaned and restocked. Even the men appeared cleaner and more manageable after a couple of days at sea and away from the mead.

The days at sea were long, with only a few landings and pillaging to break the monotony. But it was the nights that caused her the most torment.

Memories of the Dane and his touching her. A crowded boat was no place for such thoughts when you were surrounded with men. It was enough to know that they could be having similar thoughts, but to give them cause to think you are...

She watched the dark waters just at the side of the boat. The sea was calm, luring one to believe that she was near tame. No, she wasn't tame, Vilda thought to herself. She would let no man or woman subdue her. There may be periods of calm and gentle rocking, like a mother with her child, but a storm would come without warning and remind everyone of how fearsome she could be.

Looking around the boat, she saw that nearly all the men were asleep and that Groa was staring off the boat and into another direction.

She stood and walked to the hull. No one would be below deck. It had become quite known that Vilda and Groa, being the only females on the boat, needed privacy from time to time. In fact, Olaf insisted no man venture below when one of the women did. A rule she quite happily agreed with.

Once below deck she waited for her eyes to adjust to the dim light and walked to the side where she could sit on a long bench. A low and shabbily made bench, but it had served as a place to rest many times for her. There weren't many places to be alone on a boat filled with people.

Rubbing the sleep from her eyes she started to think of home and then how the Dane came. She had doubted his ability, still did really. The Dane most likely cheated in order to defeat the snakes. Perhaps someone did help him. There was no honor amongst the Danes. He probably saw it as a way to test his mental strength as well as his physical, and saw help from another as just another way to achieve his goal. A test of manhood couldn't possibly be something that a weak man would understand.

Alan of Denmark saw the test as a game, damn it! A Dane made a game of her life! Then...then he took her. Right there! As if she wasn't something to be honored or respected. He took her in a cave! His pathetic excuse of her father trying to back out of the deal was another example of how little his people and hers trusted one another. How dare he say something so insulting about her father.

As much as she wanted to think of how terrible he had been the memory of what he did to her wasn't all bad. He may have said the most arrogant things, but his touch had been gentle and her body betrayed just how much she enjoyed it.

The memories caused an aching need to swell within her sex. A need that she wished would just go away. That memory of his tender touch haunted her more than she wanted. But his kiss and his hands were gentle and firm, even as he whispered a promise for future such acts.

Oh Freya, what was she doing? Vilda lifted her arm and covered her eyes. Perhaps sleep would come and she would forget these feelings. But when she closed her eyes, his face became even more clear.

His cleanly shaved face seemed odd at first, but when he kissed her, it had been smooth. His hair was shorter than most men she knew, but still long enough to hang nearly in his eyes. Oh, his eyes. They were what she remembered the most. They could reduce her knees to nothing more than pudding.

The need grew and the more she pictured Alan, the more she wanted him. Easing her hand down her stomach and tentatively touching just the outside of her leather pants, the heat and moisture of arousal between her legs confirmed the feelings she remembered.

Making up her mind to do something about these feelings, she looked around quickly and pulled her boots and breeches off. The cool air of the dark hull should have been enough to make her stop, but the need was too strong now.

Having committed herself to doing something that even she couldn't believe, she laid back down and pictured Alan once more in her mind.

His eyes were filled with a hot passion and traveled over the length of her body. Alan wanted her as much as she wanted him. He could see where she lay and what she was about to do. Somehow that thought brought about enough courage to spread her thighs and touch herself.

Running her fingers from her entrance and back up to the nub that wouldn't stop throbbing, she closed her eyes tighter and circled it again and again. Instead of the need feeling as though it dissipated, her sex grew even wetter.

She pushed her two foremost fingers deep within herself and writhed upon the bench. She couldn't stand this need much longer. Her fingers were not enough, she wanted the Dane again.

"Alan." She whispered his name as though his image could respond to her.

Pulling her moistened fingers back to her clit, she enjoyed the new feeling of wetness and massaged faster. Bringing her hips higher and rotating them to meet her fingers, she came closer. Closer to something. She couldn't stop now if she wanted to. Even if someone entered the hull, she wouldn't be able to.

Using her left hand she grabbed the ropes hanging to her side on the wall and gripped them firmly as her right hand continued to bring her satisfaction. Finally, finally she could feel her climax. A flood of weakness and strength all at once. The wetness in her folds grew and her legs began to feel stiff.

Her hips were off the bench now, thrusting her sex into the air. Lowering herself back down, she laid quietly for a moment. She didn't feel nearly as shocked by what just happened as by whom she thought about.

What had this Dane done to her? She should be able to forget him. Forget his touch, forget the sweet salty taste and smell of him. Vilda didn't delude herself into thinking she would ever forget the way he stared at her.

She became aware of the chill once more and pulled her breeches back on, followed by her boots. She laid back down and fell asleep.

Vilda sat on the same bench and counted the few silver coins left to her when Groa entered and cleared her throat.

Looking up, Vilda waited for her to speak. The sun wasn't quite up yet. She could focus only on Groa's virtually white hair.

"We are Vikings. It's our way of life now, Vilda."

Vilda nodded. Once more they knew the thoughts of the other. She'd been thinking of the little money left to support the needs of the crew.

The pillaging and killing of others. It wasn't an easy thing for her really. The killing of innocents...wait, why innocents? Why continue to prey upon the simple sailors?

The Danes. She smiled evilly to Groa.

She tied her change purse closed and rushed to the upper deck where the men were talking or managing the large sail. "Men, we are about to go to real battle."

The Vikings sat up and alert. "To where, Captain?"

She smiled and breathed a little deeply. "Denmark herself!"

The Vikings stared from one to the other.

"I'm serious. We will strike hard and fast. We will hit the shore at night and be gone by daybreak."

One Viking laughed, then another, soon the boat was full of hearty male laughter.

"To Denmark!" One Viking stood in the back and spoke with his mouth full of fish.

Vilda looked to Groa who nodded seriously. "To Denmark then, Vilda."

Alan gripped the sword in his scabbard. The Vikings were becoming a nuisance that Denmark could tolerate no longer. His father sent him, the heir to the throne, to kill all Vikings who dared to trespass here. The decision to agree with his father's command had been an easy one after the humiliation Denmark suffered at the hands of the Gotland king and his daughter.

He looked around at the very most northern tip of Denmark. The cold as hell winter would last for months and the fog made it difficult to see far across the water. Still, even with the days and weeks passing, and the ice cold nights, the heat of his rage for the Gotland kingdom kept him warm. He strained his eyes to see through the fog even after it proved useless.

When his father sent him, he didn't feel as reluctant to go as he might otherwise have been. The possibility of running into the same Vikings as those supplying the coffers of Siward

proved too much to pass up on. He would gladly restrict the flow of their less than honorable and profitable trade.

"Alan?" He looked over his shoulder and away from the still waters ahead of him. The seascape hadn't changed much anyway. One could only see a few hundred feet until the sea seemed to meet a wall of fog.

Erick wasn't looking at him. He pointed with his chin back to the foggy water.

Alan looked back to the still waters and listened. He could hear it. Wood creaking softly and water barely moving.

"They're using the cover of the fog! Get the men, Erick!" Alan spoke while pulling his sword free and lowering his helmet. He was ready and no Viking would leave standing.

Vilda stood at the bow of the boat, listening carefully for sounds of land. In fog such as this, it was quite common for a longboat to find the shore by hitting it. She heard nothing, but felt something deep in her gut.

Raising her hand, the men lifted the oars to stand upright. The boat coasted slowly in the current. The momentum of their previous rowing set them in a straightforward path.

Lowering her eyes and looking down to the deck of the boat, she concentrated on listening. It didn't matter exactly where she looked. She used her ears as much as her eyes.

Men were talking in a hurried fashion, moving metal. The Danes busied themselves by preparing for something. She looked around to her men.

"They know we're coming! Pull back!" Vilda ran to an oar and began pulling away from the shore just as her men were.

Arrows doused in flame haphazardly pierced through the fog. Several stuck into the bow itself, one dug deeply into the leg of a crewman, but even he continued to row.

"Heave, men! If they set to sea, we need a head start!"

The boat started moving faster, but she could hear another boat being set to sea. So still was the water, that sound traveled clearly. Hearing the boat being shoved into the water and men screaming in Danish to get her moving meant they were prepared to set sail for awhile. *But who would want to just sit around in the cold and wait for Vikings?*

Battle she wanted, but not one that would result in a lot of deaths. No one likes to be ambushed. Pausing in her rowing long enough to watch her crew, the idea of regret crossed her mind. There would be no one else to blame if any of these people were harmed.

Olaf rowed at the rear of the boat now, but Groa's ever watching eyes seemed narrowed on one point in the fog. Lifting her heavy round shield she knew someone approached.

Resisting the urge to look behind her, Groa pulled the water with her oar as fast as she could. Sweat began to pour from her brow. The lamellar armor she wore rubbed raw places beneath her upper arms. Pausing when she saw the tip of a boat to her left side, she knew fear as it gripped her heart. No! Another Danish boat moved in from her right! Something unlocked in her mind and she returned to rowing.

The two Danish boats narrowed in on them. They were going to board her boat and that meant...Gods, she couldn't think of what would happen to her crew.

Suddenly and without being told, the Vikings pulled their oars from the water. Every man and woman knew the sentence for being a Viking in these waters. If caught they would die.

Swords and double axes of all sides were drawn. Shields were lifted by those with free arms. The less experienced men used oars to hold the encroaching boats at bay while the older Vikings readied themselves.

Groa rushed to the side of her mistress. Her shield held high against the falling arrows and her gleaming silver helm hiding her face.

Vilda's sword had seen blood before, but she felt genuinely frightened as Groa huddled close enough for her to hear the other woman's grunt against the impacts of the arrows. Along with her heart pounding, her mouth went dry. She lowered her helm to hide all but her mouth. Time to die fighting, or die a coward. That was no real choice, she would not be known as a coward.

The oars fell to the sides as the Danish boats touched and the Danes began to board. Both parties had swords ready. Several Danes and a few Vikings died in the initial contact.

Grabbing her sword, Vilda joined the fighting while pushing Groa off to fight for herself. Doing her best to ignore the cries of anguish and gruesome manners in which they died, she forced her eyes to look only forward and at one target. Looking around would only reveal pierced hearts and gashes that stretched from face to stomach, she had seen them before and it never got easier to look upon.

Vilda ducked just in time to avoid the downward slash of a sword. Unfortunately, Groa moved too late and caught the sword across her thigh. Her heart sank as her friend drop to the deck.

Covering herself with her shield, Groa's dilated eyes looked up to her. "I'm sorry, Vil. I am."

She wouldn't hear that. Shaking her head angrily, she yelled above the noise and confusion, "I will see you in Valhalla, friend!"

Groa braced herself against a blow from a Dane and looked away.

No. Her friend wouldn't die here. Bringing her sword up to meet the man before he could kill Groa, she thrust it into his ribcage, causing him to double over and fall to the side. There might be hope if...While watching him fall another sword clashed hers.

Vilda looked to the one holding the sword, a tall Dane and one hidden behind a full helmet.

Even as he held her sword still with his, she thought of fighting on. "Your boat is ours, Viking. Drop your sword."

Turning to her crew, she froze. Groa was down, tending a wounded thigh, but living. Olaf, not so fortunate, he laid across the stern of the ship, not moving. Only a couple of men still struggled, but only because they didn't want their throats cut. Already the Danes were laughing as they tossed the dead overboard. She heard nothing other than the Danish laughter, and felt only sick.

She lowered her sword to the deck. It would have been better to die today. Vikings knew the risk they took. It was an

honorable thing to die in battle, but not for a captain to survive while all others died.

Alan kicked her sword away from her. "Who was your captain?"

Vilda lifted her chin. "I am captain and responsible for my crew."

Alan laughed. "A woman. Of course, why am I not surprised? You Vikings don't know what women are good for."

Good for? Was he serious? What an arrogant...She stopped. No. No. No. It couldn't be. The voice and the attitude, it all sounded so familiar.

"Well, we all know what the penalty for being a Viking is in Denmark."

"Death. Kill me quickly." Please, Odin, Loki himself, do not let him be who I think he is.

Alan pulled his helmet from his head and passed it to Erick.

It was. The same dark hair, the same broad shoulders. But he hadn't been as weak as she had thought. He had fought fiercely. Alan of Sigar, the man that haunted her thoughts.

Please don't remove my helmet. Please don't find out.

What would he do? Would he kill her in an even slower more horrendous way? Perhaps he would ransom her? She had even heard of women being passed around the boat for amusement.

"Well, let us have the name of our Valkyrie, shall we?"

Alan reached forward and pulled the helmet from Vilda. Although she kept her eyes downcast he recognized her. Nearly every man on the boat did. Shock turned to anger.

The Viking he had set out to kill was his wife! How? Why? She was no better than a cutthroat. A pirate. She had killed and robbed.

Alan stood with his mouth slightly ajar.

Vilda lifted her chin slowly. "The penalty is death, Alan of Sigar. I am ready to join my men in Valhalla."

Groa moved to her side and leaned against Vilda's leg.

Alan looked to Groa and pulled her silver helmet from her. He knew her immediately.

His jaw began twitching in anger. He pulled Groa up by the hair. "You will come back to Denmark. I'll marry you to the first man that feels he can tame you!"

Alan shoved Groa to Erick and turned back to Vilda with no regard to Groa's near stumble due to her injured thigh.

"As for you, I will deal with you privately."

Vilda pulled away but was stopped by Alan gripping her wrist.

Alan turned to his men. "Danes, meet your queen to be!"

His Danish men stared silently. They knew the story well, but to claim her still...

Vilda closed her eyes while the Danes looked upon her with hate. It wasn't to be death, but life. A life she could not bear. The life of an outsider and one that had killed many of their friends. Forget the fact that there were hundreds of Vikings, she was one of them and would always be seen as equally guilty of all deaths at Viking hands.

Alan savagely pulled her to the hull of her boat. Most men deliberately turned away. Some busied themselves with oars. Others began talking happily of their victory. Some were

obviously without anything to do, but wanted to seem uninterested in their prince pulling a woman to the hull. However a couple grinned broadly with the knowledge of what was about to take place below.

Alan slammed the wooden hatch up and slid a wooden bar over it. He looked to Vilda.

Even with him hidden in shadows, Vilda could feel his eyes on her. Perhaps he was standing in such a way that she just knew. She could see his silhouette against the closed hatch and his shoulders were moving slightly with deliberately slowed intakes of breath.

"Alan..."

What could she say? That she hated his people? That she hated him? No, she didn't hate him. In fact, he had just proven himself to be more than what she had thought of him.

Standing silently, he seemed to want her to say something. Maybe he wanted to give her just enough rope with which to hang herself. He took one step. Okay, maybe he meant to give himself enough time to calm down.

"I couldn't marry you. You are a Dane. My people hate the Danes."

He took another step toward her.

Vilda took a step back and stopped when she bumped into the bench along the wall. Layers of nautical rope were hung against the wall and swished back and forth as the boat began to move. She reached behind and held onto one of the swinging ropes to steady her legs.

"You have raided my land. You disgraced me. Your father has to prepare himself for war with my country. All this

because you wanted to play Viking?" His words were strained against closed teeth.

"War?" She wanted to move further away, but before she could take another step, he stopped before her.

"You didn't think that there would be consequences for your actions?"

"I did this, not my people."

"My people were innocent, but that didn't stop you and your raids." His words cut her.

"I never raided Denmark!"

"Oh no? What were you about to do?"

"I was about to, but I didn't."

He reached out and grabbed a fist full of her hair. "You were going to subject my people to death. The women to rape, and the children to an early grave."

"I..."

He jerked her hair painfully. "Deny that's what Vikings do."

She pulled herself as straight as she could, but was still bent over before him. "I cannot deny that, but I wouldn't have allowed all that other Vikings do."

"You will become a Dane now, Gotlander. Perhaps when you have Danish children you will feel differently about us."

Vilda was pulled against his chest firmly. His mouth covered hers in a punishing manner. It was hard and cruel, but familiar at the same time.

