



Dark Fire Kiss

Author: *Amy Pennza*

Category: Erotic, Romance, Paranormal

Description: Half human, half vampire, I've spent my life on the fringes of my father's court. Born with all the vampire weaknesses and none of their gifts, I have little to offer my family—until my father, the prince, is poisoned. Only dragon tears will heal him, and the dragons are desperate for female mates. So I'm offered as a sacrifice. Dumped in dragon territory in the Scottish Highlands, I'm quickly captured by Bram McGregor and Fergus Devlin. It's my body in exchange for the tears, and it doesn't matter how I feel about the trade. But as time passes, I feel a lot more than I expected. Bram and Fergus claim fate sent me to them, and they're eager to prove the three of us could build a beautiful life together. And the longer I stay, the more I realize sharing their bed isn't the sacrifice I once believed. With two powerful, sexy dragons by my side, I'm beginning to feel I've finally found my place in the world. But my past isn't finished with me yet. Just when I think happiness is within reach, my family comes hurtling back into my life. And this time their betrayal may cost me everything—and everyone—I love.

Total Pages (Source): 71

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Prologue

FERGUS

The Scottish Highlands

1687

The castle teemed with dragons.

But I was only interested in one.

He watched me from a chair adjacent to the fire, his green eyes tracking my movements as I swiped a soapy cloth over my chest.

My skin heated, and it wasn't from the dancing blaze or the tub of hot water I sat in. From the moment I'd met him, Bram McGregor had been capable of leveling me with a look. Of seducing me with nothing more than a casual glance.

But that was to be expected, given that he was my fated mate. The months leading up to our mating ceremony had been torture. I'd wanted to seal our union right away—to sneak off and say the words that would bind us together for all time.

He'd insisted on waiting. "I want to do it properly," he'd said, nipping at my bottom lip in a quiet corner of the castle. He'd let me pull him there while the servants planned the menu for the post-ceremony feast, but then he'd caged me in with his arms against the wall on either side of my head, his big body warming mine from

chest to thigh.

“Can’t wait,” I’d rasped against his lips. Using the swordsman’s reflexes drilled into me since birth, I’d shoved him away, then spun him around and pushed him face-first against the wall. I’d pressed my hips forward, my shaft lined up perfectly with the cleft of his ass. “I won’t wait.”

He moved fast, reversing our positions in a maneuver that left me dizzy and clutching the wall. But my head cleared quickly at the feel of his erection against my ass and the sharp pinch of his teeth at my neck.

“You will,” he murmured, a smile in his voice. He licked the spot he’d bitten, and a moan escaped me before I could stifle it. “And when I’m ready to make you mine at last, Fergus Devlin, you’ll thank me for it.”

Despite the arousal clouding my brain, I managed a startled laugh. “I’ll thank you?”

“Aye.” A rough hand rifled under my kilt, and then his fist wrapped around my cock in a possessive grip. A familiar grip—as if he knew how to handle me already.

“Bram,” I said, my voice like gravel and my cock hard to the point of pain. “Please.”

Warm breath had tickled my ear as he laughed softly. “See? You’re halfway there. Please before and thank you after.” He’d released my cock and delivered a light swat on my bare ass. “I promise it’ll be worth the wait.”

That promise gleamed in his eyes as he watched me now, his hands resting lightly on the arms of his chair. The muffled sounds of feasting drifted up from the Great Hall below. Our kind had come from every corner of the Highlands to witness our joining. Given the devastation that had plagued our race in past centuries, any mating was cause for celebration.

Bram rose from his chair and walked to the tub, his kilt swinging around his thighs.

I raised a brow. “You going to join me?”

He shook his head and extended a hand.

The heat under my skin flared higher. Without being totally conscious of what I was doing, I let him pull me to my feet. Water sluiced down my chest and legs, but I hardly noticed. My attention was on the dark-haired, golden-skinned male in front of me. His green eyes traveled a searing path down my body. As soon as his gaze reached my cock, I let out a strained moan. Something about standing nude before him—and freshly washed at that—while he remained fully clothed set a torch to every nerve ending I possessed.

He seemed to know it, too, because he dragged his emerald gaze back up in a slow, possessive glide that sent fire barreling through my veins. “I’m not going to join you, Fergus. I’m going to take you.”

I knew what he meant. He couldn’t be more obvious about his preferences. That I was willing to accommodate him proved fate had chosen well for both of us. But I couldn’t resist teasing him a little. “Oh really?” I pulled his hips to mine, a thrill jumping through me when our dicks met. “And will you always be the one doing the taking?”

“It depends.”

The fine hairs on my arms lifted, his words conjuring a world of filthy possibilities in my brain. “On what?”

“On whether you please me.”

As I had against the castle wall, I choked out a laugh even as fresh desire blasted me.
“That’s a tall order. Are you sure I’m the right male for the task?”

He gripped my cock.

I stopped laughing.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

With his other hand, he swiped a callused thumb over the tip, collecting the moisture that had gathered there. Then he lifted his hand and slowly, deliberately sucked me off his thumb.

My breath caught. My hips jerked forward of their own accord, and my knees bumped the edge of the tub, making water slosh around my calves.

He squeezed my shaft, and we both watched as another shiny bead formed at my slit. He made a low sound of appreciation, then bent and licked the drop with a flash of his tongue. When he straightened, his beast stared out from his eyes. “You’re the only male for the task.” He tightened his grip on my dick and tugged me forward. “Out now. I’ll not wait another minute to have you.”

I scrambled from the tub with my heart racing and my pulse pounding in my cock. He led me to the bed by my dick, not releasing me until we reached the edge.

“On your back,” he whispered. “I want to look into your eyes when I make you mine.”

I complied, sinking into the featherbed with my heart hammering and my rigid cock weighing me down. In a voice so raspy I hardly recognized it, I said, “And you’ll be mine. That’s how this works.”

He took shadow form, his body turning to smoke. For a moment, his clothes hung in the air, the sight of an empty kilt, jacket, and waistcoat almost comical. Then everything dropped to the floor, leaving a seething black cloud. It shivered once, then reformed into a naked Bram. He climbed over me, and it was almost too much—the

ripple of muscle over his warrior's build. The dark stubble on his square jaw. The heavy, veined shaft swinging against his thigh.

"That's how this works," he murmured in agreement, settling between my legs. As I opened around him, he slid his hand under my balls and fingered my hole. At my throaty groan, he pushed inside, his entry aided by the water that still clung to my skin. "You're mine. I'm yours." He delved deeper and hooked his finger.

Raw lust blasted through me, the force of it lifting my hips off the bed and pulling a wanton cry from my throat.

He swallowed the sound with a kiss as he added another finger. He gave me several deep pumps before sliding his lips to my ear and speaking in a growl that raised goosebumps on my skin. "This is going to join us for eternity, and I'll ruin anyone who tries to tear us asunder."

Gods, I believed him. Only a fool would get between Bram McGregor and something he wanted. Some deep, innate instinct told me his possessiveness was rooted in fear. He'd been alone from his first breath, and his upbringing had been just as lonely.

But he wasn't alone now. I was willing to spend an eternity making sure he knew it.

He plunged his fingers deep and hit that spot again—the one that made desire roar through me like a bonfire.

"So good," I groaned, my chest heaving. My cock lay thick and swollen against my stomach, the tip leaking while he worked me open.

He lifted away—and for a moment it was like a loss. Like grief so deep and all-consuming an ache shot across my chest. Then he swiped the moisture from my cock and smeared it down his own.

I lifted onto my elbows so I could get a better look. And what a look it was. He knelt between my thighs, his body a tight mass of muscle and coiled power. Rippling abs. Perfect golden skin. Glittering green eyes framed by thick, black lashes. Dark, wavy hair.

“I’m going to fuck your mouth someday,” I said suddenly. And I was going to thread my fingers through those dark strands and hold him still while I did it.

He arched a brow as he stroked his cock. His perfect cock—long and thick and glistening with the moisture he’d taken from me. “Is that so?”

“Aye and soon.” Gods, the things I wanted to do to him. And it was even hotter knowing he’d make me work for every bit of it. My beast stirred in my chest, eager to claim its mate in the most carnal way possible.

A ghost of a smile played around Bram’s mouth. “We’ll see, Fergus.” He put the fingers of his free hand to my lips. “Get me nice and wet.”

Heat blistered through me. I sucked his first three fingers into my mouth, anticipation rising hot and swift. My cock throbbed, and I moaned around his knuckles, so eager I bordered on desperate.

He read me at once, removing his hand and rubbing his damp fingers over my puckered entrance. “You want my dick?”

“Yes.” I squirmed against his hand.

“Show me where.”

The growled command hit me square in the chest and shivered down to my cock. I palmed my knees and pulled my legs wide. “Get inside me. Please.”

He gave me a knowing look as he gripped himself and teased around my rim. Then he eased inside, breaching me by inches.

I clenched my jaw at the burn, then groaned when it gave way to a blissful stretch. He held my stare as he pushed deeper, filling me with delicious pressure that built in the base of my spine and then spiraled outward, raising goosebumps across my skin. I rolled my hips up, seeking more.

He obliged me, wrapping his thick arms around my thighs and yanking me closer. Driving his dick so deep, my throbbing cock slapped my abdomen. When I reached for it, he knocked my hand away.

“Mine tonight,” he rasped, beginning to thrust. He took my shaft in a firm grip and stroked hard. With his other hand, he pushed one of my knees to my chest, opening me even wider. “I’m taking you and I’ll finish you, too.”

Pleasure sizzled along my veins as he worked my dick in sync with his thrusts. He jerked me rough and fast, showing no mercy. But then, I didn’t want any. My lips parted, and my breath came in gasps. The bed rocked, the ropes creaking as he picked up the pace. Every thrust—every pump of his hand—sent bliss barreling through me. Heat built under my skin...and my vision went blurry.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

“Stay with me, Fergus,” he rasped. He gave me a sharp crack on the ass. “You shift and we have to start over.”

I bit my lip, battling back the urge to slip my skin. “Would that be such a bad thing?” I asked, my whole body rocking as he continued pounding my ass.

“No...” He leaned over me, his hand flying up and down my cock. His eyes burned with lust—and the hint of worry that was never too far from his gaze. “But I need you bound to me.”

“I need it too.” I clawed at the bedding as my body threatened to fly apart. “Not going to last,” I said breathlessly. “I’m too close, Bram.”

“Come,” he growled, his grip brutal on my dick. He jerked his hips faster, his heavy sack slapping my ass. “Come with me. In all things, we go together.”

Ecstasy rushed at me—and then swept me away. I cried out as I went over the edge, my release spurting across my chest.

True to his word, he came with me, his eyes so bright they cast green shadows on his cheeks. He pumped his hot load into my ass, his cock so thick and deep I let loose another wild cry.

“Yes,” he hissed—and then his voice dipped an octave and his words flowed into the rasping, sibilant tongue of our kind. Still lodged inside me, he lowered his chest to mine and spoke in my ear. “I bind you and I’m bound to you. I’ll take no others save the one we wait for.”

I pushed my hands into his hair and held his face against my neck. My heart pounded against his as I repeated the vow in the same language. Whispers lifted around the bed, and an artificial wind flowed around us, cooling the sweat on my skin. It spun faster and faster, moving over my sated body with invisible fingers. Rifling the bedding and making the fire crackle and dance.

As quickly as it came, it was gone. The male on top of me was mine at last.

I smoothed a hand up his back. "It's done."

He rolled off me. "Aye." His gaze searched mine. "It was...good for you?"

I pressed my lips together so I wouldn't smile. My serious Bram. I was going to have so much fun lightening him up. I was tempted to tease him now, but he looked so earnest I gestured to the sticky mess on my chest and abdomen. "Is this not evidence enough for you?"

His forehead smoothed out, and a satisfied look stole over his features. He lifted onto his elbow, dragged a fingertip through the creamy ropes coating my stomach, and sucked his finger clean.

Gods. Maybe he was going to have fun with me. I raised a brow. "What about you? Did I please you?"

He understood at once, and amusement gleamed in his eyes as he leaned over me. "Aye. I'm well pleased," he murmured. "Are you happy I made you wait?"

I rolled my eyes even as I gripped the back of his neck and pulled his head down. "Aye. Thank you, you smug asshole."

"Told you so," he whispered against my lips. Then he took my mouth in a searing

kiss.

When he lifted away a long moment later, I was hard and breathless.

And lucky. We were lucky. Most dragons waited hundreds of years for their mates. We'd found each other young, and now we had an eternity before us.

But there was, of course, something missing.

Or rather, someone.

"Do you think we'll find her soon?" I asked as he settled on his back beside me.

His reply came in a sleepy, sated voice. "We'll find her when the time is right."

Her. Such a simple word for such an important person. Our kind mated in threes—always—and as much as Bram and I belonged together, we were incomplete without our female.

I stared at the beamed ceiling. "I wonder what she'll be like." She wouldn't be a dragon, of course. Our females had died out long before Bram and I were born.

"She'll be ours," he said gruffly.

I turned my head to find him looking at me with his beast in his eyes. It was hardly unexpected. He was possessive about most things. Of course he'd be possessive about her, too.

"We'll have to approach her gently," I said, letting a warning creep into my voice. "We wouldn't want to scare her."

He grunted. “A little fear can be healthy. She’ll need to understand she can’t leave us. If she tries, we’ll hold her in the tower until she sees reason.”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

“We’re unlikely to need a tower. The other races are weaker.”

He scoffed. “Not our female.” He sat up, and his gaze grew distant, as if he peered into our shared future. “Whatever happens—however long we have to wait—you can count on this: Fate will never burden us with a weak mate.”

Chapter One

HALINA

Krovnosta Territory, The Court of Prince Ludovic the Bold

Present Day

“Weak and worthless.”

“Afraid of her own shadow.”

The mutters of my father’s warriors followed me as I hurried down the banquet table in the Great Hall. I kept my head lowered. They knew I could hear them, but it was better to pretend I didn’t. If I reacted—if I gave any indication their taunts bothered me—they would follow their words with actions. I had the scars to prove it.

So I glued my gaze to the flagstones and didn’t stop walking until I reached the end of the table and sat.

“You’re going to bump into a pillar if you keep scuttling about like that,” my brother

Aleksander said from the chair next to mine.

I looked up to find him watching me with a bemused expression. “Better than bumping into their fists,” I said.

He shrugged and reached for his blood wine. “If you don’t like their punishments, then learn to fight.”

“If I had your gifts, Brother, you can be certain I would.”

“Guard your tongue, Halina,” he murmured over the rim of his goblet. “I don’t care for your tone.”

I lowered my head. He didn’t care to be reminded of our shared parentage, either. Vampires were obsessive about bloodlines. They had good reason, since the Blood chose their rulers.

Shouts rang out, saving me from the necessity of apologizing. My father strode into the hall with my Uncle Grigory hot on his heels. As they faced off in front of the hearth, it was obvious they’d been arguing.

Not an unusual occurrence.

“How was I supposed to know who she was?” my father yelled, one meaty fist clenched around the hilt of the dagger strapped to his side. His black hair streamed down his back, and his handsome face was twisted in a scowl.

My Uncle Grigory returned the expression. One only had to look at them to know they were brothers. They were both formidable warriors with haughty features and ice-blue eyes that flashed red with strong emotion.

Unlike my father, however, Grigory's dark hair was streaked with silver—uncommon in an immortal. I'd once overheard Aleksander claim the lighter strands came from the stress of managing my father's scandals.

Judging from the storm clouds in Grigory's eyes, a new one was brewing.

He gave my father an incredulous look. "Do you honestly expect anyone to believe you, Ludovic? Ivana of Sevolod is the mate of a Blooded prince!"

"Then Prince Sergey should have satisfied her." My father smirked, the tips of his fangs showing. "Maybe then she wouldn't have strayed."

Several of the warriors at the table snickered.

Grigory didn't smile. "There is no excuse for sleeping with another prince's wife. You'll bring war to our borders!"

My father's amusement fled, and a dangerous note entered his voice. "Our borders? You forget your place, Brother."

The temperature in the hall dropped several degrees.

My heart rate picked up even as irritation streaked through me. If their argument turned to blows, I was unlikely to get a meal. It might be days before someone remembered I required food to live.

If Grigory was intimidated, he didn't show it. "And you forget your obligations," he said. "You dishonor father's throne with your unnatural lust." He spat the last word, contempt in his tone.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

My father gripped his dagger hilt more tightly, his ruby ring catching the light. “The only unnatural lust here is the desire you harbor for said throne. An unrequited desire, because you’ll never sit on it.”

Grigory went utterly still. Around the table, the warriors stirred. A few placed their hands on their weapons.

I clenched the arms of my chair. If Grigory struck my father...

“He won’t,” Aleksander murmured. “Grigory knows his place.”

Immediately, I pictured a brick wall in my mind. I’d stopped concentrating and Aleksander had read my thoughts. That kind of carelessness was dangerous in Krovnosta.

Sure enough, Grigory gave my father a short bow. “I merely seek to serve it, as I do you.” He straightened. “Brother.”

For a moment, the tension held. Then, as swiftly as it had come, the anger left my father’s face. He turned toward the banquet table and spread his arms. “Enough of this bickering,” he said in a booming voice. “Let us feast!”

The warriors shouted in agreement, several banging their fists on the table.

I grabbed my goblet of blood wine before it could spill.

Grigory stalked to his seat, lifted his own goblet, and drained it.

My father went to his throne on the dais. Immediately, two female thralls emerged from the shadows. One knelt at his feet and leaned her head against his knee. The other climbed into his lap and offered her wrist. He stroked a beeringed hand through the first thrall's hair as he smiled and sank his fangs into the second one's forearm.

Her lips parted on a pleasure-laced moan, and her eyes went glassy.

I released the breath I'd been holding and sat back in my chair. More thralls—human females from the streets of St. Petersburg—moved around the table with pitchers of blood wine. A few giggled as warriors grabbed them around the waists and fed directly from their veins. In seconds, the bubbly sounds turned to gasps and lustful moans. The tense atmosphere lifted, replaced with laughter and the hum of conversation.

Aleksander sipped from his goblet and gave me a mild look. "Crisis averted."

For now. My father was never going to change. I looked at Grigory, who had taken his seat and now stared at the flames leaping in the hearth. He claimed he didn't want the throne. That he was more useful as an advisor.

But I wasn't certain I believed him.

Not that it mattered. The Blood had chosen my father to rule. Grigory couldn't kill him or overthrow him, as the Blood prevented vampires from rising against their prince.

A thrall approached Aleksander and leaned over the table with a hopeful look in her dark eyes. Her arms were covered in tattoos. More ink swirled across her chest. Her pupils were dilated, and her eyes gleamed with hunger as she eyed Aleksander. "Will you feed, my lord?"

He looked her over, his blue eyes lingering on the swells of her breasts. “I haven’t seen you before. Are you new?”

“Da.” Yes. “But I’ve been enjoying my stay.”

“I’m sure you have.”

She licked her lips. “Will you feed?”

“Not tonight.”

She gave him a crestfallen look, then switched her attention to me.

“Neither will she,” Aleksander said before the thrall could speak. Quick as lightning, he grasped my chin and squeezed, forcing my jaws apart. “My sister is a dhampir, as well as a bastard. See her little fangs?” He clucked his tongue. “Alas, not long enough to pierce your pretty neck without causing a lot of damage. It won’t feel good, either. She doesn’t have enough sila to make you come.”

I breathed hard through my nose, my eyes watering from his grip. Several warriors had noticed our little scene, and malice danced in their eyes as they watched my mouth gape open.

The thrall frowned. “Dhampir...”

“Half human,” Aleksander said, his tone conversational. “That means her mother was a whore, just like you. Now shoo.” He released me and flicked his fingers at her.

She stumbled back and whirled away, already scanning the table for someone willing to feed. One of the warriors grabbed at her, but she darted out of his reach and kept going. The males on either side of him roared with laughter.