He lifted his head. "I will hear you beg for me wife. You will beg for me many, many times. I will take you again and again, until you think of nothing but me."

Her eyes widened. Was he serious? Shouldn't he just want her dead?

"Send me back to my parents, Alan."

Was he sneering? She couldn't quite see his face, but she could almost picture it in her mind.

His mouth covered hers once more. His arms gripped hers firmly.

She wanted to recoil from his brutal kiss, but it was too easily remembered and his grip too tight. Not a single night had passed since he first took her that she hadn't thought of him. She had dreamed of him touching her, but this time slower. Touching her in ways that caused her to touch herself in private.

He roughly pulled her wooden armor from her chest. No care was given to whether the laces were damaged. He tossed it to the dark recesses of the hull. Her thick cotton and wool clothing was the next to be pulled from her. He paused only after she stood completely naked before him.

The removal of her clothing had been done so hurriedly, so savagely, that she was left trying to cover herself with her hands.

Alan walked slowly to the bench along the wall.

Vilda stood quietly and with her back to him. She made no attempt to retrieve her clothing. She could cover no more of her body than what her two hands would allow.

"Do you remember the night I took you?" His words were calm and spoken dangerously soft.

She nodded.

"Answer me...respectfully."

"I...I do."

"I do what?"

"I do...Alan."

"No, husband. Call me husband." He laughed. "You may even call me master if you like."

To Loki with that! She was not going to call a Dane master. It was bad enough to call him husband, but to call him master. She would rather jump overboard.

"I do...Dane."

He clicked his tongue as if regretting her decision not to use the correct word. "Down on your knees, wife."

She looked in his general direction, but didn't quite see him. She slowly dropped to her knees.

"The wood of these boats can be quite painful if you continue to press down on your knees. Now, we wouldn't want you to hurt your knees, would we?"

He stood and walked close behind her.

She closed her eyes.

"Now, all I want is for you to call me husband, wife. Is that so terrible?"

She lowered her head.

He bent to her ear and whispered. "Do you remember the night I took you for my own?"

She nodded. "I do...husband."

He rubbed her golden hair gently. "I like that. What did you like about that night?"

She wanted to cry or scream or anything. Why would he ask such humiliating questions?

"There is no one here but us, wife. Tell me, and I will do it again."

Judging by the tone of his voice and his previous threat of Danish children he planned to do just that. Yet as if to make sure she understood, he pressed his cock, hard and bulging beneath his leather pants, against her shoulder.

Vilda trained her eyes forward. She knew if she looked just an inch to the left, she would be staring directly at the offending appendage.

"I...I liked it when you were shivering at my feet."

He laughed as he bent closer to speak in her ear. "I'm afraid I will not be the one shivering tonight, dove." He spoke slowly, his breath filling her ear and causing shivers. "I want to watch you shiver for me."

His mouth lowered to the bend of her neck, trailing a slow and wet kiss. He pulled her hair back and to the opposite side to gain better access to her neck.

Her knees ached, but it paled against the sweet aching between her thighs. She had touched herself enough to intimately know the exact spot throbbing now. Her wetness grew for him against every protest of reason in her mind.

No! She didn't want this. Just like in the cave, he used his skills to seduce her. By seducing her he made her think she wanted this, but it was what he wanted. Only him! With her crew dead and dying above her she needed to focus on her hatred of him. Bending forward, she almost managed to pull away from him.

Lowering himself to his knees behind her, he forced her to press against him once more as he ran his fingertips gently

down her spine. Circling her bottom and then traveling back up her spine.

Even as her breathing quickened and her mind fought her body's reaction, she found herself unable to suppress a shiver as his fingers touched the sensitive parts of her back and neck, she felt herself leaning back toward his hand.

"Mmmm...yes, wife."

"My crew..."

He said nothing, but kissed her shoulder. What could he say? They both knew that none but Danes survived the conflict. Then what happened to her no longer mattered. Did he know that a tear slid down her cheek?

She blocked her mind to the idea of his eyes looking down the front of her as his hand reached over her shoulder and palmed a breast. Her nipple betrayed her and puckered into a pebble for him. When his other hand reached around her hip and rested just above her downy mound and upon her lower stomach she closed her eyes.

"Did you miss this, wife? Did you want to be touched like this again?"

At first she thought to say nothing, but the truth came to her mind. "You never touched me like this."

He chuckled. "Yes, I was a bit hurried that day, but not now. Now I will touch your whole body. I will taste you and hold you. I will know every inch of you."

Unable to speak, she chose to bite her lower lip. She couldn't tell him what she wanted, not after all that had happened. Pride wouldn't allow her to admit that she liked what his hand was doing to her breast. If she could, she

would tell him to move his other hand lower and end her agony.

The hand she longed for didn't lower; instead it traveled higher to cup her ignored breast. He rolled her nipples between forefinger and thumb to make them a matching pair of throbbing and tender pink pearls.

Choosing a subtle movement that he may not pick up on, she pressed her hips back and against him. His penis, naturally pushed between her bottom's cheeks, threatened to bring a moan to her lips.

He paused long enough to remove his armor top and remaining clothes. Lifting both her arms, he wrapped them around his neck and returned to her breasts. Kissing her neck and rubbing his cock in the length of her bottom, he caused her to moan lightly.

Lowering his right hand to spread her nether lips, he moaned aloud as he touched the tight nub that caused her such delightful urgency. The sound of his moan nearly caused her to do the same, but still the pride and shame lingered.

When she tried to bend forward, an involuntary response to his hand, he pulled her back against him and straight once more. Slipping a finger into her tight sheath, he used his arm to nudge her thighs further apart.

Lifting his wet finger to her mouth, he slicked her lower lip with her own juice.

"Deny that you want me, wife."

How could she deny it when he presented the evidence to her? Why did he continue to ask things of her? She just wanted him to take her, end her torture.

"Taste it, wife. Taste it and describe it."

She blinked twice and closed her eyes. Tentatively she slipped her tongue out and tasted herself.

"It's...it's hard to describe."

"You've never tasted anything like it?"

She shook her head.

"It's sweet, clean, but musky at the same time." Her tongue freely tasted her lip as she spoke now.

"Turn now, and taste me."

She froze. Women didn't do that, did they? Taste what he puts into her?

He spun her around impatiently, and held her still with one arm as he used the other hand to hold his cock forward. The aggressive movement and her position on her knees combined to remind her that she had little choice.

"It's alright, dove. Do it." Surprisingly his voice was reassuring, not angry or hurried.

Vilda closed her eyes and placed her lips directly on the tip of his cock. It was an alien taste. Salty, satiny. Her mouth opened just a little more. Her tongue slipped out to taste it.

She opened her eyes only slightly and when she saw how large his cock was and realized what she really planned to do, she closed her eyes once more.

Alan gripped her head and moved his hips to encourage her gently.

Vilda opened her mouth even more and found him placing his cock directly into her mouth. It was too large for her to take the whole of it in. Instead, she was forced to wrap its shaft with her hands.

After a moment, she heard him groan and knew without looking up that his eyes would be closed.

Her mouth ached with his width. She slid back and looked up at him.

His eyes were not closed. In fact, he watched her closely. He stroked her cheek softly.

"Lay down, Vilda." His voice was soft, not demanding.

Vilda pulled her legs from beneath herself and lay back on the hard wood of the boat. She had only a moment to think of the wood before he spoke again.

"You have tasted yourself, and me, but I have yet to taste you." His eyes traveled lower.

He couldn't possibly mean...She watched him with knots growing in her stomach. His hands gently pried her thighs apart as he trailed hot and soft kisses down the inside of them.

Alan's hair fell just before his face, begging for her touch. Lifting her hand, she delicately touched the feather soft hair.

Raising his eyes, he allowed her to watch his tongue trail along her thighs slowly. His eyes were shadowed and piercing as they seemingly challenged her to continue watching.

Vilda rested back on her elbows and closed her eyes. She couldn't bear to watch him. Feeling him kiss her most intimate area was enough sweet torture. His moist mouth caused her wetness to grow and her breathing to deepen.

As her toes curled and her knees dropped further to the side, her hands pushed her breasts closer together. Moaning softly and lifting her hips to his mouth, she recognized what she knew to be surrender, but she no longer cared.

Sliding his hands under her bottom he raised her up and closer to him. His tongue laved at her folds and stopped periodically at the tight bud that throbbed with hunger. Sliding two of his fingers into her, he brought her to the point of writhing with need.

Her mouth became dry. Licking her lips, she looked back at Alan.

He slowly moved to cover her as a large cat would move over its prey. Alan kissed her deeply and pushed her backwards, completely covering her with his body.

She recognized the taste of herself now. His mouth tasted like her and the thought increased her desire.

When he paused and looked down at her, she almost feared what he would say. "Call me husband again."

Vilda opened her mouth, but before she could say anything he buried his cock deep in her wet slit.

"Husband!" The word came as a gasp when it escaped her.

Her captor thrust into her again and again causing his muscles to bulge and his brow to cover with sweat. He smelled musky and delicious.

Throwing her head back she groaned loudly. "Yes, Alan, yes."

He understood what she was feeling now. Driving into her repeatedly, he found his own climax. With one final thrust, he filled her with his seed.

Alan collapsed on her and held her close. What was he thinking? This was no punishment for humiliating him and terrorizing his homeland.

Burying his face into her hair, he now knew he didn't want to punish her. No part of him ever wanted to find her in order to bring her misery. He just wanted to find her, and now he couldn't be without her again. How could he convince her to stay with him?

"Alan?"

His name, so soft on her lips, made him regret the words she would say next. Pulling up he looked down into her face. It would be natural for her to plead for her release.

"You are my wife, Vilda."

Her expression softened. "Hold me tighter."

The request confused him. She didn't beg for release, nor did she curse him for capturing her.

"Hold me, Dane. Don't let me go."

He did as she asked while lying down behind her. What did this mean? Was she content to stay with him now? Had he finally won her?

Vilda pulled herself back and deep into his arms. She didn't close her eyes, instead she stared out into the shadows of the boat.

"What are you thinking, Vilda?" His voice was velvety as he whispered in her ears.

"I led my crew to their deaths." She half whimpered as she spoke. "And then I enjoyed being with you as they died. What kind of person am I?"

His mouth and nose were buried close and deep in the crook of her neck until he heard the pain in her words. Exhaling long and slow, he turned to look at her. "You had no

choice. Blame me, dove." He wrapped his arms around her once more. "I can handle it."

She clung even closer to him. "I can't blame you for everything, Dane. It will take a long time for me to come to terms with what happened here..." Her voice trailed off, cracking as it did.

"We have all the time in the world, Viking."

"Your people will always hate me."

He was silent. It would take time for his people to look past the fact that she had been a Viking, and attempted to flee from him. But he would be there for her.

"My people hate you, Dane."

He breathed in and exhaled slowly. "They will come to respect me."

Somehow, she didn't doubt that. She didn't doubt his strength and ability either, now. Her people respected strong men. Their lives were hard and strength was needed more, and respected more, than just bloodlines. He would be able to prove himself to them as he had to her.

She turned and stared into his eyes. Yes, they were just as wonderful as ever. Just looking into them made her swell with need once more.

"Will you always look at me like that?"

"I'll always look at you like I am now."

She kissed him lightly and then smiled. "Then I'll never leave you, Dane."

"I will never let you." He kissed her.

The End

Legends of Love  
*by Luna Carrol*

\* \* \* \*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **The Seventh Legend**

**by**

**Mila Ramos**

Some stories are rumor. Some stories are real. For a woman who has spent her life fighting evil she learns nothing is at it seems. The book she searches for is closer than she thinks and the unimaginable evil has been near her since she was a child.

\* \* \* \*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## The Seventh Legend

by

Mila Ramos

\* \* \* \*

### Chapter One

Her skin tingled with an eerie awareness. The evil *felt* near. She would find him, it, soon...A beeping noise disturbed her concentration. Alana tapped the communications earpiece clipped to her ear. Her sister Maggie spoke volumes of warning, frustrating Alana in the process. *Great timing, sis*, Alana thought.

"Alana, you need to come back to the house." Static followed the transmission.

"I'll be back momentarily. I just want to see if it is *him*," she replied as the rain continued to pour.

"Alana, it's not him. You know it can't be."

"I'm sure I know who the Viscount is, Maggie. Let me just check this out. I need to be positive."

"As your sister, I completely object to you walking into that club without proper backup. I'm sending Drew."

Shaking her head, she scanned again. "And as *your* sister, I'm the one that's been gifted. So I think I'll be fine."

"Alana don't —"

"Cutting transmission," she stated, as she touched her earpiece and continued her visual scan.

She sat perched high above the buildings still as the stone gargoyles. Rain steadily danced down onto the rooftops and streets of the city below while lightning lit the night sky. Varying tunes of water collecting in the building gutters changed as they ran down their gulley and spilled to puddles on the city streets. Cars sped down the street and threw water in every direction, adding more water to the already soaked walker-bys.

The world moved as normal; people crossed streets, entered and left cars, buildings and continued with their lives unaware of the lone figure above with roving eyes. None of the souls below interested her, though they should have. It was her job to take care of them and protect them. Yet, her focus went to finding a particular man.

She tuned her special vision onto the facial features of every passer. Alana scanned various eye colors, facial hair, no facial hair, but none proved to be the one she wanted. Born the seventh generation of Shadow Hunter, gifted with extraordinary abilities to detect a certain type of paranormal being, Alana accepted her skill. Though she adored her gifts and they made life somewhat tolerable, they did have their tolls. Easy wouldn't be the *word* she used for the things she did. Duty, yes...family obligation, hell yes, but *easy* was an understatement. Her family had been protectors for a long time.

The Legends were hunters in search of the evil preying on humankind. Alana came from a family rich in the history. Her

family spanned over thirteen generations, the first appearing in Egypt and then moving to Europe. Mauricio Legend, her grandfather told her, when she was a child, the Legends were once believed to be actual gods, but the books of genealogy were not open for common perusal. Alana only knew of the roots as far back as the 11th century when the family name changed to Legend.

What she knew of her family was through those on her mother's side; the Italian side. The Legend qualities were significantly prominent in the descending female born in the following generations. Those females with the Legend last name had the signature caramel tone complexion, full, sensual, pouty lips, and soulful, dark almond shaped eyes, and athletically toned bodies graced with poise and elegance.

Taken aside by her grandfather one day while her parents had gone to town, Alana wanted to know what made her family name so special He said that the actual story started on October 14, 1066, the Battle of Hastings. Norman troops defeated the English and killed King Harold, which opened the way for William to take the throne.

An English knight, Thomas Legend, received a terrible blow to the head during that battle. Though they were going to leave him for dead, when they checked again they realized he was very much alive. When they returned him to England, he healed and they sent him home. However, the story had it that's when his troubles started. From the moment he awoke up, he sensed thoughts of those around him. Of course those times were so much different, so he thought he was possessed.

Thomas made many trips to various shrines in England, in hopes to be cured of the voices. None helped according to the tale. Getting enough of his personal items together he took a pilgrimage to Rome, Italy. There he met and fell in love with an Italian woman Isabella Medice, and received a papal blessing to wed. Shortly thereafter, he no longer heard the voices. For the first few years things went well; he was happily in love and he never heard anything out of the ordinary.

Then one day, while out in the country with his bride, Thomas heard the voices again. Isabella answered back to these unknown voices. At this revelation, William thought the woman a witch, or he was losing his mind. Isabella explained to him what he thought to be witchcraft or makings of the Devil, were gifts from the heavens.

Over the years, Thomas was taught to cope with his gift and control the voices. As time passed, the couple had six children each born with distinct super natural gifts and abilities. One of the children, Fiona, had skills much more advanced than the other five siblings. She developed a combination of traits, such as enhanced hearing, vision, speed, strength, which the other children hadn't.. Fiona could heal her wounds at a faster rate; ward off sickness easier, aged at a slower rate, and sensed when a supernatural presence approached.