I lowered my gaze, my jaw throbbing and my chest burning with anger. My mother hadn't been a whore. She'd been a victim, the same as the thralls who attended my father now. She'd merely had the misfortune to conceive his child. My father hadn't been thrilled, but he'd let me live because some dhampirs were born with enough power to be useful. When it became obvious I wasn't one of them, he'd left me to fend for myself. Most of the time he seemed to forget I existed.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

But his warriors didn't. Vampires prized strength and power—and I had neither.

A female moan drifted from the dais that held my father's throne. He sprawled on the red cushions, his throat working as he fed from the thrall. She straddled him and cried out, her hips rolling as she orgasmed. The thrall at his knee slid a hand up his thigh to his groin. He'd bed both—and likely others—before the night was through. The only question was whether he'd bother to take them to his chamber first.

The thrall Aleksander had rejected moved toward the dais, her gaze now focused on my father.

Which was hardly a surprise. As an ancient, the venom in his fangs was rich with sila. A few drops would keep her sated for weeks.

And if she didn't get more, the withdrawal would kill her. Sila was more potent than any drug. It flooded the human brain with endorphins, causing euphoria and sexual gratification. Once hooked, a vampire's prey grew increasingly dependent on it, until they craved nothing else.

My father's nostrils flared as he noticed the approaching female. He withdrew his fangs from the first thrall's wrist and shoved her off his lap, causing her to tumble from the dais in a tangle of limbs.

The tattooed thrall stepped over her, straddled my father's thighs, and proffered her arm. "My prince, I'd be honored."

He lifted her wrist to his nose and inhaled. "The honor is mine, dushenka."

Sweetheart. He yanked her close and struck with a hiss. As he gripped her arm, the ruby on his finger reflected the firelight. The jewel was thousands of years old, passed down through generations of princes. It would go to Aleksander next, assuming the Blood deemed him strong enough to rule.

The scent of blood swirled thick in the air. Suddenly, my fangs ached and saliva flooded my mouth. Biting back a grimace, I lifted my goblet and took a sip of blood wine. The taste of copper coated my tongue, and I quickly set the goblet back down.

“Something wrong with your blood wine, Niece?”

Grigory’s voice was quiet, but it cut through the sounds of feasting like an arrow. His words might have been solicitous, but there was no mistaking the hostility in his eyes. He despised anything that made Krovnosta appear weak. So, naturally, he despised me.

My heart rate sped up. “Nothing, Uncle, except I’m not really hungry.”

His fangs flashed in a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “Drink anyway. Blood is life.”

Around the table, the warriors lifted their goblets and repeated the mantra in voices that thundered off the stone walls. “Blood is life!”

Grigory gave me an expectant look.

Clenching my teeth, I lifted my wine. “Blood is life,” I murmured and took a small sip.

“A pity you can’t stomach the taste of it. The territory needs strong females to breed strong sons.” He looked toward my father’s throne and raised his voice. “It’s past time Halina was wed.”

I froze. He wanted to marry me off?

My father lifted his head. “Eh?” He licked blood from his lips. As he looked between Grigory and me, the bloodlust faded from his eyes, the red giving way to blue. His brows pulled together. “Halina?”

Surprise jolted me. He didn’t always remember my name. Occasionally, he confused me with my mother. She’d died birthing me, and I knew nothing of her, but Aleksander had once let it slip that my hair was the same dark red shade hers had been.

My father made a negative sound. “Who would have her? She can’t hunt or channel.”

My cheeks heated, and my skin prickled as dozens of eyes focused on me.

“Slow your heart rate,” Aleksander said in a voice so low it was more breath than sound. “You make yourself prey when you let them sense your fear.”

I took several deep breaths as a mix of confusion and gratitude clouded my brain. It was always that way with him. He was capable of both cruelty and kindness, and I never knew which one he’d choose to display.

Grigory spoke. “I’ve received inquiries about her. She might not make a bride but maybe a concubine. There is more than one prince willing to take her. The smaller territories are eager for an alliance with Krovnosta.”

My stomach clenched. As a concubine I’d be worse off than a thrall. My mother’s pregnancy was a rare event. Most humans couldn’t breed with vampires, but dhampirs conceived easily enough. Alliances were cemented with offspring. If Grigory convinced my father to sell me to another prince, I’d spend my days as a blood bank and broodmare.

“I’ll think on it,” my father said. “But I fail to understand why anyone would want her. She has all of our weaknesses and none of our strengths.”

Humiliation washed over me in a thick wave. Without thinking, I rubbed my fingertips over the back of my opposite hand, where the skin was discolored and wavy.

Grigory was undeterred. “Given the right sire, the weak blood can be bred out.”

My father waved a hand. “As I said, I’ll—” He made a choking sound.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Beside me, Aleksander stiffened.

My father clutched at his throat. His eyes bulged. Veins stood out under his skin.

The tattooed thrall on his lap scrambled to her feet and looked down at him with suddenly clear eyes. "Prince Sergey sends his regards." Before anyone could move, she pulled his dagger from its sheath and plunged it into her own chest.

The hall erupted into chaos.

Chapter Two

HALINA

"It's a poison called Black Settanis," Grigory said. He stood next to my father's bed with Aleksander at his side. "See how the veins in his neck have turned black? It will keep spreading. And then..."

"And then what?" Aleksander demanded.

"Death."

I put my hand over my mouth to muffle my gasp. After the thrall had taken her own life, my father had crashed to the ground, his fingers clawing at his neck. Grigory had bellowed for the warriors to detain the rest of the castle's thralls before lifting my father and channeling away.

I'd jumped from my chair, prepared to run to my room, but Aleksander had clamped a hand on my shoulder. "Come with me," he'd growled, and the world had blurred as he channeled us into our father's chamber. Before I'd steadied myself, he'd shoved me toward the door. "Don't let anyone inside."

As if I could stop a warrior from entering. Still, I'd stayed put, my heart racing as he and Grigory bent over my father's unconscious body.

Aleksander looked at Grigory now. "Impossible. Father is a Blooded prince. An immortal. No poison can kill him."

"Black Settanis can. It's harmless on the skin but toxic when ingested."

"I've never heard of it."

"You're a child. It takes a thousand years to brew a single dose."

I stared between them. Only a vampire as old as Grigory could call Aleksander a "child." My brother had been born before Columbus discovered America.

"I warned him," Grigory said, turning toward my father. "Prince Sergey is not one to trifle with. But Ludovic wouldn't listen. It's poetic in a way. Sergey used my brother's lust for female flesh to deliver his revenge."

"Is there a treatment? Some kind of antidote?"

"Nothing. Except—" Grigory fell silent, his gaze on the black lines crisscrossing my father's face. "Dragon tears are the only thing that will reverse this."

Ice slid down my spine. Information wasn't easy to come by in Krovnosta—at least not for me—but I'd heard enough about dragons to know even vampires feared them.

Fierce and powerful, they were the only true immortals in the world. Not even a beheading could kill them.

But they were a dwindling race. According to Firstborn lore, a plague had killed off their females over a thousand years ago, leaving the males to hunt for suitable replacements among the other immortal races. They mated in threes—two males and one female—and the males shared each other's beds. When I was younger, the mechanics of it had puzzled me. Then I'd grown older and realized how such a mating could happen.

And what it might look like.

The stories said the dragons were enormous males—larger than the warriors of Krovnosta. But they lusted only for one another, reserving their females for breeding. And when they bred their female, they took her together, forcing their way into every part of her body with little regard for her consent or comfort. There were terrifying stories of females plucked from their homes and confined to towers in the Highlands. Whenever I thought of it, my heart raced and my skin felt too tight.

Grigory pulled Aleksander away from the bed. "We need those tears. You know the rules of the Blood."

Anger shaded Aleksander's eyes. "This is an impossible task. The dragons despise us above all others. They think we killed their women."

I barely managed to stifle my gasp. The dragons blamed the vampires for the plague that took their females? If that was the case, they were unlikely to give Aleksander the tears. And he had to get them. Princes were chosen by the Blood—the power that flowed through every vampire's veins. It was sacred, ancient magic. It also stopped a rightful prince's heirs and relatives from rising against him. When a prince was Blooded, the magic was strongest in him—and other vampires could sense it. Until

the Blood chose a worthier prince, they would follow no other. And the Blood would never choose a prince who killed his predecessor—or willingly let him die. In a race that thrived on violence and bloodshed, it was the only thing standing between vampires and chaos.

Without the rules of the Blood, ambitious heirs would be forever plotting to usurp the throne.

Aleksander's voice was bitter. "I've waited centuries. And now, when fate drops an opportunity in my lap, I have to pretend I don't notice it."

"There is no guarantee the dragons will give us the tears," Grigory said. "But we have to try."

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

“How? We have nothing they want. They care for nothing except gold and females.”

A beat passed.

Slowly, they turned and looked at me.

My throat went dry. No. They couldn't be thinking of...what? Sacrificing me to a pair of dragons? My heart started to pound.

Red rolled over Grigory's eyes. “We have something they want. The dragons aren't picky about females. They'll rut with any woman they find, if only to determine whether she's theirs.”

I shook my head. “No. You can't ask me to do this.”

He channeled to me and gripped my arm before I'd even registered he moved. “We're not asking.”

“They'll kill me.” I looked at Aleksander over his shoulder. “Please, Brother, don't do this.” Maybe reminding him of our common parentage would tug at his heartstrings. He couldn't send his own sister to be mauled and mounted by a pair of beasts.

Beasts who believed vampires were responsible for annihilating their women.

“They won't kill you,” he said, his gaze dispassionate as he moved to Grigory's side. “Their king signed a treaty that prohibits such things.” He kept his eyes on me as he

addressed Grigory. “The chances of her being fated for a pair of those creatures is slim to the point of absurdity. You’re basically offering them a night or two of diversion. What if it’s not enough for them to hand over the tears?”

My chest tightened, my hope for him feeling any kind of kinship fading to dust. He didn’t care how I fared in this trade Grigory proposed. He considered my pain and humiliation a “diversion” that might tempt the dragons into helping him.

Grigory met his gaze. “She doesn’t have to succeed. The Blood only requires that you try.”

I held my breath as some unspoken exchange seemed to pass between them. After a moment, Aleksander nodded.

Grigory hauled me onto my toes and bared his fangs. “You do this, or I’ll rip out your throat.”

Nausea rose swift and hot. He didn’t make idle threats. If I refused to go to the dragons, he’d kill me. My vampire half allowed me to heal some injuries, but I couldn’t survive massive blood loss. If he ripped my throat out, I’d die—but I’d live long enough to watch all the blood in my body spread over the flagstones before I drew my last breath.

So my choices were sacrifice or certain death.

“All right,” I said. “I’ll do it.”

* * *

Ten minutes later, I stood alone in the castle courtyard with the distant sound of thralls’ screams drifting around me. The warriors had confined them to the Great Hall

so they could ferret out any other would-be assassins. If the agonized shrieks were any indication, Krovnosta was going to need new thralls come morning.

The Hall's double doors swung open, and the wails swelled as Aleksander strode down the steps with a warrior at his side.

I clenched my jaw so my teeth wouldn't chatter. The air was warm, but a chill had seeped beneath my skin and now clung to my bones.

I shoved my discomfort aside as my brother and the other male reached me. "Aleks," I said, opting for the nickname I'd sometimes used as a child. "I'm begging you to reconsider. You know what the dragons will do to me. And I'm a—" I dropped my gaze as embarrassment flooded me. My inexperience was a favorite topic of mockery around the court.

Aleksander heaved an impatient sigh. "Relax, Halina. The dragons can't detain you indefinitely. It's baked into the treaty their Mad King signed to end the War of the Firstborn. Kidnapping and magic are off limits when it comes to obtaining females. Once they realize you're incompatible, they have to let you go."

My head spun with all the new information he was throwing at me. The war had happened a thousand years ago. I knew nothing of mad kings or treaties, only that dragons were deadly and unstoppable.

And I most definitely didn't want to end up between two of them.

My chest constricted with fresh fear. "Aleks—"

"Where is your sense of loyalty?" he snapped. "You're doing this for Father."

"I'm doing it because Grigory threatened to rip my throat out."

His gaze was steady as the screams of the thralls echoed around us.

I waited, my stomach twisting with nerves. We were hardly close, but he'd saved my life once. Surely, he harbored some affection for me—enough, at least, to change his mind about throwing me to a pair of dragons.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

“Please, Aleks.”

His mouth tightened. “I must do as the Blood demands.”

My heart sank.

He gestured to the warrior at his side. “This is Viktor. He’ll take you to Scotland.”

“You’re not taking me?”

His dark brows pulled together. “Of course not. I’m Ludovic’s heir. It would be folly to put myself in harm’s way, even for a moment. Besides, I’ve never been to the Highlands. The closest I could get you is London.”

I bit my tongue so I wouldn’t point out he had no problem putting me in harm’s way. That was a given. But his other excuse was sound. Vampires could only channel to places they’d been before.

And I couldn’t channel anywhere at all, which meant I had to depend on Viktor, who looked like he’d rather be interrogating thralls than shuttling Prince Ludovic’s bastard daughter around the globe. He stared at me with reddish eyes and the thinly veiled contempt I’d grown used to over the years.

Aleksander swept an assessing look down my gown. “Well,” he said almost to himself, “it’ll have to do.” He looked at Viktor and jerked his chin toward me. “Take her.”

Viktor reached for me.

“Wait!” I grabbed Aleksander’s sleeve, my words spilling forth in a low rush. “If I’m successful—if I get these tears—I make my own choices. No more concubine talk.”

He looked at my fingers on his arm, then lifted his gaze to mine. There was anger in his eyes...but also a glimmer of something that might have been respect. “You dare to bargain with me, Sister?” he asked softly.

“It’s a request.” My heart pounded, but I held his gaze.

“It sounds like a demand. One you’re in no position to make.”

“You need me,” I said, surprised my voice wasn’t shaking. He could beat me for challenging him in front of a warrior. He’d done it before. But my bravado seemed to intrigue him, so I sucked in a breath and kept going. “You want to protect your inheritance. I want to control my own destiny. I’ll do whatever I can to get the tears for you. All I ask is your promise to help me when I return.”

He lifted his free hand.

I flinched, but he merely took my arm and nudged me backwards until my back bumped something hard and solid.

Viktor. The warrior looped a meaty forearm around my shoulders and pulled me against his chest.

Aleksander stepped back. “I’ll help you, Halina.” The tips of his fangs showed as he smiled. “If you return.”

Viktor tightened his grip.

The world fell away.

Chapter Three

HALINA

One second I stood in my father's courtyard, the next I was in a moonlit clearing.

And a storybook castle lay just ahead, its windows blazing with light.

Viktor's deep chuckle rumbled against my back. "Looks like the dragons are home."

I wrenched away and turned in a slow circle. My heart raced, but I didn't bother trying to slow it. He wasn't going to risk damaging me—not when I was supposed to be a diversion for the dragons.

The clearing appeared to be a low point in a valley surrounded by rugged hills. Stars blazed overhead, filling the night sky with more light than I'd ever seen in Krovnosta. It was colder here, too, which surprised me.

The castle was obviously old—with a drawbridge and battlements—but it had been modernized. The electric lights cut through the mist that huddled on the ground and clung to my hair and gown.

I pitched my voice as low as possible. "Why this place?"

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Viktor didn't bother speaking quietly. "This is the only dragon lair I've been to." He looked up at the castle. "One's as good as any, I suppose."

I followed the direction of his gaze. The castle boasted thick, square towers—the perfect landing spot for a dragon. My heart began to pound.

Viktor swung back to me, and his incisors gleamed as he grinned. "Don't worry, dhampir, their kind would rather bugger each other than a female as puny as you."

He channeled away.

My stomach dropped. I was alone in the Scottish Highlands—a world away from Krovnosta—without a means of getting home.

I peered through the mist, my gaze on the looming castle. What was I supposed to do now, just knock on the door? If what Aleksander said was true and the dragons blamed the vampires for killing their females, they were unlikely to welcome one into their home.

Let alone hand over their precious tears.

The mist swirled thicker, and my heart hammered against my ribcage. Needing something to hang onto, I clutched my gown in my fists. Even in the darkness, the grass under my feet was lush and green. In the distance, moonlight sparkled on the surface of a lake.

A familiar sense of longing filled me, and I found myself straining forward, eager to

get a better look. Krovnosta was surrounded by mountains, but I'd heard the thralls speak of the sea. Everything about my father's court seemed heavy. What would it be like to wade into all that water and float, free and weightless, without a care in the world?

Fog drifted before me, obscuring my view of the lake and shocking me out of my daydream. No matter how beautiful, this was no time to gawk at my surroundings. I was helpless—even more so than usual. And I had no food or weapons. Not that the latter would have done me much good. Even if I knew how to wield one, weapons were useless against dragons. On the rare occasions my father spoke of them, he lamented that they couldn't be killed.

And now I was meant to offer myself to not one but two indestructible creatures.

"I can't do this," I said, my voice a pitiful whimper in the quiet clearing. But if I didn't get those tears, my father would die. I couldn't go back to Krovnosta empty-handed—

My breath caught. I couldn't go back to Krovnosta...but did I really want to?

I cast my gaze around the clearing. The rocky hills stretched in all directions, but there had to be a road in there somewhere. I could follow one until I reached a human town. If I was careful, I could pass for human.

Of course, I'd have to find somewhere to stay when the sun rose. That might prove difficult, considering I had no money. I didn't even have an ID, whatever that was. The thralls spoke of it sometimes—some kind of paperwork humans carried to buy things and get on airplanes.

I hugged my midsection. Who was I kidding? I didn't know the first thing about the human world. How could I ever hope to survive in it? And as much as I disliked

blood, my body needed it. In some cruel twist of evolution, dhampirs couldn't go without it as long as purebred vampires. But we couldn't die of starvation, either. We just grew progressively weaker, until we couldn't move or speak.

That had been one of my earliest lessons as a child.

Defeat rushed at me. I might not want to return to my father's territory, but mingling with humans wasn't an option. I knew little about their world, but I knew blood donation was highly regulated. And I lacked the vampires' ability to lure and enthrall prey, so I couldn't take what I needed from the vein, either.

Tears burned my throat, and the castle blurred.

I rubbed at my eyes. But the castle stayed blurry.

No...not blurry. Misty.

The hair on my nape lifted. While I'd been feeling sorry for myself, the white fog had surrounded me.

Only now it was joined by black—and it was too thick to be natural.

I stumbled backwards, then turned to run.

"Not so fast, little leech," a deep voice said just as a hand clamped down on my shoulder.

A scream lodged in my throat as I was spun around and faced with a broad male chest.

A bare male chest.

Oh gods. Whoever had me was nude—and huge. Trembling, I let my gaze travel up and up...until it reached a square jaw and a pair of silver eyes that danced with tiny flames.

Not human. Not anywhere close.

The scream broke free, and I jerked my shoulder from the giant's grip.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Or tried to. It was like wrestling with a mountain.

In a flash, he pinned my hands behind my back in one of his. The position thrust my breasts against his chest, making my fear-stiffened nipples poke into his pecs.

“Let me go!” My heart raced so fast it was difficult to speak.

“Not a chance.” He gripped my chin with his free hand. “Are there others?” When I gaped at him, he scowled and gave me a little shake. “Who’s with you?”

“N-No one! I swear!”

“As if I’d trust the word of a—” He cut himself off, his expression frozen in something akin to shock.

I froze, too. It seemed safer than continuing to struggle and possibly provoking his ire.

“I dinnae believe it,” he murmured, his accent so thick it took me a second to unravel his words. But I couldn’t unravel his sudden shift in demeanor. He stared, his gaze so transfixed the fine hairs on my arms lifted. His nostrils flared, as if he tested my scent. The silvery eyes searched my face, and his blond brows pulled together. The color matched his wavy hair, which was pushed back from a wide forehead.

He was handsome, I realized with a start. Gorgeous, actually, with long, thick eyelashes and a firm but sensual mouth. His cheekbones were high, and golden stubble covered his jaw, giving him a roguish air.

Wait. What was wrong with me? A dragon—because he couldn't be anything else—had me in his grasp and I was admiring his looks?