The distinctions of these abilities were understood on a rare night when the Legend home was raided by thieves. At the peak of young adulthood, Fiona was the youngest the children and known for her quiet and reserved demeanor.

Face to face with the criminals, Isabella witnessed first hand the exact measure of her daughter's biological peculiarity. Fiona defended her family when matters worsened and the men attacked her siblings. The men, which Isabella learned were called vampires, served to explain to Fiona the type of awareness she possessed.

Knowledgeable and wiser to the changes in the world and the evil, Isabella had a vision in her dreams one night. A man possessed by the evil, fought against two women. The women were Legends, each identical in appearance to her daughter. In the fight, one was killed, and the other murdered at the hands of the vampire. With their deaths, a storm of energy inundated the man. The consequential actions from this acquisition of energy resounded through as the man killed any man, woman and child in sight.

The weight of that vision never died over the centuries. The connection of the man in the vision didn't sway the rigorousness need to find answers, even in the current century.

Alana needed to keep her wits about and her senses tuned. She shifted her gaze to the people coming and going, as something caught her attention. Maybe the way he walked with smooth precision. Maybe his gait revealed him as much more than a normal man. He filtered through the crowd with ease. Maybe it was the way he seemed acutely aware of his immediate surroundings. He knew where to step and move in order not to alarm or bring attention. Or maybe the way her teeth elongated at the sense of a vampire nearby, gave him away.

It didn't take but a fraction of a second and she knew. The infamous murderer her ancestors had written about was walking along the city streets unknown to the innocent people below her. She remained poised in her position and noted his route as he passed through double doors and entered a nightclub. If only those unsuspecting people knew he was an abominable danger to human kind, they would not be too quick to welcome him into their establishment.

What did they know? Not as much as she did. From all the information she had gathered and learned, he was called 'Viscount' in all the Shadow circles. The name Viscount had been alive for a long time. As for the man, she didn't know for sure. The actual Viscount lived for currently six hundred years, and single-handedly wiped out the most royal of the Shadow Hunting families. Rumors and speculations as to his true identity in human life ran rife. Some stated the name only passed on, and the original Viscount died long ago. Other rumors said the 'Viscount' indeed was a real Viscount from the British Empire, but any truths to those rumors were never corroborated. The reality behind any of it was beyond her understanding.

Alana only knew one truth, the Viscount as an assassin, a slayer and the killer of her family. Different generation members before her were murdered at this thing's bloodied hand. Though Alana could dismiss the cause as being duty bound, the truth was she couldn't give a verifiable reason when there were currently other Shadow Hunters out searching for the Viscount. Her only intention was revenge.

Vengeance is what fueled her soul. In her immediate family, besides herself, Maggie, her twin sister, remained the only survivor. Although most of the family understood the consequences of being the lone figure that tracks dangerous beings, of the weight of carrying the Legend name, and not letting the power of the gifts overwhelm the soul, Alana was out for a personal vendetta. When word leaked about her blood feud, there was uproar throughout the remaining members of the Legend family and through the Shadow Hunter Community. The backlash was expected due to her family name. Balanced on the edge, Alana let her thoughts sift through family history as she waited for the Viscount to appear.

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[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Chapter Two**

Every two hundred years a Legend was born with supernatural powers, which gave that person paranormal senses, unimaginable strength, extraordinary speed, inexplicable endurance and agility, and a surprising degree of healing ability. With heightened and enhanced senses, and powerful physiques that could perform twenty times faster, these Legends born were almost super human. There were six members in the past generations born with this type of specialized ability. They were the known as Psi-ters, meaning the added psychic gifts they had to deal with on top of their other capabilities helped in encounters with the evil. Their strength to sense and fight the malevolence praying about made them essential in the Shadow Hunter community.

Moving off the perch and heading downstairs, Alana thought out her plans to deal with her enemy. She needed to know the truth. It wasn't until three months ago, chasing after the infamous Viscount, she caught wind of his identity. If the validity held truth, then she understood how valuable she was to her adversary.

As she walked across the street to follow the same path, she was stopped short by a lean male figure with black hair, dressed in dark jeans and trench coat. His arms were crossed over his chest and a smug smile across his face. Alana let out a frustrated breath and cursed her sister for her choice of additional support. Maggie's idea of support was to bring in another being matched in power and force as her.

"Now I find it funny that you get angry at Maggie when you're the one about to do something stupid." He smiled.

Drew. Arrogant, confident, sexy, and the only reason she admitted she needed help. The man was built for time-consuming hours of exploration. He had the physique for very long nights where she could forget she was a destined Legend and become what she wasn't allowed to be, a woman. His smile beckoned wicked desires, some that she had no idea about.

Rumors were spread about his expertise, his preferences, and his desires in all the time before and after she had known him. It didn't matter to her; she'd known him far too long to care. No one knew that the Drew standing before her to be the same man she had been in love since she was 14 years old. A love struck young woman looking at a young man who never knew she existed. Years later, here they stood. Their history was so complex and hard to detail.

"Drew? What are you doing here?" She bit out harsh and demanding. "I thought you were in Spain?"

Unmoving from his spot, he raised an eyebrow. "I was sent back when the families were executed. Not that you care, but I agreed to keep an eye on you since easing the mind of your twin sister isn't a priority." He flashed a wicked grin and stepped closer. "That is unless you want to make me your priority?"

That smile only further infuriated her but she rolled her eyes and walked passed Drew. And true to the man, he blocked her path. Drew Beckett was a part of one of the Shadow Hunter families and grew up with her when her

family lived in Europe. Though at the present moment, he was more fun to pick on and use as a punching bag, things between them were not entirely at odds. They had been in a very intense and intimate relationship years prior, but the passing of a few family members at the time, caused her to reassess a great many aspects of her life. Those thoughts eventually caused her to become a recluse.

Despite the fact that Andrew took life in his usual calm and easy manner, she thought of him and what she walked away from many times. With similar backgrounds, it was rather difficult to stay away; Drew was destined like she to lead the same path. Though each family was unique in as to how they chose their destined one, Drew took the title with no difficulty. His flippant attitude in and of itself drove her to insanity more instances than she cared to count. Over time, their relationship changed to a friendship, but she wasn't sure if she would call it that. Especially since it had been almost two years since she'd seen him.

"Drew, go home. This is no place for you." She sidestepped to get out of his path.

He blocked her trail again and took his sweet time as he raised one foot then the other to examine the bottom of his shoes. "Actually this is a wet sidewalk. But if you mean the club you're heading to is not a place for me, well I know you'll be my lady in shining armor to save me." He flashed another dazzling smile.

Alana rolled her eyes and tried to move past him. "Fuck you."

Drew blocked her path and stared down at her, his frame blocked her viewpoint. He licked his lips leisurely and pierced her with an intense stare as if he had savored nectar he extremely enjoyed. "Already have and I wouldn't mind doing it again."

Alana locked her jaw, raised an elegant eyebrow, stared at Drew, and waited for the flush of anger to pass. The man pushed her rationale and her calm quick and fast. Drew could break her and managed getting under her skin when he stared at her in the way he was doing so at the moment. She wasn't completely blind but she made sure anything between them she was never given the opportunity to flourish.

Or so she thought as her thoughts were distracted momentarily. The man was a prime example of magnetism and she knew those features well. Every part of him left her wanting more, yearning more. Even more so drenched in the pouring rain, the idea of a little tussle wouldn't hurt. If anything that just might perk her up and release some deeply held tension. She was insane to not want him in her bed and do the sensuous things his smile promised. But at this moment he was an obstacle in her path and she wanted to kick the shit out of him for not letting her pass.

"Damnit it, Drew get out of my way!" Alana punctuated brusquely.

"No. Maggie asked me to help you and I'm not going to let your sister worry." He stepped closer and grinned again. "I could offer a *special* type of protection."

"Kiss my ass. Bye." She moved and continued walking.

"There you go again with me doing naughty things to you. Alana, are you telling me something important?" He chuckled while he followed her. "Is there somewhere else you want my lips to go after they kiss your ass?"

She growled deep and restrained her answer, which in turn meant not throttling Drew in public. Though it would get out a great deal of the aggression she felt at the moment, it probably only turned on the bastard. It had been over between them for some time, and not once when he floated through her thoughts did she forget he was a very good-looking man. Drew easily stood well over six and half feet; tall to impress but not enough to speculate. His rugged jet-black hair enhanced his mysterious green eyes that were currently focused on her. Strong jaw and chiseled male features were the first of many features, which beckoned at a woman. Not to mention the broad, muscle-packed strong frame she had held in her arms many times in the past, but she had more important things on her mind.

"Can't you just go away or something?" She at last relented. "Go bug Maggie at home or stop in the middle of the street and wait for a car to hit you?"

Though she mostly argued with Drew, she respected his expertise and professional training. Maggie made a wise choice when she sent him as assistance; he could get the any job done with success. But under the cool, sarcastic surface Alana knew Drew hid more than met the eye. Yes, his features branded him temptation and sin but his fury was just as hot-blooded as hers. She hadn't seen the loss of his own

family affect his outer reserve, but she knew his anger simmered along the surface; dangerous and unpredictable.

"Who would then be able to do the things I like to do to you?"

"Like what?" Alana retorted, turned the corner and stopped underneath a flickering lamppost.

He leaned forward and whispered in her ear. "The only reason I like to piss you off is because when you've had enough, you let me taste you."

Caught off-guard, Alana looked up and bit down on the sizzle under the core of her skin. She shook her head distracted and wasn't able to stop Drew as he stepped forward and touched her cheek. Without warning, he leaned down and kissed her. He sampled her lips, and then pulled back momentarily. "Nice outfit," and tasted more before he delved in deeper.

Moaning softly, his words drifted though the muddled sensations of lust and frustration. But it was in a manner of classic Drew as he complimented her in some way and threw her off her guard. With his casual manner, it was the one thing that melted her reserve. She damn well knew she looked good. She kept her signature style simple; it was told she resembled a character out of the movie *The Matrix* with her PVC cat suit.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath while for a moment; she let her thoughts drift to their time together. It was so easy to fall back to that life with Drew. He was special in that way every woman yearned for in a man. He always took care of her, understood and made her laugh when she

would otherwise have throttled him. In his own family, Drew was considered a Psi-ter, but she overpowered him by certain gifts she possessed. This never bothered him though; it never once made him act machismo. If anything, he took that difference, led it several times around the dance floor before it turned into nothing more than what it truly was; a difference. But, after their lives had changed those fateful, painful weeks following the deaths, she reconciled she wasn't going to allow herself to go back to those moments.

Yet as much as she should have stopped him, Alana didn't fight him and returned the kiss with the same ardor. She moved her body into his and wrapped her arms tight around his neck while they continued kissing in a corner, protected from the heavy rainfall. She missed his touch and taste, but if she went down this path with him she wouldn't be able to do what she needed.

"Drew, stop." She breathed out in a rush while reality beat her skull to get her bearings. Drew refused and pulled her in tighter and continued to devour her mouth. The rush and heat of his touch and skill singeing her just as it did long ago. She groaned lost in the kiss. Just one word and she would have this entire male in her as it was right now around her. She used all her strength and pulled back and slapped a hand on Drew's chest, gasping for air. "Stop. We have to stop."

Drew never took well to rejection, this she remembered as her hand felt the rumbles of growls beneath her palm. She looked up and he only Drew pulled her in, trying to get her closer. "You know I always hated that word."

"You know we can't, Drew. We just...can't." She took a deep breath, her hands shook from the rush of heat. As she ran a hand through her hair, she stepped out into the pouring rain and let the water cool her frenzied body off.

"It's there between us, Alana, not something we can stop." He looked up from his stance, his hands on his knees while he caught his breath.

"Yes, we can, we--"

He walked ahead of her and shook his head "Let's just go back to the house, Maggie is worried."

"I can't. I'm going to end this once and for all," she stated and continued to walk in the intended direction.

Drew grabbed her arm and pulled her back hard. "It's much more complicated than you think. This is not about a book, Alana."

She jerked her arm out of his grasp and glared with suspicion. "Yes, it is about a book. This whole thing is about unlocking power beyond imaginable. You can only contain something like that in a book, Drew. You should know that better than anyone. If he gets the book, he can unlock the power."

Drew gripped her shoulder. "No it doesn't Alana. Trust me; it has nothing to do with a book!" He yelled. "You need to be protected."

She pulled her arms away and pushed Drew back. "I am not some weak-willed woman, Drew. I can handle my own. You best of all know that. Now I'm going, either you can join me or you can go back to Maggie."

She waited while Drew ran a hand through his wet hair, and cursed under his breath. "Then I pray to whoever is up in heaven that the Viscount isn't at that fucking club. There are some truths you are not ready to know."

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[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Three

Nodding her head in agreement, Alana and Drew continued the path to the nightclub the Viscount had been walking earlier. A long line of people wrapped around the corner of an old three-story brick town home while lights pulsed and flickered inside. The music filtered out the windows and muffled conversations as various dialogues were indistinct. The lengthy throng of eager clubbers waited for their turn to enter regardless of the downpour upon them. She felt Drew touch her lower back as she took a quick breath to control her anger.

Music blared outside the doors of the prominent club known to cater the elite and wealthy socialites of the city. Ignoring the clubbers' protests and sneers which erupted while they walked passed them; they walked inside the club to the front of the line. Overall silence and soft conversations greeted their ears after they entered the second set of double doors. They ignored personnel and went through a third set of double doors.

"Sound proofed." Drew stated.

"I know."

Four bouncers greeted Alana and Drew, but blocked their entrance. The bouncer closest to Alana, gripped her arm, stared down at her, and gave her a sarcastic looking and thoroughly amused smile.

"There's a line to get in, young lady."

Drew chuckled and stepped back. "Bad move, man, bad move."

Staring up at the bouncer with nothing but a sarcastic smile, Alana threw a punch into the man's throat and stayed in place while he dropped to the floor clutching his neck. She kept her eyes on the bouncer as he gasped for air and slowly moved her hand into her trench coat. Before the other bouncers could move, she pulled out her gun and pointed the barrel at the man on the floor. The people standing in line ran for cover as she fired a warning shot inches away from another bouncer to stop him from rushing away.

"Tell the Viscount, the Seventh Legend wants to see him."

"There is no Viscount here." Another bouncer stated.

"Do you want me to do to you as him?" Alana reinforced her question as she shot another chamber next to the man on the floor.

She remained tranquil and kept her gun fixated on the man on the floor, but the bouncers still did not move. Drew had already pulled out his weapon and covered her. To imply the seriousness of the request, Alana placed a silencer on her weapon and waited while one of the other bouncers entered the club. Moments later, he returned and kept the door open.

"We will notify you when he's done with his meeting. Please wait at the dance floor."

Re-holstering their weapons, Alana and Drew walked past the man on the floor and the remaining bouncers without saying another word, and strolled into the club. Pounding techno music filtered through every hole of the club, much too loud to have heard the sounds of gunshots in the previous

room. They walked slowly through the crowd, and she searched quickly through it. People moved to the hard music in each part of the club; they danced on tables, in cages, on top of the bar. She scanned the room and easily spotted different types of supernatural beings among the normal people.

*There are various forms of energy beings here, be careful.* Alana mentally called to Drew. Walking directly to the dance floor, Drew tapped his temple with his index finger and made a spiral motion with his finger to keep her eyes open as they scanned the room for anything suspicious. Alana checked her surroundings and noticed more bouncers, and without delay, pulled Drew close as she planted her lips on his. Drew pulled back in confusion. She whispered in his ear closely.

"There are beings here that will kill us at once regardless of what we are here for. We can't let them know that we are inside this club. Go with it until the Viscount appears." Staring up at him, and she licked her lips sensuously, her focus never faltering.

No sooner had the words came out, than the song "Closer" by Nine Inch Nails blared through the system. Its sexual, hard pounding, down-tempo beat tempted people to do more sensual and carnal dancing. Alana took its cue and pressed her body secure against Drew

They moved in rhythm, eyes locked. Alana rubbed her body against Drew but kept a peripheral eye view on their surroundings. They didn't have anyone else watching out for them, so they were truly on their own. Alana looked up into Drew's eyes as the music blared and caught the change in the

eye color she knew too well. She felt his hands roam over her hips and pull her intimately into him.