I struggled again, but he didn't seem to notice. With a flex of his muscles, he hauled me more tightly against him. Then he plunged his face to my neck and inhaled.

All the breath left my lungs. Shivers coursed over my skin, as if every nerve ending had been jolted awake.

His body went rigid. At the same moment, something very hard and very big nudged my thigh.

I began to shake.

Slowly, he lifted his head. "Of all things, a vampire." A smile curved his lips, and then his chest shook as he began to laugh. "Oh, Bram is going to love this."

Bram?

The other one. Of course. Somewhere nearby, there was another male just like him. Another muscular giant who may or may not be wearing clothes.

"Please," I said through a throat gone dry. "Let me go."

His smile held, but the amusement in his eyes turned to something softer. If I hadn't known better, I might have thought it was...tenderness. "Ah, little leech, that is the one thing I cannae do. Fate gave you to me, and I mean to keep you."

Fate... What was he talking about?

Overcome with nerves, I licked my lips.

The flames flared back to life in his pupils, and the bulge against my thigh swelled larger.

My head spun. He'd gone from angry to...turned on?

Against my will, my gaze drifted down.

I felt my eyes go wide. I'd seen my father's warriors in various states of undress, but none of them compared to the male who held me. His shaft was impossibly long and thick, with prominent veins running along the length. He could split a female in two.

Could split me in two—and there was nothing I could do about it.

And he wouldn't care how the act felt for me. My uncle's voice flooded my head. "The dragons aren't picky about females. They'll rut with any woman they find, if only to determine whether she's theirs."

Tremors raced over my skin, until my bones threatened to shake apart. My heart pounded so quickly I felt lightheaded. Black huddled at the edges of my vision. I'd had no dinner, and the few sips of blood wine hadn't been enough to sate me.

Can't pass out. I absolutely could not lose consciousness in the arms of a dragon.

The giant frowned. "Yer breathin' too fast, lassie."

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

His voice echoed around me, the words overlapping.

Trapped. There was no escape. Not from a creature that couldn't be killed.

The blackness loomed closer.

I strained, struggling to beat it back. But it was no use. The last of my strength fled.

And the blackness swallowed me whole.

Chapter Four

FERGUS

She'd fainted.

For a moment, I couldn't believe it. I'd finally found my fated female, and she'd taken one look at my shaft and passed out.

Was that good or bad?

There was no time to analyze her reaction. The moment she regained consciousness, she could channel out of my arms and into thin air, flitting halfway across the globe before I even realized she was gone.

At the thought, my beast roared to the surface, determined to secure our mate.

“Take it easy,” I told it in my mind. The beast didn’t communicate with speech, but it would sense the meaning behind my words. “There is nowhere she can go where we won’t find her.”

Especially since her scent was so unique. Unable to help myself, I lowered my head to her neck and inhaled again. Immediately, a sense of rightness flooded me. “MATE,” my beast said in its way, and I found myself nuzzling the soft skin under her ear. Anything to draw more of her delicious essence into my lungs.

It had been the same with Bram. I’d brushed past him on the training field all those years ago, and I’d nearly gone to my knees as certainty landed thick and heavy on my shoulders.

But he’d smelled of fire and cedar and sex. This little leech smelled like...

I lifted my head, confusion swirling. There was the rich, slightly flowery scent of incense common to all vampires. And there were certainly enough pheromones under her skin to make my cock throb with need.

But there was something else, too, and I couldn’t place it.

She stirred, moaning.

A mystery for another time. Like after I’d tied her down so she couldn’t channel.

I swung her into my arms and strode toward the castle, scanning for other vampires as I went. It was almost impossible to believe she was alone. If I hadn’t realized she was my mate, I’d already be interrogating her. But her scent had caught me off guard, momentarily making me forget my surroundings and the strangeness of finding a female vampire alone and unprotected.

In fact, it was unusual to see any leeches this far from their hidden realm in the Ural Mountains. Clannish and secretive, they rarely ventured into the human world, and only then when they needed blood slaves. The males I'd encountered were tall and powerful, with sharp fangs and red-sheened eyes.

Not hers, though, I thought, stealing a look at her as I crossed the courtyard and climbed the steps to the Old Keep. Her eyes were closed now, but they'd been a deep blue when she stared up at me. And she wasn't tall, either. On the contrary, she was a slight little thing—almost delicate. Five foot nothing to my six foot two.

A fierce rush of protectiveness surged hard in my chest, and I gathered her more tightly against me as I entered the castle. If someone had told me yesterday I'd be cuddling with a vampire, I would have shifted on the spot and singed their eyebrows off. And yet here I was, cozying up to a leech.

A beautiful leech, I mentally amended. Her wine-red hair spilled around a pale but lovely face with arched brows, a pert nose, and the poutiest lips I'd ever seen. She had a mouth just begging for a man's—

Some sixth sense kicked in, and I yanked my gaze up seconds before I smacked into a stone pillar. With a quick glance to make sure the vampire was undisturbed, I put on a burst of speed and streaked toward my quarters. There would be time aplenty to memorize her features. Right now, I had to make sure she couldn't run.

And there was the small matter of alerting my other mate to her presence.

Five minutes later, the vampire was in my bed, her hands and feet bound, while I risked looking away from her long enough to text Bram on the encrypted chat app he insisted on using.

Fergeddaboutit: Can you come to my room? It's an emergency.

Immediately, three dots appeared on the screen. Before his reply could come through, I typed again.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Fergeddaboudit: A good emergency, though.

The dots disappeared—then reappeared.

A smile tugged at my lips. There was nothing more enjoyable than keeping Bram McGregor on his toes.

BMcGregor: Fergus, there is no such thing as a good emergency.

I rolled my eyes and typed.

Fergeddaboudit: Yes, there is. Snack emergencies. Sex emergencies. I distinctly remember you pronouncing the second one “good.”

This time, the dots stayed there a long time. My smile tugged harder.

BMcGregor: If this is about you being horny, you’re going to have to wait.

“The nerve,” I murmured, my thumbs moving.

Fergeddaboudit: It’s not.

I glanced at my erection tenting the front of the sweatpants I’d thrown on. Well, it wasn’t entirely about me being horny.

BMcGregor: I don’t believe that.

Shit. He knew me too well. Eying the vampire, I started typing again.

Fergeddaboudit: Just come upstairs. You'll like this, I promise.

I tucked my phone in my pocket, then grinned when it buzzed with an incoming message. Knowing Bram, he'd send a few more argumentative texts, then curse and do exactly as I'd asked. He cared little for surprises—not necessarily because he disliked being caught unaware, but because he hated that he had a nosy streak.

He denied it, of course. So I considered it my duty to remind him as often as possible.

The vampire's eyelids fluttered, and she released another soft moan that went straight to my cock. As if drawn by a magnet, I drifted forward until I was next to the bed. I'd placed her on her side when I bound her arms behind her back. The position was probably still uncomfortable, but it was hopefully temporary. Once I got her promise not to channel, I could untie her.

At least until she asked me to tie her up again. Which, if my plans panned out the way I hoped, she most definitely would.

In the meantime, I let my gaze roam her luscious body. Her simple black gown covered her from neck to ankle, but the material clung to her curves, hugging her breasts and hips. In the canopied bed with her red hair spread behind her, she looked like a medieval princess—or a captive in a dark version of Sleeping Beauty.

Just as wicked thoughts formed in my head, she opened her eyes and locked gazes with me.

“You,” she gasped, the tips of her little fangs showing.

Fuck, they were cute. And now I was hard as a boulder.

“I’m Fergus Devlin,” I said. “And you are?”

“Let me go,” she rasped, a hint of an accent in her voice.

“An unusual name, lass. Want to take another crack at it?”

She tugged at the zip ties holding her wrists. Her chest rose and fell as she began breathing heavy from her efforts. Panic laced her voice. “Please don’t do this.”

I frowned. “I’m not going to harm you.” I’d sooner cut off my hands.

“Then let me go!”

“Not an option. But I won’t touch you without your permission.”

She stilled as she seemed to think that over. Her voice went low and solemn. “You won’t?”

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Gods, the uncertainty in her tone was enough to gut me. I wanted to scoop her into my arms, but it was obvious she wouldn't welcome it. "You have my vow."

Some of the fear left her eyes. "Please... I-I need to go home as soon as possible."

My hopes for her swift acceptance of the mate bond turned to ash. I should have expected as much. A vampire of her beauty was probably already pledged to another.

Possessiveness whipped through my chest, and it was an effort to keep the growl from my voice. "Do you have a man?"

"Wh-What?" Her eyes went wide.

"A male." I sucked in oxygen in a bid to calm my voice. "Are you mated?"

"No. No, of course not."

My beast settled down.

She swallowed. "Please let me go."

"We've discussed this already. I can't release you. We're mated." Well, not yet. Not technically. Sealing the mate bond required Bram's presence and a certain, ah, sexual position.

Probably best not to broach that subject at the moment.

Something akin to horror flooded her gaze. “You think I’m your mate?”

“I know it. There is no think when it comes to this, trust me.”

For a long moment, she just stared.

I stared back. She’d had a shock, and she was in a vulnerable position. The least I could do was let her dictate the flow of conversation.

She darted a look around. “Is there another one? I thought you came in pairs.”

I couldn’t hide my smile. “Sometimes. Or one right after the other. Twice on a good night.”

Her brows drew together, and if I hadn’t known better I might have thought she was confused.

But I immediately dismissed the idea. There was no chance she was innocent. The vampires’ orgies were well known, as was the way they drugged and then satisfied their prey.

The possessiveness flared in my chest again, and this time my beast stirred with it. No longer would she “satisfy” any other male. Whether she willed it or no, she’d get everything she needed from Bram and me.

The door opened, and the male himself strode in, his face a mask of exasperation. “This better be good, Fergus, or I swear I’ll—” He stopped in his tracks.

I waited a moment, soaking in the pleasure of seeing him stunned and speechless. A strangled sound had me swinging my gaze back to the bed, where the vampire watched him with an equally stunned expression.

“This is Bram McGregor,” I told her. “Your other mate.”

Chapter Five

BRAM

For a second, I was speechless. Fergus’s “good surprise” was a leech. A tiny leech he’d apparently tied up and stashed in his bed. I stared at her, scarcely able to believe my eyes.

Then his words penetrated the shock clouding my brain.

“This is Bram McGregor. Your other mate.”

I tore my gaze away from the vampire so I could frown at him. “Mate?”

“Mate,” he said firmly, his silver eyes twinkling. He was obviously relishing his little prank. It wasn’t unusual for us to enjoy the occasional woman in our bed, but we stuck to humans. Females from the Firstborn Races brought too much trouble—like vengeful relatives. But our trysts were harmless encounters that never extended beyond one night. We both awaited the one woman meant for us, and we weren’t interested in forming any kind of bond, however satisfying, with any but our fated female.

“This isn’t funny,” I growled.

His blond eyebrows went up. “Do I look like I’m laughing?”

“Fergus—”

“So skeptical.” He looked at the ceiling, and he seemed to address some kind of higher power when he asked, “What have I ever done to deserve such suspicion?” Before I could reply, he smiled at me and switched to Gaelic. “Go smell her if you don’t believe me.”

My heart sped up. Slowly, I turned my gaze to the vampire. Was he serious? Was she...

“Ours,” he said softly. He couldn’t read thoughts—neither of us possessed that ability—but after three centuries together we didn’t really need it.

And it hit me.

He wouldn’t lie about something like this. Which meant my fated female was steps away.

My feet carried me forward before I realized I was moving. As I approached the bed, the vampire regarded me with a pair of wide blue eyes.

Her scent reached my nose before I reached her, and I stumbled.

Fergus's warm hand landed on my shoulder before I could fall.

"It's all right," he murmured in Gaelic as he steadied me. He squeezed my bicep. "Come on. In all things, we go together."

I looked at him sharply.

He gazed back with open affection.

"You remember that," I said, my voice gone scratchy.

"Course I do. You think I'd forget our first night together?" Gaze still on mine, he tipped his head toward the bed. "It's another night of firsts for us. Our wait is over."

Too fucking right it is. With excitement coursing through my veins, I went to the bed and looked down at our female. Her scent swirled around me—a heady combination of incense and something feminine and delicate that made my cock spring to attention.

But there was something else, too. I inhaled deeply and frowned, struggling to puzzle it out.

Her gaze darted between Fergus and me. "Please," she said, her voice low and melodious and flavored with the Slavic accent common to vampires. "I'm not what you think I am."

"Oh yes, you are," I said, my dick growing harder by the second. She was a sumptuous little doll—all ivory skin and sweetly rounded curves. And that hair like fire. How fucking appropriate. "MATE," my beast roared, urging me to hike up her heavy skirts to see if her legs were as shapely as the rest of her. To spread her thighs wide and bury my aching cock in her heat. She belonged to me—me and Fergus.

Fate had given us a vampire for a mate.

And yet...there it was again. There was something off about her scent.

I sat on the edge of the bed. “You’re not entirely a vampire, are you?”

She started to shrink back, then seemed to steel herself—at least as much as she could in her position. “I’m a dhampir.” She lifted her chin ever so slightly. “My mother was human.”

“That’s it,” Fergus said on an exhalation. “I wondered why she smelled different.”

She bristled. “I don’t smell.”

“It’s nothing bad, lass.” He winked at her. “To us, you smell irresistible.”

She stared at him like he’d just sprouted horns.

Dhampir. It had been decades since I’d heard of one being alive. “What’s your name?” As I spoke, I realized I had a dozen other questions. Namely, what the hell was she doing in the Highlands alone in the middle of the night?

She hesitated. “Untie me and I’ll tell you.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

I glanced at Fergus long enough to catch the spark of amusement in his eyes.

But she must not have, because she quickly lowered her gaze. “I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking.” A blush stained her cheeks.

My breath caught. Fergus made a low sound, and I knew his thoughts matched mine.

She’s afraid. But it wasn’t the ordinary fear a captive might feel. This was muscle memory. She’d challenged someone in the past and had suffered for it. I’d bet the castle on it.

My beast rose to the surface, furious that anyone had dared to harm our mate. I drew a deep breath and pushed it down. “Another time,” I promised it. Right now, Fergus and I needed to appear as non-threatening as possible.

Moving slowly, I put a hand under the female’s chin and lifted her gaze to mine. “No apology necessary. You said nothing wrong. As for untying you, I want your promise not to channel. And we’ll be needing more information besides your name.”

She looked between us again, as though she wanted to keep both of us within sight. The pink in her cheeks deepened. “I can’t channel. I’ve never been able to.”

Truth. Sitting this close, I didn’t have to sift through scents to determine if she was sincere. Her words carried the clean smell of earth after a spring rain, and I knew she’d spoken honestly.

Fergus knew it, too, because he leaned down and snapped the tie on her ankles. “Best

sit up for your wrists,” he murmured. “I can tell you from experience it hurts like a bitch once the blood starts flowing again.”

“You’ve been bound like this?” she asked, her voice tentative as I helped her into a sitting position.

“A time or two.”

But he’d enjoyed it. I hid a smile as I pinched the plastic around her wrists and let heat build under my skin. A second later, the zip tie fell away.

She gasped, then examined her skin as if checking for burns. When she found none, she regarded me warily.

Fergus folded his arms over his bare chest. “We upheld our end of the bargain, lass. Now you owe us some answers. We’ll start with your name.”

She drew a deep breath. “Halina of Krovnosta. Prince Ludovic is my father. He’s dying, and dragon tears are the only thing that will heal him. I was sent here to negotiate with you.”

Fergus’s eyes widened—a reflection of the surprise I felt. She’d just dropped a lot of information, but one element captured my attention above all others.

“A negotiation involves an exchange,” I said. “Assuming we give you the tears, what are you prepared to give us in return?”

She took another breath, and now her cheeks went nearly as red as her hair. “My...body. I was told to offer myself in exchange for the tears.”

Chapter Six

HALINA

I'd thought one tall, muscle-bound dragon staring me down with lust-filled eyes was terrifying.

Now that two of them were doing it, I couldn't control my runaway heart rate.

It didn't seem possible, but Bram was even bigger than Fergus. In fact, he was the largest male I'd ever seen. His white button-down shirt strained over his powerful arms and broad shoulders. Even seated, he still towered over me. And though he'd been kind enough to free my wrists—by melting the tie with nothing more than his skin—he exuded an aura of danger that Fergus lacked.

Maybe it was simply the contrast in their coloring. Whereas Fergus was blond, Bram's hair was as dark as the ravens that sometimes circled the towers of Krovnosta.

There was nothing dark about his eyes, though. Green as emeralds, they were fringed by thick black lashes almost too long for a male.

But I hardly noticed his lashes or his captivating irises. I was too focused on the tiny flames flickering among the green. The fire had been there when he first approached the bed, and it had reappeared just now—when I said I was supposed to surrender my body for the tears.

The same strange lights danced in Fergus's eyes, reminding me they thought I was their mate. As in, the fated female all dragons searched for.

And then bred in painful and degrading ways until they got the offspring they needed to rebuild their race.

My heart pumped faster. They were wrong, of course. Or, more likely, they were toying with me in some kind of cruel game.

But why were they waiting to pounce? I was already in their bed. There was nothing to stop them from claiming me. They might not even give me the tears. After they'd had their fun, they could send me back to Krovnosta empty-handed, where Grigory would promptly remove my head for failing in my mission.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Tears burned my eyes.

“Och,” Fergus said softly. “None of that now.” He reached for me.

Instinct kicked in, and I scrambled back before I could stop myself. My long skirts twisted around my legs, exposing my ankles and calves.

At once, two sets of male eyes focused there. Bram stood.

I tried to scuttle back even more, but my bunched up gown prevented it. “You don’t want me,” I blurted. “I’m just a half-breed.”

“Hardly an impediment,” Fergus said. “So are we.”

“But...” I frowned. “You’re dragons.”

“Aye, and there hasn’t been a full-blooded dragon born in over a thousand years.”

Of course, I thought, feeling stupid. There were no female dragons left. Because they think vampires killed them. My heart sped up again.

Bram’s dark brows pulled together. “You cannae fear us, Halina.”

It took me a second to untangle his accent, which was thick but strangely...appealing. They both spoke in a lilting sort of way that sounded almost like music.

But he was wrong about my fear. Half-breed or not, I had every reason to be afraid.

There was nothing kind or gentle about dragons. My father was one of the most renowned warriors in the world, and even he feared them.

Using my palms, I inched backwards ever so slightly.

“I wouldn’t,” Fergus said softly. “Unless you’d like us to bind you again.”

I froze. Talking. I had to keep them talking. I licked my lips. “If you’re not full-blooded dragons, then what are you?” Oh gods, maybe their other halves were something even more terrifying.

“Our mothers were werewolves,” Bram said, “but dragon blood runs true. We inherit little maternal DNA.”

“Probably because every dragon has two fathers,” Fergus said.

My gut clenched at the reminder of how they bred their women. Never had I been so desperate to channel. To simply will myself somewhere else. I bit the inside of my cheek so I wouldn’t beg for mercy. Side by side, they were an intimidating sight, both of them so tall I had to tip my head back to meet their eyes. I wasn’t sure where to look, so I found myself darting my gaze back and forth between them, waiting for one to make a move.

“Enough about us for now,” Bram said, something in his face letting me know he wasn’t fooled by my attempt to distract them. “You said Ludovic is dying.” A dark eyebrow went up. “I’m interested to know what malady is capable of striking down a millennia-old Blooded prince. And be honest, lass. We can scent lies just as easily as we can scent our mates.”

I forced myself to hold his gaze even as anxiety prickled over my skin. If Bram was familiar with my father, then he was probably aware of the scandals that plagued

Krovnosta on a regular basis. “He seduced the wife of Prince Sergey of Sevolod. Prince Sergey retaliated by sending an assassin. Her skin was coated with Black Settanis.”

Bram and Fergus exchanged a look, and I knew from their expressions that Grigory had told the truth about the poison.

“My father will die without the tears,” I said. “And...”

“And?” Fergus prompted.

I swallowed the lump in my throat. “I’ll die if I return to Krovnosta without them.”

Both men tensed, an eerie alertness settling over them. It was inhuman. Almost reptilian. And I suddenly understood what Bram meant when he said dragon blood ran true.

The hair on my nape lifted.

His voice was soft—cordial, even—but there was no mistaking the steel underneath it. Flames danced in his eyes, and he curled his hands into fists. “Someone threatened you?”

“M-My uncle,” I managed, unable to look away from the twin fires in his pupils. Maybe it was my imagination, but he seemed to vibrate with fury.

Fergus put a hand on Bram’s shoulder and murmured something in a language that sounded like a more lyrical version of their accented English.

Some of the awful tension lifted, and then Bram gave a short nod.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Fergus looked at me. “You’ll have the tears, lass. We’ll send a messenger to Krovnosta this night.”

Shock coursed through me, followed by swift relief. “Thank you.” They were really going to let me go?

My stomach chose that moment to release a growl so loud it seemed to shake the bed.

I slapped a hand over my midsection as my cheeks heated. “Sorry. With everything that happened tonight, I missed dinner.”

“No’ to worry,” Fergus said. “I’ll bring you something as soon as you’re settled in your room.”

My relief evaporated. “But you said you’d give me the tears.”

“We’ll send a vial to Krovnosta. But you’re staying here.”

No. Protests welled up, overpowering my fear. “You can’t keep me here against my will. There’s a treaty.”

His lips curved in a smile that couldn’t be mistaken for anything but pure triumph. “Aye, there is. It prevents our kind from kidnapping females or using magic to lure them to us. It says nothing about taking females who seek us out.”

My throat went dry as the little flames flared to life in his eyes once more.

“And you most definitely sought us, Halina. So we’ll be keeping you.”

Chapter Seven

BRAM

Seventy-two hours of hell.

That was the most apt description for the past three days—and I’d felt every second.

More accurately, my cock had felt every second. Scowling, I adjusted myself while I shut off the TV in my suite and tossed the remote aside. Two hundred channels and nothing to watch. Not that anything the humans dreamed up could entertain me. The current object of my fantasies was in the suite next to mine—and completely uninterested in being anything other than a “house guest.”

Halina had been docile enough when Fergus showed her to her room. But she’d been stubborn as a mule about leaving it.

“Let me handle her,” Fergus had said in Gaelic that first night, when she told us she’d be killed if she returned to Ludovic’s territory without the tears. “She’s frightened and probably overwhelmed at the thought of having two mates. Divide and conquer, hmm?”

His plan had seemed wise in the moment—especially with my beast so close to the surface. “CLAIM,” it had roared, impatient to protect her. The urge had been so overwhelming, and the beast’s wishes so acute, I’d struggled to stay in human form. Fearful of losing control and terrifying her further, I’d let Fergus take the lead.

But as the nights wore on and she insisted on staying in her room—alone—my beast grew restless.

It didn't help that her scent tormented me every time I drew a breath.

I did so now, letting her essence fill my lungs. Instantly, my cock tightened to the point of pain.

Incense and honeysuckle. Sharp and sweet. A fitting contrast for a creature who seemed to straddle two worlds. "Seemed to" was the only way to put it. Because I knew next to nothing about my new mate. Halina of Krovnosta was in my home and my mind, but I needed her in my bed.

Under me. Crying out my name.

And with each passing day, my beast fought the metaphysical bonds I imposed on it.

I ran the heel of my hand over my erection. Something had to give or I was going to—

A shadow passed over the window, followed by a loud whirl of air resembling a helicopter rotor.

But it was nothing of the sort.

I stood and went to the window just in time to see Fergus swoop and drag a talon over the surface of the loch. Water sprayed, reflecting the light of the setting sun.

"Show off," I muttered.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

But he had every right to preen. He was a beautiful creature—all silver and blue. His scales rippled with various shades of the two colors, ranging from shimmering argent to deep indigo. Rows of black horns ran from his head to his tail, which sent sparks trailing over the water.

He dipped his talon below the surface again, then pumped his wings, propelling his body into the air before wheeling and shifting to shadow form. For a split second, a black, dragon-shaped cloud hovered above the loch. Then it tightened into a column and streaked toward the castle.

I stepped back just as it streamed through the window and shifted into a nude Fergus. “Where have you been all day?” I demanded.

He ran a hand through his hair, smoothing the windblown waves. “Oh, here and there.” He looked toward my desk in the corner of the suite. “I left a note.”

“It said you were going for a walk.”

“And I did.”

“For eight hours? If you haven’t noticed, our mate won’t speak to us.”

He rested his fingertips on his waist—a pose that, given his nudity, should have made him look ridiculous. But it didn’t, and my nape heated at the sight of his sweat-sheened muscles and rippling abs. My gaze wandered lower, and desire struck like a whip. Like all our kind, he was smooth between his legs, giving me an unimpeded view of his thick shaft and the heavy sac nestled underneath.

“It’s daytime,” he murmured.

“What?” I asked distractedly. I pulled my gaze up to find his eyes alight with something suspiciously close to humor.

“Our mate is a dhampir,” he said, exaggerating his words as if he spoke to a small child. “They sleep during the day.” He moved past me, his rounded ass drawing my gaze like a lodestone. “Really, Bram, I expected you to know that.”

I clenched my jaw as he walked toward the bathroom. “I do ken that. Where are you going?”

“To take a shower,” he said without turning around.

As if he didn’t have a bathroom of his own, I thought as he disappeared. In fact, his was far nicer than mine. He’d remodeled it several times over the decades, upgrading whenever new technology appeared on the market. His latest gadget was a Japanese bidet that worked with an app and could probably communicate with the space station. “Fucking glorious,” he’d declared it after dragging me into his bathroom so he could demonstrate all the settings. “Beats taking a shite in a chamber pot, I’ll tell you that.”

So it made no sense for him to invade my space. It was almost like he was daring me to—

“Follow,” I murmured, my fingers going to the buttons of my shirt. I shed my trousers and boxer briefs as I crossed the suite, and I was nude by the time I entered the bathroom.

Fergus turned as I opened the shower door and stepped inside. “Took you long enough.” He faced the spray again and tipped his head back, letting water course

down his chest.

It coursed down his back and ass, too, and I bit back a groan. He was perfect. Fucking perfect. When we were first mated, I'd thought my attraction would...not wane, exactly. More like evolve. I'd expected that first rush of passion to mature as we did.

But it hadn't. Even now, it was all I could do to keep my hands off him.

So I didn't.

With a sigh, I stepped close and grasped his hips. "You could have just asked me to join you," I said, kissing the spot where his neck met his shoulder.

He released a sigh of his own. "Now what would be the fun in that?"

A typical Fergus answer. He sought fun in everything. Enjoyed life more than anyone I'd ever met. The French called it "joie de vivre."

I called it "Fergus."

I pressed my hips into his ass and slid the length of my shaft up and down his crease. "I can think of several other ways to have fun."

"Oh?" He tipped his head to the side as I nuzzled his neck. "You want to share with the rest of the class, or is this something you're keeping to yourself?"

I reached up and angled the shower head away so it didn't blast us in the face. Then I grabbed his shoulders and spun him around. "You tricked me into coming in here," I said, pushing him against the tiled wall and bracing myself with a palm next to his head. I had three inches and about fifty pounds on him, and I used both to my advantage now, pinning his body in place with mine.

His silver eyes gleamed with anticipation. Water droplets clung to his lips and eyelashes. “Aye, I did. You’ve been a cranky bastard for days. It was either fuck you or fight you.”

“And you chose fucking.”

Humor—and a hint of a challenge—gleamed in his eyes. “You complaining?”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

“No,” I murmured. “Not at all.” I lowered my mouth to his.

He met me hungrily, an eager grunt rumbling from his chest.

I pushed inside, stroking my tongue against his. Licking the water from his lips as I ground my dick against his.

His groan filled my mouth, and he reached between us as if to grip my shaft.

“Mmph,” was all I could manage before tearing my mouth away and resting my forehead against his. Chest heaving, I muttered, “Not yet. I’ll come if you touch me.”

His lips curved in a sexy grin and his breath fluttered against my lips as he murmured, “Then I guess you’ll have to touch me then.”

“I can do better than that.” I dragged my mouth down his neck, savoring the scrap of stubble as I trailed a line of kisses to his chest. He moaned when I kept going, and then sucked in a breath when I dropped to my knees and swallowed his cock.

“Fuck,” he gasped, thrusting hard against my face. “Oh fuck, Bram.”

Water pounded the tiles next to me as I loosened my jaw and took him to the back of my throat. He was leaking already, and I swallowed greedily, reveling in his taste. I worked him the way I knew he liked best, going at his cock like it was an ice cream cone. Alternating between deep, thorough sucks and lighter flicks of my tongue. I dragged my teeth up and down his length, then suckled his tip, earning another shot of precum for my efforts.

He was fucking gorgeous above me, with his wet hair tousled around his sculpted face and his full lower lip caught between his teeth. His moans mingled with the hiss of the spray as he threaded his fingers through my hair and pumped his hips. “Can’t last,” he panted. “Need to come.”

I released him with a pop and pinched the tip of his dick as I stood. Abs brushing his, I rubbed a thumb over his lower lip. “Wait, baby,” I whispered. “Can you do that for me?”

A shudder passed through him. Fire danced in his eyes, turning the silver to gold. He swallowed a couple times, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he struggled to hold himself back. “Aye,” he said hoarsely. “Anything for you.”

I kissed him again because it was impossible not to. Our dicks slid against each other, and it was like a lightning bolt attached itself to the base of my spine. Hard and perilously close to the edge, I pulled away and muttered, “Turn around and put your hands on the wall.”

He complied, his shaft bobbing as he went, and it was all I could do not to prise his taut cheeks apart and fuck him on the spot.

But I wanted this to last.

I palmed his ass with both hands and squeezed, drawing another moan from him. Then I let my palms smooth down his thighs and back up again, running them over his broad back and around his rib cage to his taut pecs. Over his flat nipples, which I pinched before coasting down his abs to his rock hard shaft. I stroked him everywhere, learning him all over again even though I knew every inch of his body by heart.

He shuddered, his blond head dipping forward. “Bram,” he said, a world of longing in

his voice.

I gave his ass a final squeeze and kissed his shoulder. “Stay just like this. Don’t you dare touch yourself.”

His moan of protest followed me out of the shower, and the dull thud of his forehead hitting the tile put a wicked smile on my face as I raced, wet and dripping, to the bedroom with my aching cock leading the way. I fetched a bottle of lube in record time and returned to the shower, where he was still braced against the wall with steam rising around his flawless body.

“Such an obedient mate,” I murmured, snapping open the lube and drizzling liquid over my fingers while I drank in his muscled back and rounded ass beaded with moisture.

He’d jerked at the sound of the cap opening, and now he turned his head and spoke over his shoulder. “Did you come in here to chat, or do you plan on fucking me sometime within this century?”

I slid two slick fingers between his cheeks and rubbed firmly around his hole. “Is that what you want, Fergus?” I stroked harder, teasing his entrance. “You want me to fuck this ass?”

His answer was a harsh exhalation, followed by an enthusiastic backwards thrust of his hips. He widened his stance and bowed his spine in blatant invitation. “More,” he rasped.

I slid my fingers down and cupped his balls. “Is that a yes?”

He hung his head, one hand on the wall curling into a fist. “Aye... Fuck, Bram, don’t tease me.” His hips rocked, and I wasn’t sure if he even realized he was moving.

“Since you asked so nicely,” I murmured, stroking my fingers back up and pushing inside. He clamped down hard, and I couldn’t hold back my grunt as raw pleasure sizzled down my dick, making every inch of my shaft throb with need. “So tight.” I pumped in and out, pushing the lube deeper. Stroking him open while steam rolled around us. “This ass was made for me to fuck.”

“So fuck it already.”

“Not yet.” I thrust my fingers deeper, hitting the spot that never failed to make him lose control. At his sharp intake of breath, I smiled. “I want to play with it first.”

He moaned and swiveled his hips, the muscles in his back rippling under his golden skin. After a minute of my stroking and teasing, he moved a hand between his legs.

But I moved faster, seizing his wrist and forcing his palm back to the wall. “I didn’t tell you to move,” I growled. Still fingering his ass, I slipped my other hand around his hip and grasped his cock.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

“Fuck.” He slapped the tile and bore down on my fingers. “Oh fuck. Fuck me.”

I grinned as I jerked him with short, rough strokes. “That’s a lot of fucks, babe.”

His reply was a jumble of unintelligible moans and what sounded like another “fuck.”

Chuckling, I slowed my strokes long enough to lean in and kiss his nape. Brushing my lips over his damp skin, I thrust my fingers so deep he rocked onto his toes. “Whose is this?”

“Yours,” he gasped, shivering.

I squeezed his cock. “And this?”

“Yours.”

His quick, needy admissions delivered another jolt of lust to my dick. I pulled my fingers from his body and positioned the head of my shaft at his glistening entrance.

“Do it,” he begged, then groaned as I slid the head of my cock inside, pushing past the ring of muscle.

Gods, it felt so good. He felt so good. Impossibly hot and tight around my dick. I held still for a moment, just savoring the heat and the clench.

“Give me the whole thing,” he murmured, pushing his hips back.

“You ready for it?” Even as I voiced the question, I slid deeper, my gaze fastened on the tantalizing sight of my shaft disappearing inside him.

“So fucking ready,” he gasped, and he wasn’t lying. Not for the first time, I marveled at how easy he made receiving me look. How deliciously open he was as he rolled his hips, fucking himself up and down my length. Taking me to the root with a pleased moan.

And I was undone. Growling, I dug my fingers into his waist and began to thrust, giving him deep, thorough strokes that had us both moaning and rocking together. I took him that way for a few exquisite minutes, my hips pumping in an easy rhythm.

But this was about more than taking. I reached a hand around and grasped his swollen cock, jacking him as I fucked him. “You like this, baby?” I muttered in his ear. “You like me stuffing your ass while I handle your dick?”

“Aye,” he choked out, undulating his hips in a sensual glide. And that move—that flex of round muscle under his cheeks—was everything. Too hot to reduce to words. I rode his ass, raw pleasure radiating up my cock. Coalescing in my balls and the base of my spine.

Then the pleasure ratcheted higher. With a growl, I picked up the pace, ramming his ass with quick snaps of my hips.

He sagged against the wall, his guttural grunts echoing off the tile along with my rasping breaths and the heavy slap of my balls against his taut cheeks.

Never want this to end. A furnace blazed under my skin. My heart hammered against my ribs. Words spilled from my lips, adulations falling and then rising with the steam. “Love this,” I said throatily, my voice shaking and my balls tingling with impending release. “Love fucking you so much. I love you. Gods, I love you.”

He braced himself on his forearms, his body shaking from my thrusts. “Harder,” he begged, and I obeyed, giving him no quarter as I pummeled his ass.

“Come for me,” I growled, my fist flying up and down his cock. “Let me feel it.”

He cried out and erupted all over my hand and the wall. A second later, I gave a final thrust and let go, euphoria sweeping me as I spurted deep in his ass. My knees loosened and my mind blanked and the world could have ended and I wouldn’t have noticed or cared.

We stayed that way for a moment, our bodies locked together and our breaths sawing in and out of our chests. Then Fergus twisted his head and pressed his lips to mine.

“Mmm.” I released his softened shaft and smoothed my hands up his torso. Still buried inside him, I pulled his back against my chest and ran a leisurely palm up and down his abs as our tongues stroked and explored. With a lingering suck on his lower lip, I rested my chin on his shoulder. “That was...a lot.”

His shoulder shook under my jaw. “Bram McGregor, master of understatement.” He swiped at the mess he’d left on the wall. “We really need to invest in a shower squeegee.”

“Later. I’m freezing my balls off in here.” At some point, the hot water had run out and now the spray was glacial.

Laughing and cursing, we rinsed off as quickly as we could and stumbled from the shower and into my bed, where I tangled my legs with his under the sheets. “Thank you,” I said quietly, grateful for so much more than the sex. My beast was quiet again, soothed by my mate who never hesitated to give when I needed to take.

He turned on his side to face me. “You’re welcome. But we can’t let you get that

horny again.” He released a theatrical sigh. “I guess I’ll have to blow you every night when the sun goes down. If Halina sees you sporting the cockstand you had when I came in she’ll run from the castle screaming.”

“What if she never leaves her room?” Never accepts us? It was unthinkable. But she seemed so terrified.

His silver eyes—somehow always warm despite the pale color—crinkled at the corners. “I’ll lure her out eventually. I just have to find something she wants badly enough.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

If he was suffering from the same unrelenting lust I was, he didn't show it. On the contrary, he seemed delighted at the prospect of facing off with our newfound mate. "I hope you know what you're doing."

The smile in his eyes spread to his lips. "You worry too much, Bram." He reached out and pushed the hair off my forehead. "Get some sleep. Leave our little dhampir to me."

Chapter Eight

HALINA

As far as prisons went, mine was downright luxurious. I could hardly complain about the spacious suite with its elegant furnishings and sparkling bathroom. My first night in the castle, I'd spent a half hour trying to figure out how to operate the shower, which had more spouts and spigots than all the bathrooms in Castle Krovnosta combined.

But a pretty prison was still a prison, and the absence of bars on the windows didn't mean much when I was forbidden to leave.

"The door will stay unlocked," Fergus had said when he showed me inside. "You're free to roam the castle."

I'd faced him. "What about the grounds?"

"Off limits, sorry to say." Except he hadn't looked sorry at all. "You might not be

able to channel, but I reckon your kin can. When you don't return, they're bound to come looking for you."

It had been on the tip of my tongue to tell him there was zero chance of that happening. But for some reason, I'd kept it to myself. Part of me was too embarrassed to admit my family probably didn't care enough to send anyone to rescue me. But another part worried Bram and Fergus might feel emboldened to pursue their claim if they knew no one was coming. If the threat of vampire warriors on their doorstep was a deterrent, I was going to cling to it as long as possible. Not that I could stop them from doing whatever they wanted.

Although, so far, they'd made no move to touch me. But they certainly weren't hiding their desire to do so.

At least Fergus wasn't.

After my first day of fitful sleep, I'd risen to find a television and a stack of slim plastic cases on a big piece of furniture in the corner. Movies. The thralls had spoken of them. There was a note, too.

DC or Marvel? Watch everything, then let's discuss — Fergus (the hot blond one)

"The hot blond one?" I'd muttered. More like the one who'd sneaked into my room. It had taken me a while to figure out how to operate everything, but I'd done it—and shed some of my nerves in the process. Apparently, his taste in cinema was limited to people in skintight costumes, because every movie featured some kind of superhuman character fighting an over-the-top villain.

But I'd been entertained. And by the middle of the night, I'd grown bold enough to test the door. Just as he promised, I'd found it unlocked—and a smiling Fergus on the other side of it.

“Which one was your favorite?” he’d asked, pushing away from the wall he’d been leaning against. “I’m partial to Iron Man myself. I have a thing for Pepper Potts.” A wicked grin had curved his lips. “Then again, I also have a thing for Tony Stark.”

I’d stood frozen in the doorway. “What are you doing?” Right away, an inner voice urged me to shut up in case I made him angry. But he didn’t seem bothered by my bluntness. He strolled forward, his handsome features arranged in a smile that could only be described as seductive.

“Waiting for you to wake up,” he said. “I’m still getting used to your schedule.” He yawned and scratched at his jaw, drawing my attention to the golden scruff there. His accent might be Scottish, but he looked more like a Viking.

A Viking who wore jeans and a T-shirt that molded to his chest, showcasing the muscle underneath. His feet were bare, and I’d never in my life found a man’s feet attractive but his were as well-formed as the rest of him and—

Wait. I yanked my gaze up as my face heated. “I...have to go.”

He leaned to the side, pretending to look behind me. “Oh really? Have a pressing engagement, do you? A meeting with an armoire, perhaps?”

My cheeks grew warmer, but from anger this time, and it made me bold. “I’m glad my situation amuses you, but I assure you there’s nothing funny about being held against my will.”