She started to push away but Drew brought his lips roughly to her ear. "Stop it, Alana. You want this as much as I do, admit it." He moved her hips with slow and sure movements.

Alana's attention gradually shifted from the crowd to the man she danced with. The rhythmic beat and lyrics of the music pumped her blood as she ran her hands underneath Drew's shirt and kept her gaze locked on him. She closed her eyes and absorbed the beat of the music further accelerated the heat in her body. Her breath caught and her heart pound hard in her chest. His hands swayed away from her hips to cup her bottom, drawing her closer. Things between them were too heated, as their lips once again touched. In truth, she didn't care they were kissing heavily and touching each other in the middle of the dance floor. Then again, all those around them only considered them part of the group. Alana didn't want to let on to any one else supernatural in the club as to their true intentions. The alternative of groping in public was a much nicer option.

They were suppose to just be only there as allies. Alana and Drew came to the club to confront the man she had chased for more time than she cared to consider. With Drew as her partner, she was supposed to be avenging her family. Wasn't she? But, she...she couldn't figure that out anymore. Alana moved and swayed in Drew's arms and he pushed the attraction and heat higher in her body. The line between what reality and fantasy blurred swiftly.

Drew gazed back at her, and brought her hips a little harder into his body. It didn't help at all that she seemed as turn on as him at the present. He bent down and kissed her neck, and left small bite marks on her smooth skin. As he moved their bodies away from the dancing cluster and to a corner of the club, he lifted her in his arms and locked their lips together. Alana right away fastened her legs around his waist as she felt his hands slide up her thighs, her stomach, up to the zipper at the front of her suit and lowered it slow and with agonizing deliberateness. As he dragged the zipper and opened the suit, her breath hitched in excitement as part of her naked skin came into partial view to his eyes.

Moving his body around so as to block anyone else from seeing too much of her, Drew moved his hands into the suit, cupped her breasts with one hand, and played with her nipple as he pulled her closer with the other hand. Alana leaned her head back, completely aroused and groaned out small sounds of pleasure. Drew didn't hesitate and straight away brought his mouth down to the hard nipple exposed to the pulsing lights. Biting tenderly at first, he suckled and laved the heavy breast and rigid peak over and over while Alana writhed to get close. He left her on the edge of frustration and moved his mouth away and bit her on the neck, to return and devour her mouth.

"Am I interrupting something?" A voice interrupted them.

"YES!" They both said in unison as they went back to their heavy make out session.

A sinister chuckle greeted their answer. "So the Seventh Legend does feel things like a normal woman."

Alana and Drew froze in their spot, and both turned to look intently at the man who came within reach of them. Alana pulled the zipper to her suit up fast, untangled herself from Drew, and stepped forward.

Looking fiercely at the man before her, she knew she'd been right about the identity of the Viscount. She knew this man. A man she knew all too well and had loved more than life itself. She had held him in her arms and thought him to have died with the rest of her family members. But it was a lie; it had always been a lie.

Before her stood the man who faked his own death and killed members of her family. She finally came face to face with the infamous Viscount.

"Hello, Uncle Eric," she responded, her voice as cold as ice.

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[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Chapter Four

Isabella Legend declared in each generation, children of Legend blood will be set against the perils of evil. The descendants will have strengths and abilities from their parents, and generations past, but only one child in that whole generation would be able to sense and detect evil in an exceptional manner.

Fiona, daughter of Thomas and Isabella, was the First Legend. Her mother, Nina and twin brother Eric, were the Fifth and Sixth Legend born with the Psi-ter's gift. Twenty years later Alana and her twin sister Maggie were the most recent to the family line.

It was the divination passed down with the First Legend, which determined a great battle involving the Psi-ter's Legends. Within the Legend Codex, two Legends would battle a greater evil.

At that precise moment, when the confirmation of her uncle as the Viscount came clear, it all made sense. No wonder, no other Psi-ter's, Legend or other family hunters, sensed him as a threat or in the vicinity. No wonder none of her talents alerted a vampire when her uncle came near. The vampire was a Legend. The evil, in the form of one of their very own, was able to go unnoticed and set the prediction put in place by Isabella Legend into motion. The battle of greater evil she foresaw involved more painful and intricate circumstances than she ever stated. It was family against each other.

### Legend against Legend

They had all been blinded to the truth. Her mother may have never known until it was too late. Images flashed through her mind the last time she saw her parents. Making her usual late afternoon phone call to her parents, she received no dial tone at their house. Though her sister had always joked her parents were trying for more siblings, something didn't sit well in her stomach. Her parents weren't people to not answer the phone. She followed her hunch and instinct and drove down to their house. The exterior of the house seemed normal. When she entered the house, the sight before her was etched in her mind forever. The entire house was ransacked and destroyed. As she walked through, she entered their bedroom and both their bodies lay cold and unmoving on their bed, their throats punctured. She turned and ran out of the house as fast as she could and contacted help.

The death didn't end with her parents but spanned to her aunts, uncles and various cousins and in total ten members of her family were murdered. Weeks later, Alana came upon her parents' house in the middle of being burglarized. The men bearing marks that corresponding to the Viscount searched through the house extensively for an old relic. It was their discussions that had set the wheels of thought into motion. But most prominently it was their dialogue as to the specific location of the book that had set every cell in her being to re-examine other antique tomes, and relics from the family. That distinct conversation made her take a second look into the

murders of her family. It wasn't someone on the outside that killed part of the Legend family, it was someone from within.

She now understood the evil Isabella Legend had predicted centuries ago. It was one meant to rip their entire family apart.

Drew and Alana walked behind her Uncle and his entourage as they made their way to the back of the club. Drew rested his hand on the small of her back as she thought of ways to get them out of there as fast as possible. It didn't matter though; they were watched closely by vampires and deadly beings alike, as they cluttered the hallways. The evil beings smiled wickedly in complete hunger.

As they loaded an elevator and leisurely descended to the bottom, Alana linked her hands with Drew. She was worried; they were too far away from any possible sign of rescue. Drew had never called Maggie back to let her know he was on his way back. For all Maggie knew, he was still out looking for her. If things didn't go to right they would be easily written off. She should have listened to Drew and gotten back up.

When the elevator opened, gentle lights set a quiet overcast in the room as oppose to the harsh techno lights from the above floor. Soft warm hues adorned every possible wall and corner. Each color, burgundy, maroon, soft lilacs, various mixtures of these purples welcomed their presence.

"I believe one should always conduct business in style. Do you not think so, Alana?"

Alana nodded and kept her eyes fixed on any area that could have cameras. "Yes, it's quite beautiful down here, nothing like above."

"Yes well, it is only a club." He smiled.

Her uncle opened a pair of double doors, where behind it laid a marble conference table and various satellite link-ups for conferencing. Four plasma televisions covered every wall. On the far right, two plasma TV's showed her profile and Drew's in plain sight.

"Where's the book, Uncle Eric?" She tried to step forward but Drew held her back. The men surrounding them fidgeted over the quick movement.

"Looking for that stupid book are you, little one?" He smiled, and Alana distinctly noticed his bottom teeth and lip carried remnants of blood.

"Yes. This is what this is all about, isn't it? You wanted it for some power trip, so now that you got it, I want it back. Where's the book?" She said with more force. Rage fueled her blood as images of her dead parents filtered through her mind.

"I don't know. You're one of the infamous Psi-ters. Shouldn't you know?" He mocked as he walked around her and Drew.

As she tried to think of a way out, she remembered her parent's teachings about the Legend Codex. She recalled curious nights reading from a book as her father showed her different symbols and signs of her past. Was that the book her uncle spoke of? It didn't seem to have anything that indicated it needed a tune to open it. All her information about the Legend Codex only pointed that Isabella Legend devised the book's energy to be more powerful than any relic containing narration. From different sources she had read the

Codex contained a locked chapter. The unknown chapter held spells, incantations, enchantments for the absorption of power from the six previous Psi-ters. The spells themselves were tunes. They needed a performed melody to work. She always thought it was strange that a tune could unlock a book's energy but it made sense. The tunes, spells, her gifts, all were a type of energy. Not all six previous Legends had been killed and therefore all their strength had transferred to another form of energy. Though her uncle may have sensed it, there were still a couple Psi-ters left.

If she didn't know what the melody and tune was, but she knew someone who did. Maggie.

Alana chuckled amused, and moved past her uncle. "You don't have it do you? That's why you agreed to see me."

Her uncle grabbed her neck and lifted her off the floor. Drew rushed to stop him but was held back by a couple men as she stared down at both men. "How do you know I don't already have it? I could be just allowing this for a sense of fun."

She gasped for breath standing on the edge of her tiptoes. If she fought her Uncle, it would be a battle lost. Matched not only with her strength, but the added power of a vampire, he could break her neck just to appease his boredom. But she wasn't one to lie peacefully and passive. "That's not like you, Eric." She gasped and tried to loosen the hands. "You would have killed me already."

He squeezed tighter. "Drew, why haven't I killed her already? Would you explain it to my lovely niece?"

Alana shifted her eyes as much as she could towards Drew. "What does Drew have to do with this?" She struggled

"Drew, I think you should tell Alana what you have to do with this. I'm sure she is wondering why you are back after being away for so long."

"Eric, don't do this to her." Drew threatened as he tried to get close.

"Everybody but Alana knows Drew. Wait. You haven't told her have you?" He laughed cruelly and pulled Alana near. "Oh this is precious!"

Alana shifted her eyes back and forth between her uncle and Drew. She writhed for breath while her uncle nodded his order and the bodyguards pushed Drew closer to Alana. "Tell her, Drew, tell her where the book is?"

"No Eric." Drew fought. "Don't do this to her, she isn't ready to know."

"What are you talking about? Are you—"She widened her eyes and she struggled more against her uncle's hand, and tried to break free. "You're in on this aren't you, Drew? Oh my god, you're in on this?"

"No, I'm not!"

Her uncle laughed again maliciously. "Oh no my dear, he isn't, I assure you. If anything, he's the one that's going to unlock the book."

"What?" Confused, Alana felt the hands around her neck loosen as she was pushed into Drew while her uncle cackled for some unknown reason at her inability to comprehend.

She looked up into Drew's eyes, she searched for some answer. "Drew?"

Legends of Love  
*by Luna Carrol*

\* \* \* \*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Chapter Five**

Before Drew answered, the alarms and sirens went off above and an explosion rocked the foundation over their heads. Drew tapped her arm, gave the signal that the noise was backup. Laying flat on the floor, the light overhead turned green. At the far end towards the elevators, the doors slid open.

"Get down!" she yelled to those who came through.

Without doubting her word, the muscle-bound men dressed in black fatigues that entered dropped to the ground. Seconds later, a few shots were fired and hit the wall behind them.

Alana, aware of the surroundings, kept crouched low and tried to find her uncle through the commotion that broke out between the body guards and the men who just entered. She scanned the room quick and noted the several hand to hand fights in motion. There was still no sign of the man she wanted. Commotion behind her caught her attention when she turned her head, and witnessed Drew dodge punches in self defense.

On the ground for a short time, she stood and made her way to the closest exit. Blocked from continuing by a club bodyguard, she assumed a fighting stance. The man attacked before she realized, but she moved out of the way in time, grabbed the man's arm, then twisted it behind his back, and shoved her knee into the man's side. The club guard dropped to the ground, gasping for air.

Alana didn't waste time, and headed in a different direction. Jumping over the body in her path, she caught sight of her uncle. Before she could go after him, pain shot down her spine as something hard struck her back. A scream escaped her lips. The intense pain shot down her legs and made her drop to her knees. She tried to get up, but was hit again. Another scream escaped her lips. Turning her head Alana managed to move before the third punch landed. She rolled out of the way and kicked her opponent in the stomach.

Struggling to stand, Alana gathered her inner strength and assumed her fighting stance again. Her opponent threw the first swing but missed. Alana grabbed his arm, twisted it and used her elbow to break the man's arm. As he fell, Alana delivered the final punch to her opponent's back.

Not paying attention, Alana fell back as she was punched across the face by a club body guard. Reacting she turned and delivered a hard roundhouse into the man's face. The man jumped back up and flipped her over on to her back. Alana stood against the tall, muscular man. With a smooth and sudden move, she kicked the man in his stomach and put a strangle-hold on him.

The man grabbed her and tossed her into a set of tables and chairs. Despite the pain shooting through her body, Alana got back up. She summoned more strength as the man attacked again. Deflecting his blows, she used all her energy and delivered another round-house kick and heard the sound of his neck breaking the minute he landed on the floor. Alana dropped to her knees holding her side, struggling for air.

The room was empty with Drew nowhere in sight. She tried to stand again, but lost her footing. Alana touched her nose and lip and wiped the blood on her outfit. She found her gun and it as she struggled to stand. Once balanced, she made her way to the exit. The pulsing lights of the upper level greeted her as the elevator opened and she moved forward. Drew leaned against a wall talking to two different men while others people who'd helped in their rescue, moved bodies out of the way.

Alana stumbled but Drew moved away from the two men he'd been talking to and quickly caught her before she fell to the ground again. They moved slowly towards the door and pushed past the double doors leading out of the club, to the vehicle waiting for them outside. Settled comfortably in the back seat, Alana leaned her head back and closed her eyes as the car drove off and Drew spoke to the men in the front seat. She recognized them as Drew's long time friends Kyle and Jared, and as the ones he'd talked to minutes ago. Alana took shallow breaths trying not to focus on the pain.

"You okay?"

Alana opened her eyes to the sound of Drew's voice and nodded her concurrence. "I'll be fine. I was just thrown against too much stuff for my own good," she said as she tried to check her side. "Drew, the next time I see you watching me, I'll shoot you head on."

"You saw me?"

"Do you see stupid written on my face, Drew?" She gave him the 'what-do-you-think glare as she dabbed the blood from her lip and checked the amount.

"Can I recommend something in regards to Alana?" Kyle chimed in as he kept driving.

"What?" Drew replied.

"Recognize that she maybe smaller than you, but she can be just as deadly as any of us."

"No kidding." Drew consented and turned to Alana. "But you didn't think any of this through and could have gotten yourself killed."

Alana rolled her eyes and looked at the window for a moment. "Whatever, Drew, I can take care of myself."

"So much so you got your ass kicked."

Before he could defend himself, Alana swung at him and landed a punch across on his jaw. "The enemy isn't the only one that can kick *your* ass, Andrew."

"Fuck!" Drew leaned forward and held his jaw while spitting up blood on the floor of the backseat.

"So I take it that's she knows she the infamous Codex now?" Jared chuckled.

"No, I was going to tell her until you just did, genius," Drew replied.

"Wait. What?" Alana leaned forward confused. "What did you just say?" She looked at Jared and back at Drew trying to understand. "What did Jared just say?"

The vehicle stopped. Alana looked to their location and sighed as she saw her sister in a van across the street. Drew held up his hand to wait a moment as he continued spitting up the blood in his mouth. "Maggie is across the street waiting for you. We're sending her to a safe house for the

time being, I'll explain everything as soon as we get back your place."

"I want to know everything Drew, no more bullshit."

Drew glared as he kept the pressure on his face. "No more bullshit."

Alana pushed the door open and slammed it shut, anger laced with confusion. Taking her time, she leaned her body against the car. She just needed a few minutes to rest before she walked over to Maggie and got an earful.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Chapter Six**

After Alana had spoken with Maggie and insured her being placed in protective custody would be best, she returned to her house with Drew. Drew tended to her wounds while she rested, but that didn't stop her from asking what Jared had meant earlier in the car. At first Drew wasn't forthcoming, but relented after some time.