He sobered—and then he drifted closer, making my heart rate kick up. Now I’d done it. I’d opened my big mouth and now he was going to strike.

Instead, he stopped mere inches away, his gaze going to my mouth. “Give me a chance, love, and I think you’ll enjoy being held.” His lips curved, and for the first

time I noticed he had a dimple in his right cheek. It gave him a slightly roguish look.

But he wasn't roguish. He was a dragon—an invincible creature who would use me to replenish his dying race. I had to remember that.

I squared my shoulders. “Did you send the tears to Krovnosta?”

His smile faded. “O’ course we did. We keep our word, lass.”

“Has there...” I swallowed. “Has anyone from home asked about me?”

Something akin to sympathy shone in his eyes.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

No, not sympathy. Pity. How humiliating.

“I’m afraid not,” he said softly, afraid becoming afreed. “But it’s my hope you’ll consider Scotland your home.”

His deep, musical voice did weird things to my stomach. I shivered—and found myself swaying toward him.

He smiled.

I jerked backwards, breaking the spell. “You can’t keep me here. I’ll escape.”

“Unlikely,” he said, his dimple deepening along with his smile.

More words tripped from my mouth before I could stop them. “I’ll run the first chance I get.”

“Fair enough.” He leaned in like he was imparting a juicy secret. “But I should warn you, dragons love chasing things.”

I drew a deep breath, and my lungs filled with the scent of evergreen and cinnamon. His eyes gleamed with humor and unmistakable interest as he gazed down at me.

And he was much too close. Close enough for me to see the individual hairs in his day beard—or night beard, as it were. My palm tingled, and I found myself wondering if the golden shadow was bristly or soft.

Then I noticed the thick vein throbbing in his neck. Instantly, hunger twisted deep in my gut. Anxiety rushed hot on its heels as the sound of his heartbeat filled my head. I hadn't fed in days...

"Do you want to see the library?" he asked suddenly.

"Wh-What?" My fangs ached. The hunger sank its claws deeper.

"I came to ask if you'd like to see the library. It's one of the biggest in Scotland." He leaned against the door jamb, and his body was so big I had to step back to avoid brushing against him. "It's probably not polite to brag about the size, but some females like big—"

I swallowed.

"—books," he finished softly.

I barely heard him over the sound of his heartbeat, which banged like a drum in my ears. I tore my gaze from his neck, and my voice shook as I stumbled back. "Um, no. N-Not today. And don't come in my room while I'm sleeping!"

He'd straightened from the jamb, a frown between his brows. "Halina—"

I'd shut the door in his face, then leaned against it and waited for him to force it open.

But he hadn't. And he hadn't mentioned my rudeness when he returned the following evening, or the next. If anything, he'd acted like nothing happened. He'd brought meals and clothing, and each night he'd invited me to a different part of the castle.

I'd turned him down every time.

And I'd do the same tonight, I thought, my gaze going to the door.

Except I wasn't sure how long I could hold out. At some point, the hunger would overwhelm me, and I'd lapse into a paralyzed state vampires called "the living death." I would retain consciousness, but I'd lose the ability to move or speak.

Leaving me even more vulnerable to Bram and Fergus than I already was.

A knock rang out.

Speak of the dragon.

It was pointless to ignore him. When I'd tried before, he just continued knocking until I answered. "Coming!" I called out as I crossed the room. Pausing at the threshold, I stuffed the hunger down as deeply as possible. Then I drew a shaky breath and opened the door.

"Come swimming with me," he said at once.

Immediately, the scent of cinnamon and evergreen assailed me. He smelled good enough to eat.

To drink.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

And, oh gods, he was shirtless. Again. His smooth, bare chest was right at my eye level, and the broad expanse of muscle was so distracting it took me a minute to process what he'd said. "Swimming?" I blurted.

The dimple appeared. "The castle has an indoor pool."

My breath caught. The thralls had spoken of pools, too, and they sounded just as fascinating as the sea. But he couldn't possibly know that.

"There's a suit in your closet," he said. Then, without warning, he shifted to smoke. One second, he was as solid as the door. The next, his jeans dropped to the flagstones and a dark cloud streamed past my hip.

"Hey!" I spun around as the black smoke shot into the suite and reformed into a nude Fergus. He ignored my protest and went to the window, where he checked the thick blanket he'd tacked over the opening my first night in the castle.

"Is this keeping enough light out?" he asked, peeking behind the edge.

I tore my gaze off his muscular backside. "Um, yes. Thank you."

He gave the window a satisfied nod, then crossed to the closet and disappeared inside. A second later, he emerged holding two scraps of fabric.

"Och, here we go." Grinning, he brought the scraps to me and held them out. "I knew I'd ordered a bathing suit. Amazon never disappoints."

Amazon? My head spun. “I can’t wear that.”

“Why not?”

“It’s”—my cheeks flamed—“underwear.”

He chuckled. “It’s a bikini. But I’ll grant you it’s no’ all that different from female undergarments.” His gaze turned wistful. “Modern ones, at least. To be honest, part of me misses corsets and petticoats. There was something excitin’ about all those layers. Like unwrapping a present.”

Was he actually reminiscing about past conquests? And why was that so irritating? It wasn’t like I was jealous. I folded my arms. “And you’ve unwrapped a lot of women?”

He had the good grace to look sheepish. But then he gave me a look so heated I swore I could feel it brush my skin. “Ancient history, Halina. The only female I’m interested in now is you. And that won’t change, lass.”

Heat prickled down my nape. The way he looked at me... I backed up a step. “I’m sorry, but I can’t go with you. I don’t know how to swim.”

“There’s a shallow end.”

“I’m not wearing your bik”—I stumbled over the unfamiliar word—“bikini.”

“Wear what you have on.”

I looked down at my plain T-shirt and black leggings. When he first appeared with clothes for me, I’d insisted on staying in my gown. But the skirts were heavy, and I’d felt grubby donning a dirty dress after I bathed. So I’d chosen the least revealing

clothing I could find. It was strange to walk without skirts swishing around my legs, but the freedom of movement was incredible. No wonder males wore pants.

Well, except for Fergus, who seemed perfectly content without a stitch of clothing on.

All the more reason to avoid him. Especially with his delicious scent teasing my nose.

I backed up another step. "You should go."

"You need blood," he said.

My body went hot, then cold. Would I ever get used to his abrupt changes of subject?

"No, I don't."

"Aye, you do, and you'll get sick if you don't have it."

I tensed. "How do you know that?"

"You just told me." At my swift intake of breath, he tossed the bikini on a nearby vanity table. "I don't ken all that much about dhampirs, lass, but it's obvious you need to feed. You've been eying my neck like it's a side of beef hanging in a butcher's shop."

I opened my mouth, but he kept right on talking.

"So here's what's going to happen. You're going to accompany me to the swimming pool, and I'm going to give you my blood." His expression turned distinctly smug.

"I'm thinking it's more powerful than what you're used to."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

“I can’t feed from you.”

“And yet you cannae starve, either, can you?” His gaze dipped to my mouth again. “I know you want a taste, lass, but I’m afraid the Fergus buffet is only available poolside.”

I stared as his absurd ultimatum swirled in my head. His accented swirled, too, that oddly appealing afreed lifting the fine hairs on my arms. It shouldn’t have affected me, but for some reason his trills and rumbles made a thousand butterflies take up residence in my stomach.

“Same rule as before,” he added softly. “I won’t touch you unless you ask me to.” He went to the door and retrieved his jeans—and the spectacle of him stepping into them and then easing them over his hips made the butterflies beat their wings just a little bit faster.

I couldn’t go with him... Could I?

He swept his arm toward the hall in a courtly gesture that made me wonder just how old he was.

In fact, I wondered a lot of things about Fergus Devlin, I realized with a start.

His eyes twinkled. “Shall we?”

* * *

Ten minutes later, I had to clench my jaw to keep it from dropping open. The castle didn't just have an indoor pool. It had an indoor pool under a ceiling made entirely of glass. The night sky stretched overhead, its inky black dotted with stars that reflected in the water. The airy space was blanketed in moonlight, giving everything a peaceful, dreamy look.

"A bonnie sight, isn't it?" Fergus said beside me.

"It's beautiful," I breathed. "There's nothing like this in Krovnosta."

He tipped his head toward a set of steps that descended into the water. "Come on in. It's heated."

I pursed my lips. "Another one of your conditions for giving me blood?"

"No, lass. I only wanted to show you something beyond your bedroom." He put a hand over his chest. "I made a vow and I won't be forsworn."

I'd been around enough ancients to know they took vows seriously. "How old are you?"

He went to the steps. "Come in and I'll tell you."

I drew a sharp breath as I remembered using a similar line the night he captured me.

He winked and descended the steps in his jeans. Just walked right into the pool like he did that sort of thing all the time. Maybe he did. I was beginning to think this was perfectly normal behavior for him. The water rose to his waist and lapped around his impressive abs.

Which I was not staring at.

“Are you afraid of water, Halina?” Afreed.

“More so who’s in it.”

His soft laughter mingled with the sound of splashing water as he waded farther in.

And, strangely enough, both sounds soothed me. I felt my shoulders relax, and the knife’s edge of hunger faded.

The gentle waves beckoned to me. His body under the surface was indistinct and wavy, and I couldn’t help wondering what the caress of all that water felt like.

He spread his arms out and moved his hands back and forth like he was petting the current. More soft splashing sounds echoed through the cavernous space. He looked upward, and his eyes seemed to catch the light. “It’s almost a full moon.”

I followed the direction of his gaze, remembering suddenly that he and Bram were half werewolf. In the whirlwind of the past few days, I’d pushed that knowledge to the back of my mind. But now curiosity tugged at me. “Does it effect you?” Full-blooded werewolves couldn’t control themselves when the moon was full. Their beasts took over, driving them to mate and hunt. The packs made a ritual of it.

“Not like you’re thinking,” he said. “We can’t take lupine form, but we feel the moon’s pull.” His expression turned thoughtful. “It’s like an itch you have to scratch. We could withstand the pull if we had to, but it’s a lot more satisfying to give in to the shift. I hunted with some other wolf halflings when I trained to fight as a lad. Then I met Bram and he didn’t have anyone, so now I hunt with him during a full moon.” He smiled. “I guess you could call us a pack of two.”

I drifted closer to the steps. “He didn’t have anyone?”

Fergus's smile faded. "Ah, no. His mother died birthing him, and his fathers followed quickly after. It's the only way a dragon can die, really. Losing a mate. We love deeply, lass, and we can succumb to heartbreak."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

Looking at him now, it was easy to believe. Pain glazed his eyes, as if the mere thought of losing Bram caused him to suffer.

And it didn't square at all with what I'd been told about his race.

I swallowed. "That must have been hard for Bram, growing up without parents."

"Aye. He was raised at court and if you ken anything about our king, you ken it's no place for a bairn."

I didn't know much about their king, except... "My brother called him mad."

Fergus grimaced. "We don't use that moniker, but I'll grant you it's close to the truth. Cormac is the only full-blooded dragon left in the world. No one really knows how old he is, save for maybe his mate. But Niall spends most of his time trying to convince Cormac not to raze the earth."

My heart skipped a beat. "Could he?"

"No' these days, no. The humans have enough weapons to stop him. But he'd expose the supernatural world in the process." Fergus sighed. "One of many reasons the other Firstborn Races hate us."

He sounded so forlorn. "What of the werewolves? You're part of them."

"I'm afraid they don't see it that way. Half-breeds or no, dragons are universally disliked by the Firstborns. Some have a problem with our bedroom activities, but

most resent us mating with their women. I cannae even really fault them for it. When our females died out, our forefathers thought that would be the end of us. But fate adapted, giving us females from the other races. Some Firstborns believe this deprives their women of a chance to match with one of their own.”

I frowned. “But if fate chooses, isn’t that the end of it?”

“Maybe.” He offered a slightly mysterious smile. “As I said, fate adapts. Humans sometimes speak of soulmates—a person they were destined to be with. But perhaps it’s different for immortals. When you live forever, it’s possible fate gives you multiple opportunities to find your match. Maybe a potential mate comes around every few hundred years. No one knows for certain, lass, but my race has been fortunate. Fate spared us. None of us are willing to waste our second chance.”

The way he described the dragons’ quest for mates was nothing like the stories I’d grown up with. He made it sound almost...romantic.

He swept his hands through the water. “You should come in before it gets cold.”

“I thought you said the pool was heated.”

“It is. But I’m running out of ideas.”

My lips twitched against my will. “So you resort to lies?”

He held his thumb and forefinger an inch apart. “Just a wee one. Whatever it takes to convince a gorgeous redhead to swim among the stars with me.”

Now I had to bite my lower lip so I wouldn’t smile. He was relentless, but he was so charming it was hard to resist him. On impulse, I walked to the steps and went in. Warm water rose up my body, not stopping until it bobbed under my breasts. My

clothes stuck to me, but it didn't matter. The water pushed against my body, impeding my movement in the most gentle way possible.

It was heaven. And with the glass ceiling overhead, the stars appeared to float in the water. Keeping one hand on the pool's tiled edge, I waved my hand through the water, watching how the stars rippled in my wake.

"Three hundred and sixty," Fergus said softly.

It took me a minute to realize he'd answered my question about his age.

"The same as Bram," he added.

So not all that old for immortals. But vastly more experienced than I was.

"How old are you?" he asked. He smiled as he continued stroking his arms through the water. "Since we're on the subject."

Embarrassment flooded me, and I looked down so he wouldn't see it in my eyes. "I'm not sure. Twenty-three or twenty-four."

He was quiet for so long, I thought maybe he'd left. Maybe shifted to smoke and sped from the pool. But when I lifted my gaze, he was still there in the moonlight, his blond brows drawn tightly together. "You never had a birthday? Some kind of celebration?"

I shook my head. "My mother died when I was born. And my father was...disinterested." I forced indifference into my tone. "Dhampirs are unpredictable when it comes to genetics. I have no powers to speak of."

He made a low sound. "That's simply no' true, lass. You have a terrifying amount of

power over me.”

Oh gods. The flames were back in his eyes. And he must have noticed their reflection in my own, because he blinked and they disappeared.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

But the desire still burned, and my heart beat faster. “You’re only saying that because you need a female.” And now I was in a swimming pool with him. Smart.

“If you knew anything about dragons, you’d know how far from the truth that is.”

“I know your people are dying out. And that you need offspring but you prefer—” I cut myself off before I could parrot the parting words of the warrior who’d dumped me in front of the castle.

But Fergus wasn’t having it. “Prefer what?”

Heat entered my cheeks, and I was grateful for the darkness that allowed me to hide at least some of my discomfort. “I know you prefer males.”

His crack of laughter made me jump. “Is that what you were told?” He dipped down so the water washed over his shoulders. “I think someone’s been filling your head with tales, fair Halina.”

I pulled my gaze away from his chest, which was now damp and glistening.

He moved slowly toward me, and I held my breath as he reached the wall and propped an arm on the edge beside me. “We’re bisexual, lass. It’s not really a matter of preference. More like hardwiring. We’re also polyamorous, and that’s hardwired, too. You say we need a female, and you’re absolutely right. But we don’t want just any female. We want the one fate chose for us.”

My stomach fluttered with nerves—and maybe something else. His scent was

stronger now, that mouthwatering blend of cinnamon and evergreen...

I swallowed hard. "You claim I'm fated for you, but I don't feel the same pull." He and Bram were so certain. What if they were wrong? Or just very convincing actors.

"Don't you?" he asked gently, and before I knew what was happening, he'd cupped my jaw in one big palm. "You want me, lass. There's no point denying it."

His gaze held mine captive. As I spoke, my voice seemed to come from far away. "I... It's just the hunger." Even as I said it, my fangs ached and my mouth filled with saliva. At first, I couldn't figure out why I didn't hear his heartbeat. Then it hit me.

It was beating in sync with mine.

"Feed from me," he said. "Satisfy your craving. If you don't want me after, you'll know it was nothing but your need for blood that drew you."

My gaze went to his neck, where that enticing vein beckoned. "I could do that," I heard myself say. Once I fed, I'd be able to think straight again.

"Aye, you could." His thumb feathered over my cheek. "You should."

"I need a knife," I said slowly, and I had to focus hard to make the words come out correctly. "My fangs are too short to pierce the skin." Somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew I should be embarrassed to admit that. But I couldn't be bothered with anything other than the need twisting inside me.

He lowered his hand and drifted back. "I'll fetch one. You stay put." Then, in the most startling move I'd ever seen, he launched himself from the water and sped off in a blur. He hadn't shifted. He'd simply lifted into the air.

I blinked, and he reappeared on the pool deck, his long strides carrying him swiftly to the steps. And as he descended, I realized he'd always been able to move that quickly. He could have used that speed at any point during our many interactions. But he'd restrained himself.

He did so again now, wading toward me with a small but sharp-looking knife in his hand. When he reached my side, he proffered it. "How do you want me?"

My insides trembled as I took the knife. Was he really willing to put himself at my mercy? There was only one way to find out. I licked my lips. "Back against the wall. A-And let me see your hands."

He complied, stretching out his arms so his palms rested on the edge. "Do what you like, lass. I won't move."

Sila dripped from my fangs. Not enough to enthrall him. The chemical had to be delivered directly into the bloodstream, and I could only do that with a deep bite.

"Go ahead," he murmured. He tilted his head to the side, baring his neck. "Take what you need."

The hunger struck like a lash, propelling me forward. I nicked his vein and pressed my mouth to his neck. The second his blood hit my tongue, I moaned.

Ambrosia. His taste was unlike anything in this world. Raw power flowed down my throat and into my veins. Heat flashed through me—and then it shot straight between my legs, the force of it so intense I moaned with unbridled pleasure. My hips undulated of their own accord as instincts urged me to seek more. More friction. More of him.

Distantly, I heard his breaths grow ragged. And when I moaned a third time, he

echoed it, his throat rumbling under my lips.

Helpless to stop myself, I pressed my body against his, letting my breasts mash against his hard chest. His scent grew thicker, filling my lungs and making the heat between my thighs pulse like a heartbeat. My nipples were so hard they ached, and it was like invisible cords tethered my tongue to my breasts and sex. With each pull of my mouth, they tugged harder, spinning me into a fog of sensual need so hot I thought I might burn up. And I wasn't sure I cared.

A loud crack startled me out of the haze, and I reared back and licked Fergus's blood from my lips. As the cloud of desire dissipated and I got a clear look at his face, I gasped.

His eyes were an inferno, the silver totally obliterated by orange flame. The playful, charming Fergus was gone, replaced with something dangerous and powerful.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

A predator. And it had me in its sights.

I waited for him to lurch forward. To display some of that inhuman speed.

But he stayed still—just as he'd promised. His arms remained outstretched, but now he held a broken chunk of concrete in one hand. Smaller bits of stone floated in the water around us. He'd broken it as I fed from him? Actually snapped the edge of the pool off?

“Don't...stop,” he said, his chest heaving. He seemed bigger, his muscles more defined. Drops of water clung to his chest, and for a wild second I imagined myself leaning forward and licking them off.

I stumbled back, sloshing water as I went. “I have to go.” If I stayed near him, there was no telling what I'd do. With his blood singing in my veins, I splashed to the stairs and made a clumsy exit from the pool. My wet soles slapped across the smooth concrete.

“Halina.”

I froze, waiting for the sound of pursuit or the firm grasp of his hand on my arm. If he chose, he could reach me before I even realized he'd moved...

“Look at me,” he said softly.

Heart pounding, I turned just enough to meet his gaze.

He remained in the pool, but the look in his eyes was so hot it was a miracle the water didn't boil around him. "Run if you must, but know this: One day you're going to beg me to catch you. I'm in your veins now, and I'm going to be everywhere else, too."

I held my breath as his rumbled promise seemed to reverberate in the aching place between my thighs.

"Now go," he said. "And let me leave you with one word, lass. Soon."

Chapter Nine

FERGUS

The problem with making broad declaratory statements was you ended up looking like a complete fucking idiot when you were proved wrong. Case in point: I'd promised Halina she'd soon come begging for my touch.