Alana listened closely as Drew explained that from childhood, her parents had converted her mind as well as Maggie's into a safe-keeping ground for the Codex pages. Alana's mother, Nina, learned of her brother's hidden nature as a vampire and in a frantic act to prevent the Legend Codex from being stolen, used her gifts as a Psi-ter's' Legend to transform the words of the book into energy. The ancient method converted words into pieces of music. Thirteen generations of spells and enchantments were locked away with only a few people knowing how to extricate the information. Her mother had devised the ancient spell so half of the Legend Codex containing invocations and spells in Alana's mind, while Maggie had ceremony and enchantments in her mind.

Drew stated his father caught wind of the situation after a run-in with Eric in Spain. At a yearly council meeting between the families in the Shadow Hunting community, his father ran late for some unknown reason. Opposing to stay in his hotel room, he was adamant to attend the meeting. Arriving late, and locked out of the meeting room, he chose another door to

enter. Through the back entrance of the room, he encountered Alana's uncle, Eric arguing with Nina.

Nina yelled the Codex had been safely hidden and she knew the truth about her brother. Eric waved off the accusation but wanted to know where the book had been taken. The back and forth arguing continued for some time until Nina walked off affirming Eric would never find the book again. She ran into Drew's father as he pretended to appear at that moment, grateful to find Nina and Eric. He used the excuse he didn't know where to enter for the meeting to cover his ease dropping. Though Drew's father waited after the meeting to talk with Nina, she beat him to the punch and explained the entire situation. Weeks later, Drew received a package by specialized courier. The package he received was the actual book with instructions to keep it safe. Two weeks soon after, Alana's mother and father had died and three weeks following their deaths, six members of the Beckett family were murdered, his father included.

Lying on her sofa resting, Alana stared at the wall while Drew explained the note he received from her mother about the book, why it was important and why Eric should never get it. Also in the letter were detailed instructions as to the methods of extricating the words out of Alana and Maggie without causing them harm.

Alana blinked several times in succession. She was officially in the Twilight Zone. Long into the retelling, she had taken to pacing in her living room.

"Did you hear me, Alana? You and Maggie are the book. You are the one that holds all the power that the Viscount wants."

"What? I —huh?" She shook her head and continued to pace.

"You are the book, Alana," Drew said again. "The music is meant to unlock the secrets you contain in your mind. That's why you always told me you knew stuff that was beyond your own understanding. Don't you think it is weird that you knew all this stuff your parents needed to know, but to this day you have no idea what you said? You have no idea what it was about? The music is one you've known as a child, just parts of that tune were changed. Because it was changed, you are able to say different things, know different information. Yes, the piece of music is part of the key. The second part of the key is how it can be unlocked completely. You are the book. You've had the knowledge in your mind since we first met. Hell I've even shown you I can manipulate energy into producing music. If that is possible, why isn't this?" He stared at her resolutely.

"But Maggie...?"

"Maggie hasn't ever known about this because she doesn't use her gifts. Secondly, Maggie wasn't trained as a normal Psi-ter. You have always told me that your parents raised you as the Psi-ter and Maggie in a completely different way. Maybe they were doing that as a sort of diversion. Keep them focused on you, while Maggie is hidden in the shadows. Maybe this whole prophecy thing was about you and Maggie being forced to battle each other." He stated.

"Do you know how stupid you sound Maggie and I fight each other? Ridiculous." She stopped and shook her head. "You are saying my ancestors made a prophecy about a child being the one that contains and knows millennia of secrets. A *child*! Not a child, but twin children. And besides, Maggie and I aren't children anymore, Drew. Look at me I'm an adult!"

"Alana, I know part of the music. I'll prove it to you and show you how it works." He extended one hand, using his other hand to unbutton his shirt.

"Shit, Andrew, if you just wanted to get laid you could have said so," she countered sarcastically, but walked farther away from him.

"This is how it works, Alana."

"It doesn't *work* that way, Drew."

"Yes, it does." He locked his jaw and fixed his stare. "Once you hear the tune, you'll see things from the past, from the future. Go with it. Trust me."

"What the hell are you talking about?" She threw her hands in the air. "You know what, forget this whole prophecy thing and get out of my place, Drew."

"No."

"Fine, then I'm leaving." She turned on her heel in the opposite direction, walked into her room and slammed the door.

*Sleep with me and you'll know the truth? What a crock of shit*, she thought as she kicked off her boots and unzipped part of her suit. It should have been easy to deny him. She deprived herself of countless things in her life. Drew...Drew was a force to be reckoned with. He couldn't be the key. And

what was this crap about sleeping with him. She snorted as she threw a book across her room. So what if she heard music every time he was around. It was called attraction, human instinct. Of course, you hear the 'proverbial music'. That was the side effect of living in a land where Hollywood romanticized everything.

Okay yes, she felt a pull; yet, what did that have to do with anything? She hated how, over the time, they had known each other, he grew on her. She shouldn't have become accustomed to his presence in that time, though she did. Yes, those years together with him were unbelievable, but it was over. Heat is easily fanned as a man's passion. Nevertheless, every single time they crossed paths, or they had to be paired together due to the excellence in their skills, the pull was there, the magnetism. Sure, making his life difficult did have its perks, but it didn't help when the one benefit she wanted, was the same bonus she needed out of her mind.

Alana turned up the volume to the radio and let the beat flood the room. The tension, frustration, and treachery needed to find a way out of her body. The night had too much damn intensity. Under the rhythm, music thundered hard and deep; it spoke to her and soothed her. The bass pound into her frame as it gave gentle reassurance, as subtle and tender as a hug, but as strong and powerful as someone she longed for. Mildly swaying to the beat of the music, Alana shut everything out of her mind. Drew's words sank in deeper.

Was she the Legend Codex? Did she hold in her mind the actual book? All this time Alana thought she searched for a

real tome. According to Drew, he held the key to unlock it all, in a piece of music. That Alana needed Drew not only to unlock her mind but also to defeat her uncle was hard to accept.

Alana couldn't tell when she got the shiver, but it singed her skin. Prickles of sensitivity came to life as the sensation started at the base of her neck and then traveled down her spine, tightened her nipples to hard points, then down to her stomach and coiled in her belly as it released an unknown type of heat.

Alana stood her ground and gazed at Drew. She wasn't going to make it easy for him, but dammit, she desired him. She needed him to acknowledge the same; she sought after him to confess things that couldn't exist between them.

Waiting for Drew to acknowledge her presence, he merely watched her. Frustrated, Alana rolled her eyes and turned around. She continued letting her thoughts drift as she dropped her head and took a deep breath. The music pounded hard against her frame and soothed her mind. *Bastard wants to stand there staring, by all means he can stare.*

Drew grabbed her arm and turned her around, staring down at her. Alana glared back "Damnit, Alana, do you honestly think I don't know the history we have? Don't you think this isn't difficult for me too?"

"Leave me alone, Drew. I don't know who to believe anymore, who to trust anymore."

"You can trust me."

"Ha! Good one." She pulled her arm out of his grasp.

She felt like a woman that hadn't experienced much passion. Sure, she had a couple boyfriends, but none that made her want to curl her toes into satisfied. No man ever measured to that criterion—her standard, Drew Beckett.

Yet, with more passion than she had known in her life, he suddenly pulled her into his arms and kissed her. A deep, slow pull meant to take her soul and steal her heart. A kiss that took from her deep inside and was intended to unbalance her.

Alana felt his hands frame her face and draw her close to oblivion. *He's going to burn me alive.* To her, he savored, lingered, and relished her lips. Heat burst in her veins and poured through her skin. Her muscles tightened, clenched and released against something imaginary under her skin. Something she could easily imagine filled her with languid pleasure. Excitement flared through her pores as the sound, rational mind used to dismantle supernatural beings, turned off. How could he make such a thing as a kiss so sensual? How could he make a kiss so dark and tempting?

Drew took the tasting a step further as he molded and re-learned the fullness her lips.

The man took his time as she felt the unhurried slide of his tongue in her mouth. So smooth, so sweet and decadent. The way he sampled was how she wanted him to drink her between her thighs. His tongue moved her bit-by-bit to the unknown rhythm and ancient beat her mind locked away; yet a beat he knew so well.

Drew pulled away an instant before her resolve collapsed. The stormy green eyes, now dark emerald, gazed for answers in her dark brown eyes. "You can trust me, believe in me."

There was more there than she wanted to admit, wanted to hope in. "Drew, I-"

"Don't, Alana, just this once, don't say it. Come with me instead." He linked his fingers with hers, his thumb massaging the point where her pulse raced.

Nodding her head in acceptance, she followed him to the bed.

Here she was, Alana Legend with Drew Beckett. With the man she'd always wanted, but truly denied herself. As they moved to her bed without hurry, he didn't say a word as he laid her down and continued kissing her. She knew if he did, she would have changed her mind right away. As they lay kissing, holding on to each other, they threw excessive clothes everywhere. Drew wrapped her legs around his waist. She could feel the taut muscles so close to the heat that simmered inside. He held on to her ass and to add more tension, rubbed his erection against her. *It had definitely been a long time*, Alana thought, and groaned.

Seconds after he pressed against her, she forgot the comments that ran through her mind. She only felt sensations and the torturous ache when his hands slid up her thigh and teased her center as he outlined the lips with his finger. Heat rushed to her chest when he nibbled on her earlobe and whispered that he couldn't wait to taste her. Was she alive? Did she happen to bump her head and this was just a dream? She sighed and looked up as she watched his muscles

contract and relax as he rose above her. His strong chest filled her view while her hands touched his heated skin.

Perfect. He was absolute perfection, right down to the trail that promised pleasure. Every muscle bunched and stretched as he kept his eyes on her. He smiled and it felt more than one woman could take. Drew's smile was a personal guarantee of unconditional money back certification that she would be ridden hard. As he moved above her and teased her with his body, she gazed at him in entirety. Alana had most certainly forgotten certain delectable features about this moment. Slight pre-cum was dripped from the tip of his manhood as he rained more kisses to her body. She lost herself to him and yearned for when he slid himself into her. With that thought, she frowned at the precise meaning of what she would be after tonight.

"What is it?" He asked, tensed naked above her; every part of his body shook with small tremors.

"Its just to get my mind to open isn't it?" Fear settled deep within her mind.

He was quiet for just a moment, but she noticed the tick in his jaw. "No. I don't do this for duty, Alana."

She focused on his face. "So, I'm a trend-setter, but what happens after this? We go back to our sarcastic banter?"

The tick became more pronounced. "Is that all you think there is? If you do, then being in love with you is going to be a tougher job than I thought."

Alana's eyes widened and cried out at the same time he thrust into her body. "Oh my god...Drew." Taken by the wave of heat, Alana moaned in ecstasy.

"I've waited...too damn long...to tell you... and I'm not going to let...these past years...fuck it up now." He punctuated each phrase with movements of his hips against hers.

Still stunned but flushed with desire, Alana opened her arms and kissed him with all the ardor she kept locked deep inside. Unleashed, she groaned when his hands grasped her breasts. "Drew!"

"I've wanted to do this for a while now."

Insane with lust, she noted he looked at her body as if he had just received a million dollar prize. Alana felt he couldn't contain himself as he kissed his way down her body. Hot, lazy, sensuous kisses followed by the swirl of his tongue to cool the skin. She gasped with every sensation. Alana closed her eyes, couldn't believe how now, of all the times, something wondrous could happen when other things were at their worst. Lost in thought, she felt Drew slipped his fingers into her wet folds.

"Oh, god!!" she cried.

"Wherever you were before this moment, I want you here with me now." He growled.

She looked down her body, the sight more than she imagined. Drew's tousled dark black hair enticing across his face, his deep green eyes shone with restrained hunger. His strong shoulders flexed and relaxed as he moved bit by bit and he settled himself between her thighs. Her heart slammed into her chest as his smile lowered towards the junction of her body. She wasn't dreaming. This was very real.

Excitement singed her nerves as she looked at Drew hover before her entrance. He smacked his lips a couple times, and licked the skin at the junction of her hips. She needed him to taste her, looked for him to brand her distinct flavor into his taste buds. Moving her body closer, she opened her legs wider, so he could have his fill. She wanted him to taste what his ministrations did to her body and savor the perfection of her boiling, feverish senses as her desires dripped down his palette.

His fingers touched the slippery entrance to her heated core. Spreading her legs a bit wider, she watched as he responded to the rich, heady scent of her aroused body. His strong muscles corded tighter and signaled the battle waging within him. What his body demanded, she did not know, but possession lay etched in his face

He lowered his head, and little by little, time stood still. His features focused and concentration solely on her swollen inner lips. He closed his eyes in reverence and then laved a long, lingering, and torturous path from her entrance to clitoris. She bucked off the bed in a strangled cry. The grunt of male satisfaction, arrogant and pure, punctuated the silence in the room along with her cry as he repeated the move again

*Oh my God!* Alana focused on Drew as his mouth explored her hot depths. *The man would burn her alive with his hot touches.* She couldn't think past the way his tongue tormented her body. Long, sensuous licks followed by short swirls of his tongue, and then teasing, spiraling flicks meant to undo her. She opened her legs as far as possible, heard her juices flow as he hungrily devoured her with his mouth.

How a man could be so gluttonous on a woman's body? The way he licked her! The motion caused by the sucking of his mouth on her, drove her wild; she couldn't keep her hips still. Alana arched her back and tossed her head from side-to-side as Drew continued feasting on her. She tried to buck her hips, but suddenly couldn't move her lower torso. He'd pinned her down on the bed for his taking. The sensations he caused within her became almost unbearable.

He feasted, slurped, and devoured every part of her body. His hands squeezed, caressed and pulled her nipples as he pushed her closer towards climax. He kept tracing every line of her inner thighs, as he gorged on what she offered. She couldn't believe her own body had so many lines, so many curves. Alana felt every movement his tongue made as it followed gentle slopes and planes and tongued further inside. She didn't know how he got his lips to do and give the same procedure of attention to her clit. Soft suckling followed by rapid flicks pushed her further into agony, into bliss, into—my god the man had a registered weapon!

"Drew!" she cried, clutching the bed sheet as her body remained spread and opened as he took everything. "Dear god, Drew!"

There was that wicked, dark laugh which always irritated as it rumbled from between her legs and increased the pressure of the pleasure, which coursed through her. She looked down in a dazed lust as his smile of satisfaction sent skips of pleasure to her heart. She trembled when he licked his shiny lips and dove down again before she could catch her

breath. With a rendering cry, she held on to the bed sheets with all the strength she could muster.

He attacked her with single-minded obsession; with so much drive she couldn't take a breath. Weak beyond what she imagined, her legs were pushed wider and he continued on his mission. Spread open for his eyes and mouth, she pleaded for him to take her, to feel him inside her. Drew didn't relent though and kept tasting. Beads of sweat rolled down her temple and she felt like a soft peach in the middle of summer, split open as her juices flowed.

Pushed past three climaxes, mercy was the only thing she begged; and, for peace, for a moment respite. How could a man want so much? The more he feasted, the more her body burned. He pulled away abruptly and poised himself above her trembling form. She couldn't think, she needed him to take her, possess her, and make her his own. Alana knew he would brand his mark into her skin, into her body. Drew had already marked her soul with his being and now she knew he did so with his scent and taste. As he lowered his body over her, Drew splayed soft kisses to her neck, rocked his hips against her, and further teased her. She noticed the small tremor in his shoulders. How could such a strong man tremble?

"I want you, Alana," he said, and slid himself back into her wetness.

Hissing in pleasure, she opened her eyes and looked into his dark green eyes filled with heat. She wanted him too, with more than he could imagine. Nodding her approval, she leaned in for another searing kiss. His hands kneaded her

breasts as the kiss took her another step closer to oblivion. She felt him pump deeper inside her, as he teased her with light strokes of his body against hers. Drew changed the rhythm, thrusting harder and pushing her past oblivion. It had been some time since they had been together and she didn't imagined it would she could feel this fantastic again. He groaned and growled in complete satisfaction, but still moved above her.

"You feel so damn good, Alana."

She answered him with a soft plaintive mewl as Drew slid deep into her body and drove her mad once again. Gazing up at the man over her, she heard a soft tune playing her mind.

"Alana?"

Soft melodies played in her thoughts as she blinked her eyes several times. Drew was out of focus for brief moments while glimpses of time flashed before her eyes. She blinked rapidly blinked again and she stared into the shocked eyes above her. "Please, Drew, I don't want to explain. I want you."

"You hear the tune, don't you?"

"Yes," she replied in a whisper, which changed to a groan.

She stared up at him with deep concern, and hoped he wouldn't stop what he was doing. Hoped the one part she wanted him to have wouldn't be rejected. He answered with another loving kiss meant to ease any fears she had hidden and pushed harder and stronger within her. She held on to his strong body and let out the rendering cry as Drew filled her again and again.

For one moment in stasis, Alana held past memories of their time together and many others from different periods as they held onto each other. Their personal relationship, their work, and the memories she possessed of him. She looked up as Drew glanced down at her. His eyes were slit in ecstasy. Again, he moved hard and deep into her. Alana was crazed with want of him. She wrapped her arms strong and firm around him, feeling like she couldn't get enough of his loving. She trembled and surrendered, further aroused and wet with need, yielding to his passions while he pumped in and out. He was her first true lover to take possession of her entire being. Alana cried out with each punctuated thrust into her body. To her, he felt confident and strong as he mastered her heart and soul.

This was exactly what she wanted, what she needed. He took her without mercy, and hooked her legs over his arms for deeper penetration. Each plunge was marked with her pleaded cry of ecstasy. She loved his grunts and moans of pleasure as she held on to him with bare threads of sanity. Her eyes focused on his as he moved over her. Needing more, she looked down and watched him surge into her over and over again. Soft sounds of her name from his lips shredded her hold on reality. His body offered the comfort she needed after so many years of trying to stay away from him. With each plunge, her body coiled in preparation for the next impending climax.

Alana bowed her body as the sweet release washed over her entire system. Caught in the rapture and euphoria of their lovemaking strength, off in the distance she heard his

guttural moan of release. The slam of his hips jerked with power and force. She tightened her legs around his waist.

Without warning, thinking the moment had passed; Drew moved down and feasted on their combined essences. The sight of him along with his skillful techniques of her body propelled her deep into another orgasm.

At the brink of unconsciousness and breathless, she felt the warmth of Drew's breath resting on the curve of her neck. She must have been out of her mind, because she wanted him again, but didn't want to push her body beyond what it had already thoroughly experienced. Their heady sexual scent clung to their skins and overpowered the air in the room, as she listened to both their heartbeats. This was how it should have been from the beginning, but things were too complex before to do anything.

"Are you still alive?" He chuckled with amusement.

"Shhh...I'm trying to breathe. I think I almost have the whole process of inhaling and exhaling down perfectly."

"Let me know when you have it down."

"Sure thing, give me a day or two." She chuckled.

The night held their soft laughter as they regained their composure. "Alana, what did you see?"

She didn't want to say it. She didn't want to ruin the spell that had worked its way between them, but his silence relented. "I saw off in the distance, the history of my family. My parents teaching me things that none of the other kids knew."

"You know we can't defeat your Uncle without help." He kissed her shoulder.

"I know. We have to tell Maggie, it's no longer feasible to keep her hidden." Alana stated quietly

"She's out of harm's way at the safe-house Alana." Drew replied as he made lazy circles in her shoulder.

Alana rolled to her side and kissed his lips trying to get him to understand. "I think you were right, Drew. The two Legends fighting against each other will be me and Maggie. I thought it was him since he was the bad guy. It was never that. He's going to have us fight each other, somehow, someway. Make sure one of us is only standing and then take what he wants out of the victor's blood."

"But why Maggie though? Okay yes, she has half the book in her mind too but...how did your parents train her. She isn't a Psi-ter, she's something else"

The truth was too much to bear. "Maggie probably doesn't even know what Mom and Dad did. Eric wants the spells, the power. He's going to do what it takes to get that power. Especially if you say what is in my head and in Maggie's head and give him the gifts of all the Psi-ter Legends. He wants it and he doesn't care. Even if it means Maggie or I have to die in order to get the secret from the other, he wants it...look at what he did to his own twin." She felt the tears knot in her throat as she tried to keep her composure. She wasn't losing Maggie.

The phone rang and as she picked it up, a wave of dread overcame her.

"Hello?"

"Lana?" The voice trembled as the woman called out her nickname.

"Maggie? Sweetie, what's wrong?"

Before she received her answer, another familiar voice replied. "You know, you must train these men guarding your sister to be better at their protective detail. I'm afraid they lack in their training. Hello my lovely, Alana. I must admit you and Maggie share quite an appealing strain of blood. I never realize how very rare my two little nieces were. You are both very extraordinary women indeed."

"Eric, don't do this to her!" She screamed into the mouthpiece as she sat up.

"Well now, I guess that is up to you. Who my dearest, Alana, will give me a happy ending to the tale Isabella stated centuries ago? Will it be sweet, innocent Maggie who doesn't know the truth of her genetics, or you, Alana, the infamous Seventh Legend? You have twenty four hours Meet me at your parents' home."

The flat line answered all her questions as to what she had to do, as she held the receiver in her hand, feeling completely numb at Eric's words.

"Alana?" Drew said as he got closer.

A veil of rage descended up on her when she replaced the phone on the receiver. "He's got Maggie. The damn bastard's got Maggie." She pushed her self out of bed and walked into the bathroom to shower. As she heard Drew jump from the bed and follow her, she knew she and Drew would find Maggie and make Eric pay. He would pay for the lives he took from her. One did not mess with the Seventh Legend, and live to tell about it.

\* \* \* \*

The End, for now...

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Silver Linings**

**by**

**Mae Powers**

In Silvera, Kaden and Xera are use to cultural taboos amongst the Wysp fairies. Will they dare to shrug off strictures and follow their hearts?

\* \* \* \*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Silver Linings**

**by**

**Mae Powers**

\* \* \* \*

Xera felt the leaves of the diamente brush against her one-half bared shoulder. It was like a sharp touch, albeit how slight it scrapped her. She jerked from the tiny sting and stood back to look at the shiny, white stalked flower setting in a ruby vase. Its teardrop shaped stems and flowers glistened at her, almost angrily. With her nature attunement, she knew the richly coveted gem flowers were sensitive to Fae or human touch. She was blessed and cursed with both.

The diamente was just another reminder that she worked for the upper class of Silveran Wysps, instead of being one of their classed ilk. For all the lush beauty of the gem-tree rainforest country she lived within, she still would not have it otherwise. Her life had been good, being born to a traveling human and her half Wysp-Fae mother. They had settled in the housing branches of Silvera's lower-middle class district subdivision of Grove-tree, and had made a decent and comfortable living. When the great quake had devastated part of Silvera, her parents had been swallowed up in the giant jaws of a crack in the earth, along with half the residents of Grove-tree. She had been away at school at the time in the sister Wysp city of Torch.

Ten years and she still had set backs with her loss. She'd finished those last few months at the Fae-wizard academy,

but had immediately come back the day after graduation, when she'd finally been told that her parents had died in that awful quake.

The city of Silvera had been reconstructed and rebuilt at a fast rate over the years, and even now, she could still see inklings from the loss. The quakes were rare, and not always so devastating, but any Fae or non-Fae seer had not foretold the large one.

The diamante whispered a sway of motion as the breeze from the open shutters filtered through. She immediately went to the large bay window and slid the rare translucent glass shut, so the diamante would not get a chill upon its delicate features, which might cause one of its fragile petals to drop. She did not want her lofty customer to charge her with the cost of its breakage.

Sighing, she glanced around the large sitting and entertainment room. No one was around and the owners of the lush tree house condo would not be back for a few hours. She made a little movement with her hand, ever slightly, and a tiny whirl of glittering magic swirled into the room and went merrily twirling around the tree house of her rich clients. In a few minutes, it came back towards her. She held out her hand and the empath magic twirl-hopped happily into her hand. She touched it softly with her other index finger and it dwindled down to a soft purring circle in her hand before it completely disappeared.

"One must always thank magic for its help." Her mother use to tell her, "No matter how small it's helpful to you." Xera couldn't help but agree. Her father may have been human,

but he also was an empathic nature being. She had been bequeathed the best of both their talents and would always be thankful for them.

Once more she glanced around the large room to make sure everything glistened and was cleaned properly. The room beamed happily at her. Even though the rich owners had wanted the human cleaning touch, she'd learned early on that homes sometimes reflected their owners and both human and magic cleaning were needed to make the house itself feel pampered and cleaned.

She walked to the front door, and it slid open waiting for her to leave. She knew it would self-lock after she left. With a shrug, she went from the spacious tree condo and out onto the wide deck. Very wide for the condo even. She had only seen one more opulently spacious than this one and that belonged to the fourth princeling Fae of Silvera. The place she was headed next. Like the owners of this condo, he was out for the day. It had said so on his magic itinerary, when his private wizard secretary had contacted her the other day to come and clean the tree-mansion while the princeling was away. He liked his privacy and didn't have many servants.

She made her way down several tiers of swinging wooden walkways, not coming across too many people, thankfully. She then turned down another walkway that led upwards. This airy, wood-vine bridge was wider than the ones that connected through the lofty tree homes, making it a more used thoroughfare. Fae and other magic and non-magic beings passed her here and there as she walked upwards. She knew she could have used her hidden wings, but up in

the long-branches it was considered best to walk the canopied byways. Not only that, it was trendy and an unwritten rule to do so here in the upper class sections of the wide faring city-tree world.

She went up a narrow, but long side-swinging path, and finally saw the wooden icon that marked the private home of the fourth princeling. It interspersed several floors up into the wooden oakwish tree. The tree's larger branches closed over the threshold for a few moments and she felt unseen guardian eyes upon her. She flashed the work emblem from her necklace and waved it across the wooden and bejeweled property icon that was near the double glass and wood doors. The tree branches glimmered for a few moments, while its magicom mind filtered her identity and her reason for being here. It moved its branches out of the way. The doors glimmered, too, for a few seconds and then gently creaked open to allow her to enter.

Once inside the large foyer, the doors closed and locked behind her. She took a few steps into the foyer and looked around. It was a large open area, with doorways leading into different directions. Some stepping paths led upwards and some led into other rooms downward and upwards. It was a myriad of glittering and subdued decorative styles. It awaited her patiently and she moved towards the nearest stairs.

As she toured the upper floors, assessing what needed cleaning and what didn't, both by magic and non-magic means, she took in the simple yet stylish grandeur of the palatial condo. It was only the second time she had been here. The first, maybe a dozen years ago. Home from college

that summer, her parents showed her more of their cleaning business, catering to the elite. At the time, the fourth princeling's parents lived with him. He'd been away for the day, and Xera hadn't met him in person, though she'd seen com-news pics of him off and on over the last few years. As for the condo, nothing had not changed, only the house seemed quieter now than before.

She finally came to the largest bedroom. There she saw a huge circular bed with curtained windows behind it. The pale blue satin covers were rumpled, and she wondered if from a bad night's sleep or a wild party upon the bed. She sensed it had been the first. Holding out her hands, she let her empathy embrace the room. It was not something she felt comfortable doing often, because of the invasion to one's privacy. But briefly, she sensed that indeed the room felt sorrow and loneliness, despite its soft beauty of oak and blue and gold decor. She lowered her hands and went to the large curtained windows hanging high from the wooden ceiling. She took one and pulled it back.

She gasped at the beauty she saw from the soft blue tinted windows. The palatial bedroom overlooked a rare upstream that ran from the ground over a mile below. Up and down it meandered, twining through the trees. Then it streamed past the bedroom window before it went downwards in a zigzag, breathtaking flowing trail, towards the hill nearby, where it sloped over the hill and filtered out into the immense Wysple Lake just beyond the lush hillscape. She caught her breath as gamma fish with their iridescent beauty floated and swam merrily by on their journey to the lake. She

knew the stream started from the ocean of Trill beyond the borders of Wysp; yet this was the largest upriver on the tri continents of her world Kakth, which she'd learned in long hours of world history in college.

Birds of rare beauty, some she didn't know even the name of, flew by the windows. She pulled the curtain back further and hooked its taper onto the jewel hook at the frame of the sliding windows. She slowly opened the window slightly to let the soft breeze into the musty room. She then moved to the other large curtain and began to open it. Suddenly, she stopped and swirled around, feeling another presence within the room. Yet, when she looked to the open doorway, no one was there. She realized then, the aura or presence of the person would precede him or her, it being a powerful one.

No one was supposed to be here. She preferred cleaning when no one was around, that being quicker and easier for her, and most of the clients she cleaned for did not mind, since she was bonded and of long standing in the communities. Something made her stand behind the curtain, to one side. She was glad she did, for a soft, but heavy shadow entered the room. Then its owner followed.

The thick curtains barely hid her. She peered around one side to see a large being, half man, half beast, enter the room, but not from the bedroom door, from a side doorway she had not noticed. It was located behind the large mirror imbedded in a wall at the far end of the room. It was a Krakken-beastman. She stifled a gasp. Those beings were terrain dwellers. Why had one come up to the tallest part of the gem-tree forest?

She'd never met one before, but had seen pictures of them in her study books long ago. They lived in the lowest parts of the forests of Silvera. She'd only been down-earth a few times to find rare herbs she used for medicines and cleaners for her business and her side remedy shop she opened on weekends. What indeed was this large man-creature doing here in the princeling's bedroom? It was near seven feet tall, nearly towering over her by a foot. Its shaggy, layered hair glistened like a rare rock gem, unpolished but recently uncovered. His, its, shoulders were massive, but his body was muscular and although covered in a long tunic of forest green, she could tell how powerful his limbs were.

For the first time in a long while, she felt a stirring between her legs. She'd been with a human and had a few Elven lovers, but this was something more powerful, more pulsatingly striking than she'd ever felt before. It sniffed the air, and then spun around, looking directly at the curtains. It stood there almost frozen in surprise as she stepped out curiously from behind the curtain. Her own eyes widened and she could sense his sudden fear, as if being discovered at something he shouldn't have been doing. Or that he'd been found out about a dark secret he was hiding. Then before he could move, his body started shaking ferociously. He groaned and slumped to the floor.

Xera automatically moved nearer. The beast man lay in a heap, for a few mere seconds, then a twinkling swirl of stars and silver mist appeared around him. He began to change before her, into a full-blown man. Soon it dissipated leaving a naked, amber haired Adonis in its wake. She let out a small

gasp as she surveyed his well tanned and toned physique. His long hair lay half over his gaunt face, but it was an arresting face that she became drawn to. His legs moved in a groaning jerk and she bit her bottom lip as she saw what lay between his muscular thighs.

The man could fill her deeply with that thick shaft of his. She felt the moistness between her thighs thicken. Gawd he was devastating to look upon. Suddenly, he turned flat on his back, and the most incredibly arresting sapphire blue stared up at her. She recognized the face immediately. Staring up at her with a bewildered look in his misty eyes, lay Fourth Princeling of Silvera, Kaeden Tiraine. A royal born Fae, who had just morphed from a Krakken Man-Beast into the most handsome, sexiest male she'd ever beheld. And for the life of her own sanity and libido, she really was at a loss as to what to make of him and his incredible secret.

Kaden moved through the low-lying bushes with ease, brushing those away that got in his path. He loved it down here in the lower layers of the dense rainforest. The creatures were much quieter and friendlier at times, than some other beings. Moreover, his alter, morph persona fit better in with the deities and beings of the down-earth terrain. Even as a child he had liked sneaking down to the grassy and mysterious realm of the foremost bottom land layer of Silvera.

He had learned about his shifting ability and curse since his mid-teens. Yet, despite his conflicts about being of a changeling heritage, he had found a way to deal with it. Most of the time that is. His parents had never told him about the

morph lineage, he'd always thought of himself as a regular Fae Wysp. After all, he'd had the larger wings of royalty and the upper class. Yet, his Krakken beast persona had large wings too; though they changed to earthier colors than his blue and emerald ones, when he did become the man-beast.