And yet here I was two days later nursing a tub of salted caramel and peanut. With nary a lust-crazed dhampir in sight.

After she'd fed from me, she retreated to her suite. Worse, she'd stopped opening the door when I knocked. I could take shadow form and enter in a thousand different places, but I wasn't about to erode the trust I'd won by forcing my way into her space. I'd given her a vow and I intended to keep it—no matter how uncomfortable it got.

And right now it was pretty damn uncomfortable. The memory of her clothes plastered to her body in the pool tormented me. The second her lips had touched my neck, she'd transformed. The timid halfling had gone, replaced with a sultry temptress. Her breathy moans had filled my ears, and the feel of her little tongue lapping at my vein had nearly been my undoing. When she'd drawn back, her eyes

had glowed an eerie blue.

Then she'd left the pool and the damp ends of her wine-red hair had teased the curves of her ass. I'd kept my control—barely.

But something had to give.

The door to my suite opened and Bram strode in. "I think she's asleep. Her room's quiet." He took a seat on the sofa opposite mine in front of the hearth. "Ice cream at midnight?"

"It's called eating your feelings," I mumbled. I dug my spoon in and took another bite.

He folded his arms. "We have bowls in the kitchen. You don't have to eat directly from the carton."

"Aye, but I plan on eating the whole carton, so it's not a problem."

He pressed his lips together but didn't comment. Which was hard for him, I knew. He'd grown up in King Cormac's court, and he'd never shed his palace manners.

I hunted for a peanut and found one.

"Do you think it's normal for her to be sleeping right now?" he asked. "It's the middle of the night."

"Dunno." My spoon struck another peanut. Jackpot.

"Maybe she didn't get enough blood. How much did she take from you?"

“Don’t know that, either.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

An edge entered his voice. “This is important, Fergus. Our female won’t speak to us.”

The peanut wouldn’t budge, so I stabbed my spoon at the ice cream around it. “I didn’t have a phlebotomy lab handy. I was too busy trying not to come like a fountain.” I stabbed at the ice cream a couple more times. “Fat lot of good that did me.”

He was silent a moment. “Fergus,” he said softly.

“What.” I pried the peanut loose.

“Will you stop torturing that ice cream for a minute?” Something in his voice made me pause and look up. A smile played around his mouth. “Come here.”

Part of me bristled at the smile, but another part heard the entreaty in the command. I put the carton aside and stood. He rose at the same moment, and as soon as I was within reach, he snagged the back of my neck and pulled me into him.

“Is that what’s bothering you?” he murmured, his green eyes tender. “You didn’t come like a fountain?”

“No.”

His smile grew.

I huffed out a breath. “Maybe. But it’s not just about sex.”

“Of course not.”

“I’m serious, Bram. What if—” My chest tightened, as if my body didn’t want to let me voice my deepest fear. “What if I ruined our chance? She doesn’t desire me.”

“Impossible.” He squeezed my nape, pulling me closer. “She’d have to be made of stone not to desire you.” He took my mouth in a kiss that started mild and quickly progressed to scorching. His tongue probed mine, plunging and thrusting. My cock swelled as pleasure surged hot and heavy in my veins. A moan gathered in my throat. It broke free when his fingers found the drawstring of my lounge pants.

“Take these off,” he said against my lips.

I scrambled to obey, and my dick sprang forth, the tip already leaking for him.

“And the shirt.”

I’d barely pulled it over my head when he wrapped his arms around me and gave me another searing kiss. As it had all those centuries ago, the juxtaposition between my bare skin and his clothed body cranked my lust up a thousandfold. I thrust my cock against his as he ran a hand over my ass and slid his fingers into my crease.

“You taste like caramel.” He teased his fingertip around my entrance, penetrating me in shallow pumps that sent goosebumps racing over my skin. His voice dropped to a growl. “I want to taste you everywhere.”

“Aye,” I groaned.

He groaned back—and deepened the kiss as if he couldn’t help coming back for more. Not that I minded. I couldn’t get enough of his cedar and smoke scent. The scrape of his stubble against my chin. His wicked fingers working deeper into my

body. He added a second—or maybe a third, it felt so good I didn't care—and the burn of his entry gave way to a powerful buzz of pleasure that made my breath hitch.

“That's it,” he said, nipping at my lip. “Open up for me.”

I rolled my hips against his, torn between the need in my cock and the delicious pressure in my hole. Wanting to fuck and wanting to be filled. Quite simply, I wanted it all. I'd take whatever Bram would give me. And I'd give him anything he wanted.

He wrenched his head away, breaking off the kiss and giving me a heated look through narrowed emerald eyes. “Get on the bed.”

I went, one hand on my throbbing dick. I stroked it leisurely as I lay on my back and watched him undress and prowl toward me. My poor cock wept at the picture he made—six and a half feet of raw, primal male. I was hardly small, but he was bigger and it suited me just fine. He climbed over me and, without preamble, pushed my thighs wide and rolled me up onto my shoulders. Then he lowered his head between my splayed legs and flicked his tongue over my puckered rim.

“Fuck!” I gasped, shivers coursing through me. He licked me again, and my next curse was nothing more than a wheezing grunt. The sensation was incredible. Pure bliss that streaked straight to my dick. I wrapped my hands around the backs of my knees and pulled my legs wider, shamelessly begging for more.

His dark chuckle floated up as he continued his carnal exploration. Each swipe of his tongue made my lust roar higher, until I was thrusting wantonly to meet him.

He swirled a lazy circle around my entrance, his ministrations soft and gentle, before swiping his tongue over my sac.

“Bram...” I tried to tell him how good it felt but couldn't. Not with him killing me in

the best way possible.

But he knew, of course.

He lifted his gaze, seizing mine as he suckled my balls, closing his lips around one, then the other, tonguing my sensitive flesh while I squirmed and panted. His stubble scraped my crease, adding to the pleasure. Just when I thought it couldn't get any better, he licked his way back to my hole and delved inside, fucking me with his tongue in wet, forbidden thrusts.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

My hoarse cry echoed around the room.

Fire licked over my skin. Sizzling and twisting.

I wasn't going to last much longer. My cock throbbed against my stomach, a thick bead of liquid at the tip. Gods, I was going to come like this. I didn't even need to touch my shaft.

He lifted his head and guided my legs back down.

"You bastard," I groaned, letting my head flop back. "I was right there."

He flashed an unrepentant grin. "You're not getting off that easy." He put a big palm on my hip and urged me onto my stomach. "Don't move."

As if I could. I lay in a limp puddle with my heartbeat pounding in my cock. He left the bed, then returned seconds later and covered my body with his.

I groaned as warm, heavy male pressed me deeper into the bed and his cock prodded my ass. He didn't enter me, though. Merely stoked my need higher by gliding his shaft up and down my crease, teasing my clenching entrance as he trailed a line of kisses up my neck before murmuring in my ear. "I'm going to milk you. Then I'm going to fuck you."

His sultry promise, spoken in a voice like gravel, set a blowtorch to my senses. I clenched my fists in the bedding and gasped, "Do it."

“The right answer.” He kissed my jaw. “On your knees, baby.” He moved fast, tugging my hips back and stuffing a pillow under my stomach. And when his rigid dick trailed precum across the back of my thigh, I knew he was just as on edge as I was.

But Bram was a master of control. He wouldn’t let either of us come until he was ready, and that knowledge had me gritting my teeth as I lifted my ass high and pressed my flushed cheek into the bed.

“This is a gorgeous view,” he said in a voice thick with appreciation. Then he pulled my dick backwards between my thighs and sucked me from behind.

Gods. For one blazing moment, I couldn’t think or react. Couldn’t breathe. I became pleasure—my whole body contracting at the feel of his hot mouth sliding up and down my cock. His tongue swirling and stroking. His big hand working my shaft as he blew me. He kept at it for a few intense, glorious seconds, sucking me hard from root to tip. My balls tightened, my orgasm gathering. Just as I tensed to come, he released me, letting my dick thump, aching and unfulfilled, against the pillow.

“Fuck,” I groaned, miserable and shivering. I pushed my hips forward, ready to fuck the pillow if I had to. “Can’t take anymore.”

I couldn’t see him, but I heard the smile in his voice when he said, “You always say that.” There was the soft click of a lube cap, and then his suddenly slick finger pushed inside me. He twisted it deep and added another, expertly finding that magical spot that made pleasure come roaring back.

My cock leaked. A tingling started in my toes and spread up to my thighs. I clawed at the bedding, my breath coming in gasps as mind-bending ecstasy rushed toward me.

“Let go,” he murmured, massaging my gland with two firm fingers. As fluid began to

flow from my cock, he gave a throaty growl. “There it is, babe. Let it all out.”

I hardly heard him, caught up as I was in the quiet, steady release he milked from me. It was wholly different from a typical orgasm. This was no quick and violent burst of pleasure. Rather, it was a slow, earth-shattering stream—and even hotter because he controlled it, his carnal massage wringing me dry. As my ejaculate flowed, a buzzing, pleasure-laced current started at my toes and shivered all the way to my head. I couldn’t move—could only lie there and moan while his fingers worked their magic and my dick soaked the pillow.

When I was spent and shuddering, he eased his fingers from my body and maneuvered me onto my side. I drifted for a moment, vaguely aware of him tossing the pillow away and then spreading lube over his cock. He settled behind me, his chest to my back, and pulled my ass snugly against his hips. “You okay?” he asked, his breath warm against my neck.

I twisted so I could see his face, and I wanted to smooth the little frown between his brows. He always worried about pushing me too far. I could never quite convince him that simply wasn’t a possibility. “Never fucking better.”

He gave a soft huff of laughter and then kissed me—a slow and easy glide of his tongue against mine. When my heart was racing again, he slid a hand down my hip. “Speaking of fucking...”

“Aye,” I rasped. “Give it to me.”

He pulled my thigh up and placed it atop his. Then he gripped my hip and sheathed himself in one fluid stroke. Prepped from his fingers, I took him easily, and we both groaned when he withdrew a few inches and then slammed back home.

My breath shuddered out, and new goosebumps rushed over my skin. We stared at

each other, our gasps mingling as he rocked into me, sliding over my prostate and lighting me up all over again.

“Fuck,” I breathed.

His slow, sexy grin stole my breath. “We really have to work on your vocabulary.”

I huffed. “It’s your fault. I can’t think when you feel this good.”

He tunneled a hand under my shoulders and slung his forearm across my chest, pulling me more tightly against him. “You feel better,” he whispered, his breath hitching with his thrusts. “So tight. So perfect. I can’t get enough. It’s never enough.”

If I’d been capable of stringing words together, I would have told him the same. But coherent thought deserted me as desire blistered a hot path through my veins. His cock drove deep, and even though I’d just come, my own dick hardened again. I reached for it, moaning loudly as I began to stroke myself. My voice was a breathless plea. “I need...”

“I’ve got you,” he murmured, his eyes so heavy-lidded only a sliver of emerald showed through. “Keep pumping that beautiful cock and I’ll get you there. You’re going to give me every last drop.”

Page 31

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:09 am

His decree was all it took. Between one breath and the next, I was coming, the force of it taking me by surprise. My vision blurred as I shot all over my hand, my body detonating a million times over.

His thrusts grew wilder and more disjointed. Then he cried out and held me against him as he shuddered through his own release.

We lay like that for a long moment afterward, our sweaty bodies tangled together on top of the sheets. My eyelids drooped as I floated, exhausted and sated, in my mate's arms.

"We need to try something different," he rumbled.

I was instantly alert again, and I couldn't keep the incredulity out of my tone. "You weren't happy with that?"

His soft laugh stirred my hair. "I meant with Halina. Divide and conquer didn't work. I think we should approach her together."

"Tag team," I said, already plotting.

"What?"

"It's a wrestling term."

I could almost hear his frown. "I've never heard of it."

“Professional wrestling.”

He made a dismissive sound. “You mean television wrestling.”

I turned in his arms. “Bram McGregor, you are an unrepentant snob.”

“Or—and hear me out—you have exceedingly bad taste.”

“But not in men,” I countered, squeezing my ass around his dick as I spoke.

He sucked in a breath, then released it on a shaky exhale. “No...not in men.”

I grinned. “So how do you propose we tag team Halina?”

“You said she felt like a prisoner.”

“Aye.”

His gaze turned thoughtful. “Then let’s give her a taste of freedom.”

Chapter Ten

HALINA

Fergus hadn’t lied about the size of the castle’s library. Not that I was much of a judge when it came to Scottish libraries—or any libraries, for that matter. But the cavernous space was both impressive and inviting. Bookcases stretched from the floor to the ceiling, and each shelf was stuffed with books of every size, shape, and color. In the center of the room, thick carpets covered the stone floors, and comfortable-looking sofas and chairs offered places to curl up and read.

But I couldn't concentrate long enough to do that.

Because I couldn't get the sounds of Bram and Fergus's lovemaking out of my head. Their bedrooms bordered mine, but I'd never heard so much as a peep from either male.

Until tonight.

It started innocently enough—a muffled groan that had pulled me out of a deep sleep. I'd slid from bed and stood frowning at the carved wood paneling on the walls. Then came another groan. And another...followed by the unmistakable rustle of sheets.

A sound I shouldn't have been able to hear.

Heart pounding, I'd moved to the wall and pressed my ear against the paneling. Bram's voice had reached me, his tone rough as sandpaper. "I'm going to milk you. Then I'm going to fuck you." Fergus's answering moan was just as rough. "Do it."

Instantly, moisture had gathered between my thighs. I had no idea what "milking" was. No idea how the men looked or what, precisely, they were doing. But I had my ears and my imagination—and my imagination conjured a world of steamy scenarios accompanied by the very real sounds of rasping breaths, passionate kisses, and sensual groans.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I'd leaned harder against the wall as my pulse raced and an ache blossomed low in my belly. I couldn't see them, but images formed in my mind nonetheless—scenes of their powerful bodies twined together, their strong jaws moving against each other. With every moan and rustle of bedding, my skin had flushed hotter. My nipples tightened, and my heartbeat seemed to throb between my thighs.

My fangs had descended, the tips sharp and dripping with sila. A moan wound its way up my throat and burst from me before I could stop it.

I'd clapped a hand over my mouth. Then I'd dressed quickly and rushed from the room like the hounds of hell were snapping at my heels. I'd found the library through sheer luck, and I'd spent the past hour trying to think of anything other than Bram and Fergus.

But it was proving difficult. Sighing deeply, I shelved yet another book and stared at the row of colorful spines. Even now, my body hummed with restless energy.

And it wasn't the first time. In the two days since I fed from Fergus, I'd been beset by...urges. It was as if his blood had galvanized my senses—all of them. My vision was sharper, and my hearing was better. When I stood in the shower, the caress of water on my skin made my breasts ache and my sex clench. When the sun rose and I lay in bed struggling to sleep, I tossed and turned as Fergus's muscular shoulders and handsome face flashed through my head. Over and over, I pictured him striding nude across my room, his taut ass flexing as he went. I imagined him stretching his long arms along the edge of the pool and tilting his blond head as his deep voice rumbled, "Take what ye need."

Worse, the forbidden thoughts hadn't stopped with him. More than once, I'd dreamed of the men together—and with me. And each vision was more vivid and erotic than the last. It was as if the sila had worked in reverse, creating a craving I couldn't ignore. Now I'd heard the men together, and I could only imagine what my brain was going to do with that information.

I rested my forehead against the edge of a bookshelf. I had to banish Bram and Fergus from my mind. Like now. Right this moment.

Footsteps had me swinging around, and then—as if I'd conjured them with my thoughts—my captors appeared in the library doorway, twin expressions of relief on their faces.

And, oh gods, they'd obviously just come from the shower. Their hair was damp, and both men had that “freshly scrubbed” look. Side by side, they made quite a pair: one light and one dark. Bram studied me with serious green eyes. Fergus grinned.

“There you are,” he said. “You damn near gave us a heart attack, lass. We couldn't find you anywhere.”

“I'm sorry.” I focused on a spot on the floor halfway between us. “I was...bored in my room. You mentioned the library, so I thought I would check it out.”

“No need to apologize,” Bram said. “You're welcome to go anywhere in the castle.”

Fergus strolled forward, bringing the scent of cinnamon and aftershave to my nose. “You sure you're okay?”

“Yes,” I said quickly. The bookcase behind me prevented retreat, leaving me no choice but to stand still for his scrutiny.

“Your cheeks are flushed.”

“I’m fine.” Oh no, now Bram approached. I dared a look up and quickly yanked my gaze back down—but not before I got an eyeful of dark hair, stubbled jaw, and sculpted lips. His scent—smoke and forest and clean male—joined Fergus’s.

My body wanted to melt.

I stiffened my shoulders.

“Perhaps you need to feed again.” Fergus’s voice slid around me...through me...reaching places that made my heart beat faster.

“No, thank you.” That was the last thing I needed.

“Are you sure? You’re lookin’ a wee bit peaky.”

“I’m fine.”

“Ah. Well, all right, then.” For a moment, he looked so crestfallen I could have smiled. Then he brightened. “In that case, we have a proposal.”

I tensed. Why had I left my room? I was trapped with them now. Both of them. Whatever “proposal” they had in mind was bound to be—

“Go to dinner with us,” he finished. “Or I guess more like lunch for you, considerin’ it’s the middle o’ the night.”

I blinked. “Lunch?”

“Aye.” His lips twitched, as if he’d discerned the wild direction of my thoughts and

took pleasure in proving me wrong. “If I’m no’ mistaken, you eat regular food just as often as we do, yes?”

“Yes,” I said slowly. “But I can continue dining in my room.” Eating with them was a bad idea, not when I couldn’t trust my traitorous body to behave itself in their presence.

“Och, that’s too bad,” he said, his expression not sorry in the least. “Bram and I were just saying how much we fancied a meal out. Weren’t we, Bram?” He didn’t wait for an answer, just plowed forward with that glimmer of mischief that appeared to be a permanent fixture in his eyes. “Thought you might like to get out of the castle for a bit. But I suppose you aren’t interested in human restaurants in the middle of a big city like Inverness.” He lowered his voice to a conspiratorial murmur. “Lots of noise. People everywhere.”

My heart thumped. Lunch in a big city was exactly the sort of experience I longed for. And something told me he knew that. Somehow, Fergus Devlin had discovered the curious streak that had gotten me into so much trouble in Krovnosta. And now he dangled an adventure in front of me like bait.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Now I had to decide if it was worth the risk to seize it.

He looked at Bram. “You know the place.”

Bram nodded. “Aye, it’s—”

“The one right on the river,” Fergus finished.

“All right,” I blurted. A river wasn’t the ocean, but I couldn’t turn it down. And the presence of humans would ensure Bram and Fergus behaved themselves. Immortals shunned human attention. They wouldn’t do anything that might jeopardize our secrets.

Fergus smiled. “You’ve got yourself a date, lass.”

* * *

A short time later, I sat in an Inverness restaurant with my head spinning from the sights and sounds I’d experienced since we left the castle. Everything was bright and new and human. More than once, I’d resisted the urge to pinch myself to make sure I wasn’t dreaming.

After I’d agreed to dinner, Fergus and Bram had led me to a parking garage deep under the castle, where I’d had to scoop my jaw off the ground at the sight of so many different kinds of vehicles. Fergus had chosen a sleek, black sports car with heated leather seats and a dashboard full of glowing buttons. It was a beautiful machine, and it had practically purred as it sped us away from the castle and into a

city of glittering lights and quaint cobblestone streets.

The restaurant, which Fergus called a “pub,” wasn’t normally open so late at night, but he’d “pulled some strings” and now we were ensconced in a wooden booth with plates of pasta and meatballs in front of us. Bram had ordered a bottle of wine with a price tag that made my eyes bulge. But after three glasses, my mind was pleasantly fuzzy and a soothing hum drifted through my veins.

“Let’s play twenty questions,” Fergus said as he passed me a basket of bread. Just before I touched it, he wrenched it back. “Och, it’s garlic.”

I rolled my eyes and took the basket from him. “The garlic thing is a myth. How many vampires have you met?”