Below the high rising canopies of the jem-trees and multi layers of the rain forest of Wysp, Kaden found peace in the lowest of the forests, where hardly any jem-trees and vegetation were found. However, the flora and fauna of such trees as oaken and maplaire and huge rosewoods were as magnificent as any above the main ground of the forest. Here he'd seen other life as well. Some Fae he'd seen above ground, but mostly Krakken, a myriad of beast, and woodlen folk, like wood nymphs.

Mainly one nymph in particular, he thought as he moved along a dense trail back towards his birth tree. A beautiful blonde haired sprite, whom he'd never seen up close, but had seen gathering herbs and rustic leaves to place in a knap sack. Yet, she was a tall lithe beauty, who's golden blonde tresses and whose quick movements often made him wonder if perhaps there was some Fae ancestry in the nymph. And the strangest thing of all, he'd seen her one time with large beautiful wings. And everyone knew wood nymphs didn't sport wings. In fact, large gauzy wings were mostly purported by royal birthed Fae.

All in all, though, it mystified him, he thought it no odder than if she had probably known about his particular hereditary affliction. Kaden saw the sun shine barely filtering through the trees, and knew it was time to get back to his

tree-home. He found his tree with ease. He stood looking at it for a moment, glad he had let the bushes grow high around the old oaken beauty. The door to the magic stairwell would be well hidden behind it. It was tall and beautiful, with many years of wisdom to grace its bark. It had been the tree most of his family and ancestors had lived and been born in—well its large upper branches. He glanced to his left and then his right before moving the large fernah bushes away, and then waved his hands over the small indent in the large bottom of the tree and a door appeared. He immediately entered its darkened entrance way and the door quietly and quickly shut behind him.

He felt for the stairs, and his eyes glowed in the dark, letting him see even better in the dark hollow of the tree. He touched the stair-ladder, and with ease, he glided, climbed the stairs that would lead him way up into the main canopy of the Silveran Wysp rain forest and to the doorway that would lead to his bedroom. Within long minutes, he was there, and opened the door that was hidden behind a large dressing mirror embedded within the secret door's outer side. He knew he had to get back before the change overtook him. He'd long figured out how many hours and when it overtook him. Any second now, he'd change back. He liked to be up in his private rooms when that happened, and usually wasn't late for that change to take place. Today, though he'd taken longer than usual to get back.

Kaden felt the presence of another when he first opened the doorway. Moments later, he saw the Fae woman step out from behind the curtains. He'd forgotten that today was the

cleaning time of his condo. Yet, it was the woman in particular whom he had been surprised by being there. It was his wood nymph. Dressed in a handkerchief tunic and soft brown stocking pants, he saw her ilk to be that of Fae. Minus the wings, most full-blooded and bodied Fae had. His surprise, culminated with his sudden awareness of her sexual appeal, hit him strangely and incredibly strong. Then before he could move towards her or anything, the transformation hit him. He fell to the floor unconscious.

Now, he stirred in the large bed, awakening to find himself covered with the blue silken comforter and totally naked. How had he gotten here? Had his beautiful nymph pulled his body into the bed? Where was she? As if in answer to his questions the door to his bedroom opened and he saw someone enter. He inhaled sharply at the exquisite woman entering, who carried a tray of food and beverage with her. She moved slowly towards him, when she saw that he was awake. He shifted himself and edged into a half sitting position, careful not to move to rapidly.

"I am called Xera, Prince Kaden. I hope I'm not wrong in assuming that's who you are, or the vid-com news pics I've seen of you weren't faked."

He smiled at her as she sat the tray down on a nearby bed-inn table. "I am Kaden. Why have I never seen one such as you before? I thought an angelic Fae must you be, upon my awakening."

Her smile made his heart melt and his shaft stir with burgeoning life. "I've always cleaned when the owner is away.

I am bonded and in good standing. I...will not say anything to anyone about...well your transformation."

He motioned to the side of the bed, for her to sit. "I am at a loss myself. You are the first to know of it, besides my parents and a few close aides of the family. I am a changeling by heritage. I would appreciate it if you could not tell anyone. For some reason, my instincts tell me I can trust you, Xera."

He studied her as she tentatively sat beside the bed. "I can be, Prince Kaden."

"Please, just call me Kaden."

"Perhaps. I am not from the upper canopy of the Silvera. I'm too use to the formalities, Your Highness."

He reached out to swiftly take one of her long fingered hands in his larger one. She shivered under his stare and touch, yet he was not mistaken in the physical interest she had in him. Prettily she blushed under his gaze and it pleased him. He tightened his thighs together and hoped she hadn't noticed the rise of his rod beneath the cover. By the Wysp deities, he wanted her like no other who had ever caught his interest. She was like ambrosia to his sexual palate. Her hand trembled within his, but so did her body as he leaned forward.

Ever so slowly, his face neared her. She blinked, but she did not move away. "I want to kiss you." When she did nothing more than nod slightly he leaned in closer, until their lips were just a breath's caress away.

Tentatively he opened his mouth and then brushed her bottom lip with the briefest of caresses with the tip of his long tongue. Her soft intake made him lower his lips completely over hers. Her lips trembled beneath his momentarily before

they widened and she pressed hers closer to his own. He let out a soft growl-groan and then firmly pressed his mouth to hers. Hot and sweet, like wild berries, she tasted. Succulent and warm lips melted into his kiss. Slowly her hand came up to caress his cheek. They leaned in closer to each other.

He felt as if he had really come home. No class distinction lay between them in that simple, but heated kiss. He put one arm around her and drew her closer. His kiss deepened. Her tongue darted into his mouth, flickering, tasting. She let a sigh of contentment escape her lips and then pulled back from him. He felt a great loss when she pulled his arm away from her. He looked deeply into her eyes, seeing wonder and finally regret within them. And in that moment, he knew his heart had been captivated.

"Your lips are an aphrodisiac, Xera. Let me tasted them again."

She shook her head softly and moved off and away from the bed. "This is not right. I do not regret the kiss. I'm not of your class, Prince Kaden. I must be going."

"Wait." However, she was out the door quickly. Kaden rolled out of the bed to run after her before he remembered being naked. He grabbed a robe hanging from the back of the door and put it on as he ran out of the room. He felt better after the rest, but still felt out of breath as he raced down the long winding stairs. However, by the time he reached the bottom stair, she was out the door.

He stopped just in front of the closed ornate front door. "Damn."

He knew he could not chase after her. It wouldn't look right. He knew too, that he didn't want the other beings out there to think he was chasing his mistress. No, she would never be the type to become his mistress. Lover, perhaps, but never his mistress. He wanted her to be so much more. Yet, he couldn't treat her like a commoner either. He'd felt something in her that was anything but common. Kaden trekked to his private study. There at his desk he sat down and viewed his magicom.

"Tell me about the Home Cleaner who came today." He vocally commanded the magical electronic device with its large oval shiny screen.

It spoke back to him a sweet musical voice, telling him about Xera of Grovetree, her background that was known, where she went to school, and what her known magics were. He saw the common stuff that was known or could be known about her, just as he might have found out about anyone. Yet, though he read that her father was human, and a highly trained empath, not a lot was known about her mother.

He smiled to himself. Well he had one of the best knowledgeable upgrades of magicoms ever built by Wizard Electronics. He could dig up what he wanted to know. It took him less than an hour to find her mother's background. He was indeed surprised. Did she know then that her mother, her half-human mother, came from a royal human family? Xera's mother was the offspring of a human and Wysp Fae father. However, Xera's grandfather had died from a rare magical ailment, before the child's birth had been announced as an heir. Kaden learned that another sibling, cousin had inherited

Xera's mother's place. It must not have bothered Xera's mother, because she married a commoner human.

Kaden knew then that he had finally found a woman that could share his life and his secret. As he would hers. He would court her swiftly. And show her that class differential did not make a difference to him. He had a lot to think about. He typed out a message and had the magicom send it to Xera. He knew she had a magicom of some kind, because his cleaning bill was on his financial logs. He grinned and rose to go take a shower. He had a lot to think about and do. Xera was a stubborn and flighty woman who needed a lot of convincing. Something he was going to enjoy doing. His wood nymph would not get away from him this time. Kaden's heart lightened. And his mind surprised his heart. He really had fallen in love with her, almost at first site, since he'd first seen her in the forest. But seeing her in person had cinched it.

Now the fates would be on his side. He had much more to find regarding the laws of Wysp, particularly Silveran Laws. There had to be one that would allow him to make Xera his wife. He just hoped she would want to become his bride. She'd been raised that the old class did not mix privately with the upper class. He'd always hated that snobbish differential. He knew he had some power to change that rule. Kaden rose, and merrily went to go think out his plans.

Xera rushed down the nearest wooden walkway. She only briefly glanced back and was relieved that Kaden had not followed her. She had loved his kiss, and it had melted her heart. No male had ever affected her body, mind and heart so

blatantly and with such fierce need as the Fourth Princeling had, and still did. What had possessed her? She knew she couldn't leave him lying there and she had her cleaning mini tornadoes help her to put him to bed. When he'd awakened and looked at her with those large beautiful eyes, she'd fallen immediately under his allure. Her mother had said the clouds of her heart would one day reveal the silver linings of love, when she least expected it.

And she had not expected it this day. She'd been fond of a few men, yes, and even fancied a few in and out of bed, but nothing so explosive as the way she wanted and cared for Kaden. The thought pleased her and then startled the life out of her. She'd been happy with the way of her life after her parents' death and to have it disordered by that devastating but simple kiss scared her with a fierce shock. She had run from something and someone for the first time in her life.

Not to mention that it would have been awful for them both to be caught together. She and he were from different class branches. He lived over a mile up in the trees, just like the other lofty rich Fae. Yet, he wasn't lofty, as she might have expected. Her empathic abilities found his kind nature and troubled heart. He had been the Krakken she'd seen briefly one day in the woods, and had run from it, not knowing if he was friend or foe. Yet, she had not wanted to be caught with her wings all out and a glitter.

She'd never shown her wings to anyone other than her parents. It had been too personal. With him though, she'd wanted to for the first time in her life. Moreover, she *sensed* his emotions, and found him glad to share his own secret with

someone. She wanted the same, and to have him sense her own needs startled her. His loneliness found a home within his heart. However, she'd been much too aware of their class differences to allow them to become more. Xera was relieved when she got home. She closed up the home shop and went to the back of her shop where she lived in a small, but pleasingly comfortable four-room tree-home. She was a bit too unsettled to eat or do anything around the house.

Xera went to her back patio and looked over the forest. The sun, still low in the mid-afternoon, danced merrily through the lower part of the giant gem-oak trees of New Grove. She took in a deep breath and felt relaxed again. The crisp air made her feel refreshed. She found herself walking down the patio steps leading to the next public landing. Two landings down, she made it to the rarely used public garden path that led out to the bottom forest where she often walked to find her herbs and just enjoy nature. She walked for some hours by herself until the sky settled into a soft darkness of ebbing dark-lit beauty.

It was so different looking upon the life of the lower forest, as she had seen it from Kaden's bedroom window way up in the uppermost part of the canopy of the rainforest. That, too, took her breath away, and she admitted to herself that she loved the upstream and the fish fly-swimming by. It was all so incredible. Some part of her felt as if she belonged there, and yet she actually knew she'd always love it down-earth. At night, when she thought no one was around she would come here and walk to the open meadows and allow her wings to reappear. Then she would spread her large butterfly shaped

wings, soar into the moonlight, and become one with the winds of night.

That's what she wanted to do now, become one with the wind and the moon and all things magical in the air. She found her clearing and glanced around herself, making sure no one was in the vicinity. Then she made her wings visible. She arched and spread them, flapping them gleefully. Then sprinting, she jumped into the next breezy air current and flew upwards, flapping her wings briskly, gaining momentum with each large splay of her wings. She closed her eyes and twirled around and around. Oh yes, this felt so right. Because she was of mixed breed, she'd always been shy about her large wings, ones she knew mostly only royalty had, or those sometimes produced by the offspring of a royal born and commoner.

She'd asked her mother, and her mother told her that her grandfather had been a Wysp princeling, who'd coupled with Xera's grandmother, a human, hence making Xera's mother a halfling. Yet, her mother had never mentioned that Xera's grandparents had married. It didn't seem to bother Xera's mother, but her mother had said she did not need to keep her wings a secret. There was nothing to be ashamed of in Xera's heritage. Her mother and father had been proud of her and it was Xera, herself who had always kept her wings a private thing. Once in Faeling School, a few other kids had teased her about her wings and heritage, and Xera kept them to herself since.

She knew nearly nothing as wondrous as winging the wind, except walking down-earth in the forest. Two of her favorite

things in life. Only someone to share those with would make her otherwise nice life spectacular. Kaden had come into her life. Krakken beasts loved their forests, she'd learned that, but Fae men loved the air and being up high, she'd seen that. He had the best of both worlds. It had made her soar higher than she'd ever soared before.

Suddenly she became aware of a powerful presence.

She quickly opened her eyes and saw a shimmering shadow form approaching her with rapid speed. Immediately, Xera flew away amongst the dark clouds with their glittering silver linings. She whisked behind the darkest ones and held her breath, hoping whomever or what ever had not followed her. For some seconds she waited and silence stayed with her. She slowly let out a deep breath and felt relieved she had not been spotted.

Xera turned and froze, just as she had in Kaden's bedroom. He was right there in front of her, flapping his great wings, but she had not heard him. He was swift and quiet. She knew then that it had been his shadowy image she'd seen in the sky. Only for a brief second did she become scared and then his hopeful look melted her heart and she wasn't afraid of him anymore.

She smiled slightly, and asked softly. "How did you know I would be flying?"

"After you left, I waited until evening and I too had had the need to spread my great wings and fly, to be alone, to think. I could feel your presence. I did not mean to alarm you, sweet nymph."

She grinned. "It was you in the forest, the Krakken I thought I saw. Your secret is safe with me." She hoped he knew that in his heart."

His wings beat in rhythm with her heartbeats. "I do, Xera. Do you know how lovely you look in the night with those beautiful wings of yours flapping as strong as my heart beats for you right now."

Her mouth opened in surprise. "Kaden, I thought the same thing now, how it feels that your wings beat as rapidly and emotionally as my heart."

He moved but a hairs' breath from her. "Sweet, Xera, I didn't think that I could fall this instantly and euphorically in love, but I have. With you. Do not let class come between us—nor my secret. I do care for you and desire you. You have but to say yay or nay. My heart, my wings, and my life are in your beautiful hands. Share my life with me and be my wife."

She melted even more, both her heart and her body. Desire flooded her veins. She bit her bottom lip and knew his beseeching eyes captured her soul and her body. She did not want to deny him. And, she could feel it in his emotion filled voice and empathically in his heart, that he greatly cared for her. His eyes smoldered with desire.

"Soar with me to the stars, through the clouds. Walk with me down-earth and let my home become yours. Or I will dwell where ever you wish to, my heart."

She held up her hands and joined hers with his outstretched ones. "You make me feel as if all of those are my home, dear Kaden. The desire and joy I felt from your

kiss scared me. Being up here amongst the stars and clouds give me hope that nothing could come between us."

"Then follow your heart and embrace me with your love, Xera, as I would like to do so, to you with mine." He pulled his hands from hers and opened his arms wide. "Love me and let me make such wondrous love to you here and now."

"I would like that very much, dearest Kaden." She flew directly into his open arms, and wound her arms around his chest.

Kaden's mouth bore quickly and heatedly down upon hers. She returned his kiss with fierce abandon, and all her fears melted as the heat in her sex enveloped her, wanting to experience what his hardening shaft promised her this night. His hips pressed against hers, letting her feel the strength of his desire. She shivered with an overwhelming need, only he could fulfill. Passion filled not only her mind, soul and heart, but her body screamed for his touch and fulfillment only he could bring to her.