He appeared to think it over. “I can’t say that I’ve met any, to be honest. More often than not, they were at the pointy end of my sword.”

Well, then.

“Sorry, lass. The world was a lot more violent when I was a lad. And I didnae realize I’d have vampires for in-laws one day.”

My lips parted. He spoke so casually, like our mating was a done deal. I slid a look at Bram, who was twirling spaghetti onto a fork beside me. At first, he didn’t seem to notice my scrutiny. Then he glanced up and winked.

I caught my breath. Bram McGregor had just winked at me. Flustered, I drained my wineglass.

“So,” Fergus said. “Twenty questions.”

I frowned. "I don't know what that is."

"It's a bit of a game. Easy, really. I ask you a question and you answer. Then you ask me a question and I answer. And then back and forth until we get to twenty."

"That's not how you play," Bram murmured.

Fergus shot him a disgruntled look. "Wheesht, spoilsport. We're playin' my version." He turned to me. "Ready?" With his accent, it sounded more like reddy.

"What if I don't want to answer?" I dared to ask.

A teasing expression moved through his eyes. "You get one pass, but then you have to answer the next question. No excuses."

I chewed on my lower lip, then abruptly remembered we were among humans. If someone saw my fangs... But the restaurant was dimly lit, and the staff were nowhere to be seen. The hostess who'd seated us had gawked at the men and then looked me over with obvious envy. The waitress had done the same, promising the guys she'd get them anything they needed.

Somehow, I didn't think she meant extra marinara sauce.

"Come on," Fergus said. "I know you're curious about us." He sipped from a glass of whisky, the amber-colored liquid catching the light as he tipped his head back. He lowered the glass and licked moisture from his lips.

Instant heat flared over my skin, and I jerked my gaze away from his mouth. "Fine. How did you two meet?"

"On the training field. 'Twas love at first sight, wasn't it, Bram?" Fergus leaned

toward me and spoke in a stage whisper. “He almost fainted.”

Bram sat back and folded his arms. “If I recall correctly, you tripped over your own feet and fell on your arse.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Fergus shrugged good-naturedly. “We can’t all be formidable warriors.” He turned to me again. “Bram was a Sovereign Guard at sixteen.”

“Not because of any particular skill with a sword,” Bram said quietly.

“Bollocks.”

“What’s a Sovereign Guard?” I asked.

Fergus held up two fingers. “That’s two questions in a row, lass, but I’ll allow it. The Sovereign Guard protects our king. Like a Secret Service for dragons. Only the best fighters are chosen.”

It made sense that Bram would be selected. His jeans and thin sweater did nothing to mute his size or the slabs of muscle he carried from his shoulders to his thighs. He twirled spaghetti again, his long fingers handling the fork with elegant precision. Twisting...twisting... His hands were as big as the rest of him, but they were beautifully formed. Without warning, the buzzing in my veins moved between my thighs. I swallowed, willing away the desire that had plagued me ever since I drank from Fergus.

Although, if I was honest, it had started before that.

Bram took a bite, his strong jaw working. The stubble there was as blue-black as his hair. And he really did have the longest eyelashes. They brushed his cheeks as he bent over his food again.

I tore my gaze away—and found Fergus watching me across the table with a knowing look in his eyes. As my cheeks heated, the scene I’d overheard intruded. “I’m going to milk you. Then I’m going to fuck you.”

He smiled—that damn dimple peeking out—as if he’d read my thoughts. “My turn to ask a question.”

I stopped breathing. What if he really could read my mind?

“Did you like your dinner?” he asked.

Relieved, I answered more honestly than I might have. “Yes, although I wasn’t expecting Italian.”

“What, you thought we’d serve you haggis and porridge?”

“No, but—”

“That’s a harmful stereotype, lass. Now, for my next question—”

“You already had one!”

“Ah, but you asked two, so I’m returnin’ the favor.”

Bram gave me a decidedly sympathetic look. “There’s no sense arguing with him. He’ll just keep talking until you surrender.”

“I’m insulted,” Fergus said.

“And yet that won’t stop you from talking,” Bram replied mildly.

I absorbed their banter with a mix of exasperation and amusement. Bram's comments were delivered with obvious affection, and the light dancing in Fergus's eyes told me he knew it.

He focused his considerable charm on me. "How often do you need to drink blood?"

I sucked in a breath. "I... I d-don't—" My distaste for blood had always been a chief source of embarrassment in my father's court. Of course, Fergus's blood had tasted divine. Even now, the memory of it made my mouth water.

"Don't be shy about telling us, Halina. We want to take care of you."

As I met his stare across the table, I sensed he told the truth.

No, it was more than that. I knew he did. His honesty flowed over me with crystal clarity—like an intake of crisp winter air on an unspoiled mountaintop. The certainty hit me like a punch in the gut, rendering me speechless.

The men noticed at once.

Alarm jumped into Fergus's eyes. "What is it, lass?"

"Are you ill?" Bram asked, his green gaze just as troubled.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“N-No.” I shook my head. “It’s just...I scented truth in your voice. I’ve never been able to do that. It’s not even a vampiric trait that I’m aware of.”

The guys exchanged a look, then Fergus said, “It’s a dragon trait. Have any of your other senses improved since you fed from me?”

My cheeks heated. It was no use lying. They’d smell a falsehood as easily as the truth. “My hearing is better. It’s almost too good, actually.”

“You’ll get used to it,” Bram said. “Has it disrupted your sleep?”

“No,” I said quickly.

Fergus frowned. “Yes, it has.” His gaze sharpened. “Is that why you left your suite tonight?”

My heart pounded. At the same moment, desire rushed through me like a wildfire.

Bram’s nostrils flared.

Oh gods. I was trapped in the booth, boxed in by dragons who could smell lies—and, apparently, lust.

Understanding bloomed in Fergus’s eyes. “You heard us.”

I looked at my plate, misery mingling with my body’s inconvenient reaction. “I wasn’t trying to eavesdrop. I left as soon as I understood what was...happening.”

Quiet reigned. Then Bram's deep rumble slid around me. "And did you like what you heard?"

"I..." How could I answer that?

Fergus answered for me. "There's no shame in it, lass. Fate chose you for us. I ken it may be an adjustment of sorts to think of yourself with two males." He dipped his head until he caught my gaze, and his voice went low as he added, "But I promise you'll enjoy it."

"You must have a lot of questions," Bram said. "We'll tell you anything you want to know, whether it's about us or you or the three of us together."

My pulse spiked. He was right—I had a lot of questions. And maybe it was the alcohol—or a combination of the wine and my runaway lust—but I found myself beset by curiosity I couldn't rein in. "You're bisexual."

"Aye," Bram said, his green eyes gleaming.

"Both of you."

"That's right."

"So you like having sex with women?"

"Most definitely."

Heat pooled between my legs. "And you also have sex... Um, the two of you—"

"We do," Fergus said, dimple in full view.

“And you...well, h-how do you...”

He leaned his elbows on the table, the expression on his handsome face downright devilish. “Let me guess, lass. You want to know which one of us does the, ah, receiving?”

My cheeks blazed, some of the heat caused by the way he rolled his R on receiving. It was so unfair the way he made everything sound so sexy. I chewed my lower lip, wondering just how I’d landed myself in such a taboo conversation.

But Fergus didn’t seem frazzled in the least. On the contrary, he flashed Bram a heated look before saying, “We’re versatile, though Bram will say it all depends on whether I’ve pleased him.”

I might not have grasped his exact meaning, but I didn’t need to. The desire arcing between them was hot enough to singe the ends of my hair.

Footsteps approached, and then the waitress appeared holding a small cake with a single lit candle in the center. “I heard we have a birthday here?” she said in a thick brogue. Her hopeful gaze shifted between Bram and Fergus.

“Aye,” Fergus said, nothing in his demeanor indicating he’d been discussing sexual positions with his longtime lover and a female he hoped to make his second lover. He nudged my dinner plate aside. “It’s this fair lassie who’s celebratin’.”

Page 36

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I could only stare in confusion as the waitress placed the cake in front of me. “Och, well, happy birthday, then.” She stepped back. “Get I get you gentlemen anything else?”

I bristled. Judging from the way her gaze drifted over both men, she hoped the answer was something like “yes” and “you on a platter.” Before I even realized what I was doing, I’d leaned across Bram. “No, thank you. We have everything we need here.”

She paled. “Of course. I’ll leave you to it.” She spun and dashed away.

When I resettled in my seat, both men regarded me with a mix of astonishment and admiration. Fergus drew a deliberate breath. “That was scary, but also really sexy.”

I put a hand over my mouth. “Did I show my fangs?”

“Who cares? It was hot.”

“But—”

He leaned forward. “One thing you need to know about humans, love. They don’t see anything they don’t want to see.”

Bram nodded toward the candle. “Make a wish, lass. It’s tradition.”

“But it’s not my birthday.”

Fergus smiled. “You said you weren’t sure of the date. Why no’ make it tonight?”

I looked between them and realized my head was spinning again—but this time it wasn’t from wine or the unfamiliar atmosphere.

It was...them.

Chapter Eleven

HALINA

By the time we returned to the castle, it was almost dawn. The sky was a deep purple scattered with stars. In the distance, the loch sparkled with the last of the moon’s glow.

I turned from the car window to look at Fergus. “It’s a full moon. Don’t you need to hunt?”

“We already did.” He guided the car up a curving drive.

Oh. They must have gone out while I slept. “Was it successful?” Even as I asked, I realized I might not want to know. They were dragons. They probably chased down deer and roasted them.

He met my gaze, and his irises were the same shade as the moon. “Time will tell, lass. But I have a good feeling.”

My heart fluttered as his meaning sank in. He and Bram had indeed gone hunting tonight.

And I was their prey.

Except I didn't feel hunted. They hadn't chased me or backed me into a corner.

Instead, they'd taken me to a private dinner and made me laugh. They'd surprised me with a birthday cake—the only gift I'd ever received.

But the real gift was the experience—the sights and sounds of a life I never thought I'd see.

Fergus stopped the car in a courtyard bordered by night blooming roses and vines that climbed up the castle walls. Before I could open my door, he was outside, helping me from the car with Bram at his side. As I took Fergus's hand, I was struck anew by their masculine beauty. They were so different: Fergus light and outgoing, Bram dark and reserved. They balanced each other.

They love each other.

The thought entered my head like an arrow, creating an unexpected ache. What would it be like, having a love like that?

I swallowed the lump that had formed in my throat. "Thank you for showing me the city."

"We have one more thing to show you," Fergus said. He glanced at the sky. "If it's not too late."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“It’s not.” The sun was still below the horizon.

Fergus’s smile could have powered the whole castle. He looked at Bram, who nodded.

I frowned. What were they—

They shifted to smoke, their clothes dropping to the ground in twin heaps.

I stumbled back.

The man-shaped column of smoke that used to be Fergus shivered, and I could have almost sworn it smiled. Then, without warning, both columns streaked upward.

I followed their ascent, my head tipped back and my heart racing. The columns continued to climb before splitting apart and streaking away from each other.

Then they burst into dragons.

My lips parted on a gasp. They were beautiful and enormous and a dozen other descriptors that deserted me as I marveled at their dance in the predawn sky. Fergus was a mix of silver and blue, whereas Bram was the solid, deep emerald of his eyes. Their bodies were long and sinuous, with spikes that ran from their heads to whipping tails that trailed behind them. It was hard to judge their size from the ground, but they were larger than the car behind me—probably bigger than the airplanes I occasionally saw pass over Krovnosta.

Yes, I thought, that was a good comparison. Their wings stretched as wide as the wings on those jets. But the dragons' wings weren't fixed or rigid. They bent and flexed as Bram and Fergus soared among the stars.

They dipped and wheeled, tracing patterns through the air as if they'd synchronized their movements. Their scales glittered like jewels in the moonlight, and sparks flew from their tails as they changed direction, streaking away from each other once more. Then, together, they released a stream of fire that lit up the sky and reflected in the distant loch.

The heat caressed my skin, wrapping around me like a warm blanket as the dragons swooped toward earth. Bram led, his wings flapping as he alighted on the courtyard's cobblestones. Fergus touched down behind him. Smoke streamed from their nostrils. Two sets of reptilian eyes settled on me.

Power. There was no question these were the most dangerous creatures on the planet. Up close, their scales were like armor. Curved talons scraped the stones. I blinked at the sight of my body reflected in their glowing pupils. Just as my throat went dry with fear, they shifted to smoke. The black clouds streamed toward me, and then reformed into Bram and Fergus.

Nude Bram and Fergus.

The latter tossed me a puckish grin as he went to his clothes and pulled on his pants. "Apologies, lass. Nudity tends to be an occupational hazard for shifters."

I waved a hand. "It's nothing."

He made a face. "Well, no' nothing, I hope."

I bit my lip. It certainly wasn't—not for either of them. I'd seen Fergus in the buff

more than once, but Bram... Well, he was large everywhere, and I was torn between relief and disappointment when he donned his pants once more.

My relief was short-lived, however, as the men strolled toward me barechested and limned in moonlight. The desire I'd struggled to suppress came roaring back, and this time I couldn't blame it on bloodlust. Fergus was right: I wanted him simply for him.

But I was also attracted to Bram, and it was a struggle to keep my gaze off his broad chest as he and Fergus reached me.

"You know," Fergus drawled, "it occurs to me you never answered my question back at the pub."

It took me a minute to realize he spoke of the "twenty questions" game we'd played. "I didn't realize you were keeping score."

"Oh, I was. You were supposed to say when you need to drink from me again."

"Who says she has to drink from you?" Bram asked.

Right away, my gaze went to his neck. Would he taste as good as Fergus? I wasn't hungry yet, but my fangs ached nevertheless. I ducked my head and tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear.

"What's this?" In a flash, Bram seized my wrist in a light but firm grip, his gaze fastened on the back of my hand.

"Nothing. Just an old accident." I tugged against his hold, but it was useless. His hand swallowed mine and his dark brows knit together as he studied the injury I'd carried since childhood.

“‘Tis old, aye, but this was no accident.” He lifted his eyes, and pain hovered in them. “I know a burn when I see one. I’m...familiar with what fire can do. And this was inflicted deliberately.”

The hair on my nape lifted. “How do you know that?”

He touched the waxy, rippled skin. “The burn stops here.” He drew a light fingertip across my wrist, making me shiver. “Fire will always climb. This was neatly done.” His voice went lower than I’d ever heard it. “It has the hallmark of torture.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Fergus's chest rumbled with a growl.

Shame swept me, and I looked down so I wouldn't have to meet their eyes. "When I was young, some of my father's warriors tried to teach me how to channel. They thought if they thrust me into the sun my instincts would kick in and my body would save itself. But...that didn't happen."

The men were utterly still. After a long moment, Bram spoke in a rasp. "They forced you into the sun? The daughter of the prince?"

I shook my head. "Vampires don't care about birthrights. Only the Blood. It chooses the strongest to serve as prince. My weakness is a liability. If it wasn't for my brother, the warriors at court would have killed me."

Bram studied the scars on my hand. "He saved you this day?"

"Yes." The memory of the sun blistering my skin—of the bones underneath beginning to crumble—was as clear as if someone had emblazoned it on the inside of my skull.

"And he killed those who tried to murder you?"

I pressed my lips together. "He...did not."

Fergus scowled. "What possible reason could he have had to let those scum live?"

"He told me that living among my enemies would make me stronger, and that if I

wanted to stop being a victim I should learn to fight.”

“And I don’t suppose he offered to train you?”

Fergus’s voice dripped with sarcasm, but I answered anyway. “Aleksander never does anything unless it benefits him directly. To be honest, I’m not sure why he saved me. My uncle spoke recently of giving me to another prince as a concubine. Maybe Aleks thought it was worth keeping me around for that kind of alliance.”

Bram clasped my hand in both of his. “That won’t happen, Halina. Your worth isn’t measured in alliances. As for training, it would be my honor to teach you to rip the bawbag off the next vampire who dares lay a hand on you.”

Fergus caught my eye. “He means scrotum.”

Mirth bubbled up, but I managed to nod solemnly.

“I’d take him up on his offer, lass. There are few warriors as fine as Bram.”

He was difficult to resist. Both of them were. They looked at me like they would do anything to protect me.

Like I was precious.

“All right,” I said.

“There’s something else,” Bram said softly. “You’ll need two good hands if you mean to swing a sword.” Fire flared to life in his pupils, but this time the blaze was...calmer. Somehow, I knew its source was altogether different from passion.

The courtyard around us appeared to sparkle, as if someone had tossed glitter into the

air. There was no wind, but currents teased my hair and swept gently over my skin. Before I could fully absorb the magic of it all, a small, perfect tear slid from the corner of Bram's eye and onto his cheek.

Only it wasn't a tear.

It was a diamond.

I held my breath as he collected it from his cheek and carried it to my lips, and it was the most natural thing in the world to let him place it in my mouth.

The second it touched my tongue, a flash of fire licked through me. Heat traveled a wild and unrestrained path from my mouth to every part of my body, filling me with euphoria. Minor aches disappeared, and the back of my hand began to itch. As I lifted it, the rippled skin smoothed out, the remnants of the burn giving way to whole, unblemished skin.

Astonished, I could only stare. This was what they'd sent to Krovnosta. Their healing tears—as priceless as diamonds. Only now I knew they were diamonds.

He reached out and stroked my cheek. “I can't heal the scars you carry inside, but this is a start, hmm?”

“Yes,” I whispered. It was a start.

My skin tingled—and then it began to burn.

The sun.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I darted a look at the horizon, which glowed orange.

“Right,” Fergus said. Quick as lightning, he scooped me into his arms and sped us inside. Bram followed at the same inhuman pace and bolted the doors behind us.

Fergus set me gently on my feet and stepped back. “I suppose this is where we say goodnight.” His dimple appeared. “Unless you’d like to join us upstairs?”

He meant it, too. The invitation burned in his gaze.

And it lit a fire inside me. But he wasn’t asking for just one night. He and Bram wanted a lifetime. And for our kind, that could very well mean an eternity. They were so certain fate had brought us together, but how could they be certain a relationship between the three of us would work? They’d been together for centuries, and it showed in their easy banter and obvious passion. What if I ended up being a wedge that drove them apart?

I had to swallow a few times before I could speak. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Disappointment flickered in his eyes, but he inclined his head gracefully. “As you wish, Halina.” He leaned in and kissed my cheek—a gentle brush of his lips that brought the scent of cinnamon and evergreen to my nose. As he withdrew, his breath fluttered over my skin. “But you keep forgetting I can tell when you’re lying.”

He mounted the stairs, and then Bram was at my side. “Goodnight, lass.” He kissed my other cheek, the touch of his lips just as light.

And just as devastating.

I could only stand there, my body quaking, as they ascended the staircase. Leaving me alone with the knowledge of what they were going to do when they went to bed.

And gods help me, I couldn't help thinking I'd just made the wrong decision.

Chapter Twelve

BRAM

As I stood outside Halina's suite the next morning, it was a struggle not to cut and run before she opened the door and discovered me. This was Fergus's purview. He could talk to anyone, anywhere, at any time. Human, vampire, unicorn—it didn't matter. He'd once charmed the notoriously bloodthirsty Orkomoth demon king into releasing a fellow dragon from prison.

If anyone could coax Halina from her shell, it was Fergus Devlin, which was exactly what I'd told him this morning.

"If anyone can coax Halina from her shell, it's you. I'll only frighten her."

"Nonsense," he'd said, strolling from the bathroom stark naked with a toothbrush in his hand, which he'd waved around like a conductor in a symphony. "She likes you, Bram, and she's just starting to realize you're not an ogre."

I'd sat up in bed, sputtering. "I'm not an ogre!"

"Aye," he said with exaggerated patience. "That's what I just said. Look, you offered to train her and she said yes. This is a perfect opportunity to close the deal. Strike while the iron is hot. Make hay while the sun shines."

I held up a hand. “Just...stop with the idioms.”

He crossed to the bed and smiled down at me. “You’re mysterious. Females like that sort of thing.”

I glowered, which only made his smile widen.