Kaden grabbed her even tighter against his body, and thrust upwards, further up into the air. Winged bodies met in a fierce embrace and searing passionate kiss of lips. Xera held tight to his massive shoulders. Sparkles of his aura heated the wispy streams of air bombarding her. She gasped for air as he soared higher and higher until they were in the midst of a silver gray cloud, whose linings only illuminated the love and passion they were frantically feeling. Then suddenly, it was quiet except for the two of them. No sounds of birds, or any natural object.

Xera held tight to him, gaining her composure back. "Ah, Kaden, you make me feel as if anything is possible. I desire you as much as there are stars in the sky."

"Sweet nymph, and I you, more than the beauty of the star themselves, and the rainforest in which we both feel at home in. Do not let class or secrets or anything come between what is meant to be. Believe in me and this sudden love that we've been gifted with. Know my heart and my body are yours forever."

"As mine are yours, dear Kaden."

Then his full lips came down over hers again, and she felt the wind being drained from her in a most pleasant way—no, in a most enticing, breathtaking passion that made her shiver with the intensity of it.

"Then know my love in all ways, Xera," he said between heated kisses.

She wound her arms around his neck, holding tightly on to him, but pressing her lithe body against his as solidly as possible. She returned his kisses with matched, maddening passion. "I do love you, Kaden. I've been such a fool. Love me as wild as the wicked winds our wings do beat. And I will love you with my body this night and every night from now on in many ways too."

Kaden groaned against her lips, deepening his kiss. With one arm, he held her against him; with his free hand, he caressed every inch of her luscious body he could. Kaden quickly removed her flimsy tunic and soft pantalets from her body with her wiggling assistance. She helped him quickly to

remove his flowing tunic also, letting it disappear down into the clouds as he had her clothing.

They began to touch each other, each feeling the growing excitement and need of the other. Wings flapped in unison and faster as their desires grew into a fierce need for each other. Her hands explored his body, needing to feel the hardness of his strong heat. She wanted him to feel her physically even more powerfully than she felt him empathically. Trickle of wetness flowed between her thighs as her desire for him grew rapidly.

He touched her sex, feeling her moist and ready for him. He stroked her softly at first, but as she leaned into his hand, he thrust his fingers into her, sliding them in and out of her hot wet depths. She leaned her head back, and at the same time hitched her legs around his hips. She pushed up and down on his fingers, feeling her desires flow over them.

"Take me now, Kaden. I need you right now!"

"Yes, love, yes!"

Kaden ached with suppressed need. He wanted to be inside of her, sheathed in her heated walls. His long thick shaft slid into her in one fluid, hard movement. The wind roared around them as their desires became a tempest of whirling emotions. Xera tightened her legs around him. Kaden held her by the waist and she leaned back again into the empty sky. His head came down and he suckled on the hardened nubs of her full breasts. Her breasts were on fire with his delicious suckling.

Her hips pressed wildly to meet his firm jabs. She boiled inside with such a need it inflamed her mind, body and soul.

Her body ached with hot desire and his love engulfed her. She felt his fiery, intense flesh moving inside of her moist walls. He shoved harder and harder inside her.

Tensions of repressed desires exploded from them both. They held and jerked against each other with fierce abandoned passion. Pleasures as strong as the rawest forces of nature intensified within them both, bringing them to a zenith of volcanic and magical proportions. Winds of change encompassed them both. Passion flared into life of renewed hope and love. Nature's heat consumed the two lovers making them soar to incredible heights.

Their liquid desires joined, making them bond as deeply as any elemental force could be combined. Xera's hands tightened on a solid, fleshy waist. Their hips thrust into one last orgasmic jolt of pleasure. Together, winged beings of might and magic whirled in the air in each other's arms, with the world at their feet and the clouds as their kingdom, governed by love. Their wings beat slower, but with still powerful movements, as they stayed locked in each other's embrace, miles high in the night sky. Their hearts still beat rapidly, but not with just exhaustion from their intense bout of lovemaking, but also with the incredible wonder of their unified love.

Xera knew she would never have to worry about loneliness again, or having to hide her wings when she was with him. Nor, she felt, would he ever again have to hide his secret of being a changeling beast, for he now had her to confide in, as she did him. She moved against him, his shaft swelled within

her. His body shivered, no quaked suddenly against her, his large arms seem to get even larger.

She pulled her head back and saw that his face started changing. His eyes glittered with renewed desire, but it was the face of the beast man that now stared down at her. Lust, accented with a silver lining of love, flickered within his deep-set eyes. A low growl escaped his thick lips and he cupped her from behind. She grinned wickedly up at him and nodded. He let out a low and deep growl of desire.

Kaden's powerful rod shoved into her once more. She gasped at the force filling her. He was larger in man-beast form, yet her slickened channel took him in, as he pressed in and out of her slowly at first. Her wings closed and she furled them behind her. She held onto his large neck while he cupped her buttocks, bringing her up against his hips as close as he possibly could. For a long, slow while he moved hard and softly in and out of her wetness, then as she moved in rhythm with his animalistic movements, his thrusts became more frantic and powerful.

Hot intense pleasure built up within her again. He growled his need to be unified with her again. She shoved against him as hard as he did her. His shaft enlarged within her, filling her with his wild fiery passions. Together they came hard and fast and furious. Then he held her tight, and flew downwards as the spasms of their orgasms overcame them. Within minutes, he had flown them through the open windows of his tree-condo bedroom.

With a wave of his hand, the covers pulled back and he gently lowered their bodies onto the large bed. Contentedly

they lay wrapped within each other's arms, sated by lust and warmed by the love that enveloped them as perfectly as their embraced bodies. Together they slept, while their minds filled with glorious thoughts, which outlined the silver linings of their dreams. Dreams they would soon make into a reality of a wondrous new life for them both.

\* \* \* \*

The End

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

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A curious invitation mystifies acclaimed movie critic Moira Castle as she returns home to face hidden memories and answers she's not ready to hear or feel.

Mae Powers

www.midnightshowcase.com

maepowers@yahoo.com

Digests with stories in them by Mae Powers:

Pagan Pleasures 2

Alien Seductions

Undersea Delights 2

Melange

Jaded Destinies 1

The Aldairian Ecstasy, a futuristic romance novel

Spellfire Shadows: Dark Edges Novel

Writing with Lani Aames as Leanne Strange:

Lucan Wolf, Lord of the Night

(vampire time-travel)

Spellfire: Sinful Sundaes 4 (paranormal collection)

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## Excerpt Roamin' Love by Luna Carrol

Available from

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Groa screamed as the Danes laughed. One Dane called the other to stop pulling her. Collapsing on the side of the boat she turned her back to the blood and tortured cries. She slid down the inside of the boat and cried.

"So, Viking women cry." The Dane looked older than Olaf. He had to be. His gray hair and the wrinkles beside his eyes came from more than just a life at sea.

Groa sniffed and pulled her hand over her cheeks. Damn her show of weakness. The Danes should never see a Gotlander cry.

"Well, you cry your eyes out. Sigar said you are to be married." He used his foot to move her wounded leg none too gently. "That will not make for a pretty bride. Still, a man doesn't need to see it until he has wedded you."

"I'll not marry a Dane." Groa threw the words at him.

The Dane laughed. "You'll marry whoever the Prince says you'll marry. It may even be..." he lowered himself to a squat position beside her, "an old Dane such as me."

The bucket sat too close to resist. In one movement, it was in her hand and crashing against the Dane's face.

The ship erupted in laughter as he touched his bloodied nose. He released his face and grabbed her. His mouth sneered as the blood trickled down into his gray beard.

Groa used her good leg to kick him where no man wants to be kicked and caused him to release her. She would become food for the sharks first! Grabbing the railing just as two other men reached her, she tried in vain to pitch herself overboard.

"Asger! That's enough!"

Groa was turned by the Danes to face Alan of Sigar, the prince that captured Vilda's boat. If she could only kill him, then the Danes would kill her. Death would be a far better sentence. She struggled against the arms holding her.

Alan smiled. "It seems that you do not care for Asger." He placed his hand on the shoulder of the still bleeding, taller man.

"I'll not marry a Dane!" Groa stopped and stared. Vilda walked freely from below deck!

"Alan, do not force her to marry a Dane."

*Alan?* Groa looked from the woman once her friend, her Captain and her princess, to the Dane Vilda now called by his name. *No. She cannot be accepting him as her husband!*

"Vilda?" She didn't want to believe it. Could she betray her people, her oldest friend? *No, please Freya, no.*

"Groa, you are like a sister to me. And if my husband respects me in the least, he will not marry you to a Dane."

Lowering herself to the deck once more, Groa gave up. There was no fight in her now. This betrayal cut deeper than the sword had her leg. She would have died for Vilda, and still may if her wound wasn't treated.

So many Vikings died to keep Vilda from being married to a Dane. *Now Vilda accepts him? What did the Dane do to her below deck?*

This *Alan* spoke now "She's wild, Vilda. She will need a strong man to tame her."

"Not a Dane. Groa will kill him...or herself." Vilda placed her hand on Alan's bicep.

Groa closed her eyes to the sight. Vilda was dead to her now. She would not acknowledge the presence of the dead.

"She is wild, but lovely enough to tempt most men. Perhaps a Celt?" A moment of silence fell.

How was a Celt better than a Dane? Alan of Sigar seemed determined to punish her. Sentencing a Viking to live among the Celts was no more than a death sentence.

"Alan." Vilda's voice sounded mixed between sigh and plea.

"Yes. A Celt it will be. I know one. His people have wanted their chieftain to take a wife, but he has refused all offers of marriage." Alan's voice burned into Groa's mind. She would never forget this moment.

"Why would he take her if he wouldn't take one of his own?"

*That is the voice of the dead.* Groa would cover her ears if not for the fact that it would acknowledge the fact she could hear the dead.

"I'm not sure he will, but his people want him to marry. By taking a wife who doesn't want him, he would still be free to live as he does now."

She would be no more than property. The Celt would be allowed to live freely, while she would be bound by the marriage. By the gods, these southern men were savages! It would have been better to die in battle just lost. At least, in death, she would not have witnessed the surrender of Vilda. The *death* of Vilda.

"This man will not abuse her?" The dead spoke again.

"He is a respected man." Another brief pause. "We're home."

Groa heard the calls of land. She looked toward the bow of the boat. This shore should be the place of victory for Vilda, but instead became Groa's prison. Bleak and dismal. The night refused her a glimpse beyond the immediate shoreline.

The boat jarred her as it jerked onto the shore. The Danish language was one she understood well enough. Their cries of land and thankfulness filled her ears.

Once more Groa was pulled up to stand beside two Danes. She averted her eyes as the dead one stood before her.

"Groa, I know you're angry, but I will not allow them to harm you again."

She didn't hear her. She could not hear the voice of the dead. To hear her would mean that she had gone insane, or should expect to follow the dead one into the other world.

"Please look at me." The touch of the dead to her shoulder was not felt. She would not acknowledge it. Better to look at the crowd gathering along the shore. That was the real threat now...

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[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

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In space and under the sea, merfolk exist. Enjoy these tales of fin, fun and fantastic adventures in life and love.

### **Incredible Sea Hulk, Mae Powers**

A mer-alien and a human must work together to solve a crisis, but do they dare consummate their fiery passions in reality?

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Mermaid Marina can't find love. After another reckless adventure, she meets sexy merman Ceph. But will their parents' past stop them from having a future?

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Excerpt from Merlicious 1**

Incredible Sea Hulk

By

Mae Powers

### **Chapter One**

Lieutenant Commander Kellah Franklin was about to step inside the ship's main tube-lift when, with a frightening thud, her breath was temporarily knocked from her lungs. Kellah let out a startled cry, finding herself staggering backwards. Huge arms, like bands of steel, instantly encased her, pulling her forward, lifting her tottering form against a rock-hard body.

Time stood still as Kellah looked upwards, her astonished gaze finally resting upon a face. Startling gold-flecked amethyst eyes glared back at her as her body was lifted higher so that her face came even with a strong, square chin. The man's external but alien charisma was too overpowering to her startled senses.

*The man is an incredible sea hulk!* Irrationally appreciating the rich golden-green of his skin, she was further discomfited when he pulled her more firmly against his length, and her heart pounded madly at the close contact of their bodies.

"Are you stable yet?" Amusement was evident in the fluid smooth voice; the vibrations from his sexy voice, Kellah could feel against her own breasts. She noticed he looked for the

telltale blue dot that showed whether a person wore an intergalactic language translator implant in his or her lobe.

She tried not to blush, knowing this powerful enigma was more than aware of her rapidly beating heart. She saw little strands of what looked like kelp, maybe even seaweed, layering his dark gold hair, as if they were just mere wisps of hair blowing about his face. His exotic looks tempted her. Kellah forced herself to act more rationally.

"I'm fine," she replied calmly, starting to find the situation a bit awkward. "I should have watched where I was going."

The rumbling laugh came from deep within the Seamarrin. "It was I who erred. I rushed out and nearly trampled you in the process. I did not expect anyone to be about this late. I am not sorry though. We seem to fit perfectly in all the right places. But I must let you down. I have work to do. Perhaps we shall meet again soon."

Kellah knew he was teasing. The twinkle in the gold of his eyes assured her of it. However, her heart once more increased its tempo as his deep-set eyes kept dancing over her form rakishly. It irritated her she could not share his amusement, especially as no amount of wiggling on her part would allow her feet to touch the ground. Though the slick wetsuit he wore for clothing should have allowed her to slide down his sexy length, he held her too close.

She knew Seamarrins wore the wetsuits to regulate their body temperatures when out of water or in conditions adverse to their native water environments. They lived under the oceans of their world more than on top; the race was more water breathers than air breathers. They also used air-tablets

or nose loops across the bridge of their noses for breathing out of the water if they could not take the air tablets.

"As this is a large ship, I doubt it." She intended her voice to sound disinterested, but she didn't think her tone bland enough.

He only laughed at her again. "I can only hope you are wrong and that we meet again, sweet sea nymph." His voice caressed her every bit as much as his body did when he slowly slid her form down his length.

Finally, her feet rested none too steadily upon the ground. And then he was gone, striding away from her as quickly as he had come up against her. Kellah felt so totally shaken, she did not know if their encounter had lasted a minute or an hour. She did know her body would not quickly forget the pulsating warmth and tingling caused by the Seamarrin.

She wondered if there would be bruises in the morning where his large hands had gripped her upper arms so tightly. If there were not, she might be tempted to believe she had dreamed the entire incident. More aroused than she cared to admit, she entered the elevator and pushed the proper button. Feeling completely, sensually alive, she realized that the Seamarrin had awakened a hunger in her flesh she thought she was no longer capable of. Kellah forced delicious thoughts of the eye-catching alien out of her mind as she left the ship's elevator, making her way to the intergalactic library on the Earthstar exploration ship, *Quintar...*

\* \* \* \*

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **Vamptations 2**

Vampires have haunted our dreams for eons. Yet, how can we resist their dark allure and hypnotic wonder. Whether a classic vamp or an empathic one, they scare us and thrill us, and even make themselves the objects of our affections. So don't just watch your neck and mind when you read these devilishly succulent tales, but watch it when the lights go out, and the bedroom door creaks open. We've warned you a second time now, so not our fault if you get smitten or bitten.

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Candra hides from an evil, ex-lover, and must choose between putting her trust in another vampire or end up alone in a cold, dark world.

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Vampire Micah Davenport has searched for 600 years for his true-mate, Gabrielle. But dangerous forces threaten a love that's been destined for centuries.

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Sylvan is a vampire whose 'night job' facilitates his lifestyle. When he falls for Antonia, his no-nonsense manager, will he surrender the 'night life?'

### **When the Sun Goes Down, Taylor Evans**

After sunset, more than vamps prowl the night; as Laurence, a member of the Houston Vampire Association, finds out when he bites the wrong woman.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

## **THE ALDAIRIAN ECSTASY**

By Mae Powers

**While in disguise and on a deadly assignment, Prince Dalharan Demmonarris of Aldairia and Admiral Rieka Hahl, of LAW, find that their dangerous desires grow to an all-consuming need**

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