“She’s curious about you,” he said. “Take advantage of it.”

I hesitated, then sighed. “She’s had a hard life ‘til now, and we don’t even ken the half of it. We can protect her from the bastards who raised her, but we can also empower her by teaching her how to protect herself.” I swallowed. “I don’t want to train her for me. I want to train her for her.”

“I know,” he said softly. “You’re a good man, Bram McGregor.” He pushed the hair off my forehead—a familiar gesture as beloved to me as anything he did. “Now go show our mate how lucky she is to have you.”

Our mate. He’d won me over with that. A reluctant smile tugged at my lips as I gazed at Halina’s door. Knowing Fergus, he’d plotted out our entire conversation and settled on the angle he knew I’d be unable to resist. I might have grown up in a palace, but he was a natural-born courtier.

The door opened, and Halina stopped and gaped at me. “Bram. You’re...here.”

“Aye.” Gods, she looked lovely in a flowing dress the same shade as her eyes. Her pert breasts pressed against the thin material, and I coughed into my fist before I added, “I thought we could train this morn. Uh, evening. Well, morning for you, I suppose.” I clamped my jaw shut to stifle my rambling.

Her eyes went wide. “Train? Like you and me?”

“Aye. You agreed to it last night.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“I remember.” She seemed to recover from her initial shock. “I just didn’t think we’d start right away.”

Strike while the iron is hot. “No time like the present.”

Her mouth opened. Then closed. Indecision played over her features.

What would Fergus do?

Easy. He’d act like she already agreed.

“You should probably change. The training room’s at the end of the hall. Make a left outside your door and don’t stop until you reach the suit of armor. I’ll meet you inside.” With that, I turned and strode off, a heady sense of victory pumping through me. Was this how Fergus felt all the time? No wonder he never shut up.

But it remained to be seen whether resorting to his tactics would work for me.

Ten minutes later, I got my answer when Halina walked into the training room.

I shot up from the weight bench I’d been sitting on, my stomach instantly knotting with nerves.

She plucked at her hot pink tank top. “Is this all right? I wasn’t sure what to wear.”

“Aye,” I said, my voice emerging as little more than a rasp. “It’s perfect.” It was a damn sight more than that, actually. “Moisture-wicking” was what they called that

material, and it was designed for performance rather than sex appeal. But it was sexy as hell on her, as were the black leggings that hugged her ass and thighs. She'd pulled her long hair into a ponytail, and the brilliant strands swayed as she flashed a self-conscious smile.

"The color probably clashes with my hair."

"Not in the least." She'd look stunning in a brown paper bag. Or nothing at all.

Color bloomed in her cheeks. "I guess appearance doesn't matter in a fight."

I relaxed. Because this was a subject I understood. "On the contrary, lass, it can be the difference between a win or a loss." I swept my arms back and forth in front of my body, warming up.

"Really? How so?"

"A good warrior uses everything at his"—I smiled—"or her disposal. Most males are dense as bricks when faced with a pretty woman. You can capitalize on that. Distract them and get close enough to make a strike."

She gave me a skeptical look. "I think I'd rather just learn how to kick a male's ass."

Surprise flared in my mind, but perhaps it shouldn't have. She'd arrived in the Highlands cowed and frightened, but she was quickly showing that wasn't her natural state of being. Grinning, I motioned her toward a mat in the center of the room. "We can do that, too, lass."

She moved to the mat, her expression wary. "All right, but I have to warn you, I have no idea what I'm doing."

“You’re too hard on yourself. I guarantee I’ve had far worse pupils.”

* * *

An hour later, I was certain Halina was the worst pupil I’d ever had. Her reaction time was poor, her footwork was nonexistent, and she had a tendency to telegraph her punches.

Not that she managed to land any.

I frowned as we circled each other on the mat. “For the last time, lass, keep your thumb on the outside of your hand. If you tuck it in like that you’re going to break it.”

“Sorry.” She pushed a strand of hair off her sweaty face. “I forgot.”

I beckoned her forward. “Not a problem. Now, try to hit me.”

She nodded, then continued circling. After a few seconds, she darted a look at my midsection and lunged forward.

I dodged the blow with ease. “Missed. Stop looking at your target before you attack.”

“I didn’t!”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“Oh?” I jogged in place to keep my muscles warm. “Then how did I know where you were going to hit?”

She frowned, one tiny fang gnawing at her lower lip.

Gods. If I got much harder, I was going to have to cut our session short. Even now, her incense and honeysuckle scent tormented me. I’d tried hard not to envy Fergus his experience feeding her, but I couldn’t help wondering how her lips would feel at my neck. As a rule, dragons were reluctant to part with tears or blood. We’d been hunted for both in ages past.

But I’d open a vein for Halina if she asked it. She could take whatever—

My head snapped to the side, and pain exploded in my jaw.

I straightened to find her backing away with a hand over her mouth.

“I’m so sorry!” she cried. “Are you okay? I didn’t mean to—”

“Hit me?” I rubbed at my jaw, humor tugging at my lips. “Aye, you did.”

She lowered her hand. “I...did. I really hit you.”

“And a fine punch it was, lass.”

“Are you hurt?” Her blue gaze roved over my face, and she drifted close like she needed to assess the damage herself. Her breasts rose above the tight neckline of her

top, the plump swells sheened with sweat.

“Only my pride,” I murmured.

“Your bruised jaw suggests otherwise.”

I reached out and tugged the end of her ponytail. “One lucky punch and now you’re bold enough to taunt?”

She smiled, and relief washed over me because I’d intended her to. She’d come a long way from the cowering, timid creature Fergus had tied up on his bed, and watching her blossom was more satisfying than I could say.

“How about a recovery drink?” I asked her, aware my voice was deep with the desire that had plagued me since I first glimpsed her spandex-clad curves. I went to a mini fridge in the corner and withdrew two post-workout shakes. When I returned and extended one to her, she read the label and lifted amused eyes to mine.

“Chocolate Dream?”

I shrugged as I cracked mine open. “Fergus buys it.”

She sniffed at hers, then took a sip. Her eyes widened over the rim, and when she lowered the bottle she made a sound of astonished pleasure. “That is really good.”

“Aye. Almost worth getting my jaw rearranged by a wee dhampir.”

Her laughter sent heat swirling over my nape, and the sight of her fangs made my cock tighten. “Let’s sit,” I said abruptly. “I think we’ve earned it.”

She joined me on the mat and used her forearm to wipe sweat from her brow. “Do

you really think I can learn to hold my own in a fight?”

“With enough training, aye, I do. Warriors come in all shapes and sizes. I’ve seen diminutive fighters take down an opponent thrice their size.”

Curiosity lit her gaze. “When you were a Sovereign—” She searched for the phrase.

“Sovereign Guard.” I braced for the next question and, sure enough, it came.

“Did you really join at sixteen?”

Damn Fergus’s big mouth. “It’s more accurate to say I was born to it.” I shifted, uncomfortable talking about myself. It was much easier to listen to others speak of their own lives, which were invariably more interesting than mine. But Halina and I had something important in common, and maybe telling her as much would bring her closer to me.

So I took a deep breath and forced the words to come. “My mother died birthing me...and my twin sister.”

Halina’s eyes went wide. “I thought there were no female dragons left.”

“There aren’t. The baby was weak and malformed—a result of the blood disease that took all our females.”

Her gaze faltered. “My brother said you blame the vampires for that.”

“‘Tis but a theory, lass. The truth is we just don’t know. The Curse originated a thousand years ago, when humans still believed bathing could open the body to evil spirits. We may never know what caused it, just as the Razroth demon who delivered my sister and me was mystified as to how my mother conceived a female in the first place.”

Halina’s eyes had widened at my mention of the Razroth. “My uncle always said you can’t trust the demonkind.”

“He’s not alone in that.” The demon tribes had a reputation for being dirty fighters, preferring to sneak up on enemies and kill them from behind rather than face an opponent openly on the field of battle, where they were certain to lose against an immortal. They resorted to such tricks so frequently, some claimed the term “backstabber” had originated with them and eventually made its way into the human world.

“But the dragons trust them?” she asked.

“There are honorable tribes.” I gave a rueful smile. “And we dragons don’t have many allies. When my mother died, my fathers were alone. And heartbroken.”

Sympathy filled her gaze. “And that can kill a dragon.”

I nodded. “The Razroth offered to take me in, but dragon tradition calls for orphans to be raised at Castle Beithir, where King Cormac holds court. He’s a true ancient,

possibly the oldest living creature in the world. He found his mate, Niall, long ago, but they have no female. The loss of our women threw the king into a sort of madness. He rarely takes human form, and his dragon is... Well, it's something to behold. When he'd fall into one of his rages, the whole castle would shake."

"Not a place for a child," she said softly.

I rubbed a hand over my mouth, remembering. "I don't know how he discovered it—dumb luck, maybe—but Niall found that Cormac grew calmer when I was around. So I joined the Sovereign Guard as a lad."

She paled. "They forced you to keep company with an unstable king? At sixteen years old?"

"It was a different time, lass. A lad of sixteen was an adult back then. And I didn't have to do much. Just sit in the throne room for a few hours a day."

"That must have been boring."

"Aye. I suppose that's where I learned to keep quiet. But there's something to be said for observing. Courtiers and emissaries would visit from all over. Representatives from the Firstborn Races. Other magical creatures. Someone was always waiting to speak to Niall or the king. If you're patient and you let people talk long enough, they'll tell you everything you could ever want to know about them. Even their secrets."

"And then you met Fergus."

I didn't even try not to smile. "We were twenty-five. I haven't known a moment of silence since."

Her laugh was full and rich. “I used to think you were scary because you were so quiet. Now I realize you just never get an opportunity to speak.”

I chuckled with her. “Fergus is a force of nature, but he saved me in a number of ways. I never had a family. Never knew my parents.” I held her gaze. “I believe you ken how that can shape a person.”

Her smile faded, and then she looked down at her lap. “Yes. I had my father, but I was only ever a disappointment to him.”

“What of your other relatives? You mentioned a brother.”

She grimaced. “Aleksander is a complicated male. There’s also my Uncle Grigory, but he probably hates me more than my father and brother combined.”

“Whatever for?” Anger rose hot and swift at the thought of her own relatives mistreating her.

Her chest lifted as she sighed. “All vampires honor the Blood, but Grigory worships it. He perceives any sign of weakness as a threat to the throne. Everything about me offends him.” She ticked items off her fingers. “My inability to channel, my awful fighting skills, my distaste for blood—”

“You dislike blood?” I’d never heard of such a thing. The vampires’ bloodlust was legendary.

She flushed and looked away. “I don’t know why. I just never liked it.” A frown marred her otherwise smooth brow. “Although, I enjoyed it when I fed from Fergus.”

My dick went instantly hard. “Aye, he mentioned that.”

“D-Did he?” She swung back to me.

And my breath caught.

Because her gaze was focused on my neck.

And now her eyes glowed a brilliant, unearthly blue.

Chapter Thirteen

HALINA

The hunger clawed at me—perhaps brought on by the memory of how delicious Fergus’s blood had tasted. I’d been a fool to bring it up.

And now it was all I could do not to leap across the mat and find out if Bram’s was the same. My fangs ached—and so did my sex.

“Aye,” Bram said, his green gaze steady. “He did.”

It was a struggle to tear my eyes from the pulse in his neck. “What?” I’d forgotten what we were talking about.

“Fergus, lass. He said you enjoyed drinking from him.”

Oh gods, I had.

“Your eyes are different,” he murmured, but he didn’t look shocked in the least.

No, he looked downright enchanted, and his own eyes gleamed a deeper green. He was gorgeous—and now I knew he was a gentle giant. Not at all the taciturn male I’d thought him.

“I like it, Halina,” he rumbled.

My heart raced, galloping like a wild thing in my chest. “You do?”

“Mmhmm. And, you know, I cannae help but wonder if you’d enjoy feeding from me just as much as you did Fergus.”

Moisture surged between my legs, and now my voice trembled with need. “I’ve wondered that, too.”

“Have you now?” He tipped his chin up ever so slightly.

I was on him like a flash of lightning, my fingers spearing through his dark hair to hold his head still as I nuzzled his neck. Immediately, frustration battered me. “I’ll hurt you,” I panted. “My fangs aren’t long enough to pierce the skin.”

“What do ye need?”

“Knife.”

“Hold on.” He tightened his arms around me, stood in one fluid motion, and whisked us from the room. I buried my face in the hollow of his neck as wind whipped around us. When we stopped, we were in an unfamiliar bedroom and he was pressing a blade into my hand.

It had all happened so fast. I swayed on my feet, his heartbeat loud in my ears.

He pulled his T-shirt over his head and tossed it aside. “Cut me wherever you wish, lass.”

Need assailed me. He was a walking fantasy—smooth, golden skin and muscles for days. And he was offering himself to me, giving me carte blanche with his magnificent body.

Could I take it? Because if I did, I wouldn't be able to walk away this time. My panties were soaked, my breasts heavy and aching.

A thought flashed in my head, clear and certain as an arrow hitting a target: If I fed from him, I was going to sleep with him, too.

He waited, patient and steady. There was fire in his eyes, but he wouldn't touch me unless I willed it. I knew that now.

When I stepped toward him, his eyes went heavy-lidded. Anticipation coiled around him like a snake, but he remained still, and he didn't flinch as I drew close and flicked the tip of the knife over his vein.

But he jerked when I latched onto his neck. And with my first draw, he gave a low, sexy moan.

The sound shot straight to my sex, which clenched hard and made me moan in response. My eyelids fluttered shut as ecstasy overwhelmed me. He smelled of cedar and smoke. He tasted like fire. His exquisite blood rushed down my throat, spreading the blaze everywhere. My body undulated against his, and the feel of his hard muscle against my curves was almost as satisfying as the taste of his blood.

One big hand stroked my hair, and another slid around my waist to pull my hips into his.

At the feel of his rock-hard erection, my eyes flew open. He was just as large there as he was everywhere else. I swiped my tongue over the wound in his neck and pulled back, torn between lust and apprehension. "Bram..."

Page 44

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

He brushed the backs of his fingers over my cheek, his expression achingly gentle. “You’ve nothin’ tae worry about.”

“But I’ve never...” I ducked my head as my cheeks warmed.

He made a soft sound as he curled a finger under my chin and coaxed my gaze to his. “‘Tis your first time?” At my tentative nod, his expression gentled even further. “I’ll take such good care of you, lass. We dinnae have to do everything all at once. I ken I’m a big lad.”

A battle waged within me, flipping back and forth between indecision and desire. When I dabbed my tongue over my lower lip, savoring the last of his blood, he shivered.

“Ah, Halina, you ruin me.”

With that heartfelt declaration, the last of my inhibitions fell away. I rose on tiptoe and pressed my lips to his.

He made a low, satisfied sound and stroked his tongue along mine.

My first kiss. Who would have ever thought it would come from a dragon? Then again, he was exceedingly kissable, his lips so much softer than his body. Feather-soft. Impossibly gentle. He wrapped an arm around my back, lifting me up and into him. Giving me as much access as I wanted to take.

And I found I wanted all of it. Boldness rushed through me, and I sucked at his

tongue, letting the tip of one fang drag along the surface. A shot of his delectable blood filled my mouth.

He moaned roughly, and the hard length of his shaft pressed firmly against my belly.

I clutched at his shoulders, lost in his taste and scent. My nipples tightened to hard points, and the flesh between my legs grew hot and swollen. A great restlessness swept me, urging me toward a goal I didn't know how to reach.

But he did. He slid his fingers into my hair and tugged me back, breaking off our kiss to rest his forehead against mine. His breaths came fast, and his eyes danced with the flames I'd once feared and now craved.

"You tasted me, lass," he said in a voice like sandpaper. "Now I want tae taste you."

Heat blasted me, the force of it so intense I gasped against his lips. Inexperienced as I was, I knew what he meant. Except... "I'm all sweaty." He couldn't do that. Mortified, I pushed at his chest.

He held me fast, his big palm cupping the back of my head. The tiny fires in his pupils jumped higher as he smiled. "If yer dirty, lass, we'll just have to clean you off." He slid a hand down my arm and laced his fingers with mine. "Come."

My heart pounded as I let him pull me across the suite and into a bathroom. It was probably modern and beautiful, but I didn't notice. Nothing could have peeled my attention away from the breathtaking male before me. His abs flexed as he removed his shoes and socks and pushed his sweats down his hips. I watched them plop to the floor, and then bit my lip as he stepped out of them. Then he stood before me in nothing but a pair of tight-fitting boxer briefs.

I found myself leaning forward, desperate for him to keep going.

He hooked his thumbs in his waistband. “All right, lass?”

“Yes,” I said through a throat gone dry. The boldness that had swept me before returned. “If you don’t take them off, I’ll do it for you.”

His nostrils flared, and he gave me a look so smoldering I whimpered. “As my lady commands,” he rasped, and pushed the fabric down his hips.

I could only stare, transfixed by the sight of his powerful form. He was all male—every inch of his body cut and defined. Smooth, golden skin beckoned me forward, and before I knew it I was touching him, smoothing my hands over his chest and down his rippling abs.

He stood still, letting me explore even as his breath hitched and his heart beat faster. The air thickened, as if our combined lust had sucked all the oxygen from the room.

I stopped my exploration just above his shaft, which bobbed thick and heavy between us. I’d never considered this part of the male anatomy appealing before, but his cock was a thing of beauty. The rigid length was as smooth and hard as the rest of him, the round shaft traced with plump veins that made fresh hunger stir deep within me. The spongy head drew my gaze over and over, and I had the most overwhelming urge to drop to my knees and take it in my mouth—to dab my tongue over the pearly fluid gathered in that tantalizing slit.

“Halina.”

His murmur brought my head up, and the hunger in his eyes rivaled my own. I had to swallow before I could speak. “What comes next?”

“You do, love.”

His words stroked between my thighs as surely as if he'd used his tongue. I trembled with need, ready to beg if I had to.

But I should have known Bram would never leave me wanting. He pulled my clothes off, peeling away my leggings and top. If I'd harbored any embarrassment about being nude before him, it vanished at the raw lust in his eyes. When my breasts bounced free, he growled like an animal, his jaw clenched as his gaze moved over my puckered nipples.

Touch them! The plea hovered in my mind, but I couldn't quite bring myself to voice it.

He reached out and slid the elastic from my hair. "We'll leave the panties for now," he said huskily. "I have plans for those."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

My core tightened, and a daze fell over me, making my limbs feel heavy. I didn't resist as he grasped my hand once more and led me to the shower. He twisted a few knobs, bringing forth a spray that quickly filled the glass stall with steam. Then he pulled me inside and the water beat down on both of us, rinsing away the sweat from our training session and plastering my hair to my back.

He smoothed a big hand down the tangled mass...and then kept going, following the curve of my spine. Despite the warmth of the water, I shivered as he ran his palm over my skin, his touch almost reverent. He slid callused fingertips under the edge of my panties and cupped my ass, making me moan as I grew wetter. When he swept back up to my ribs, I huffed a disappointed breath that made him smile.

“Need something, lass?”

I shivered again, blinking against the steam that lifted around us. I groped for the right words, eventually landing on a breathless “please.”

He backed me slowly to the wall, his hard chest making contact with my stiffened nipples and drawing another breathless moan from my throat. “How can I resist such a lovely request?” he murmured. Then he lowered his head and placed a soft kiss on my cheek. As I trembled, flushed and wanting, he painted a line of tender kisses down my water-slick body, touching his lips to my neck, my chest, my breasts. I sucked in a breath as he licked the tip of one tingling nipple before moving down my stomach.

He sank to his knees.

Goosebumps rose on my skin, and I stared down at his dark head, anticipation knotting my stomach. Was he going to...

He kissed my sex over my panties.

Yes. Yes, he was.

Desire streaked down my spine, making my knees loosen. There was nothing to hold onto, so I clutched at his hair, keeping his mouth where I wanted it.

He murmured something I didn't catch and kissed me again, nothing but a thin layer of wet silk between his lips and my throbbing flesh. My hips thrust forward and my breath rushed out as I groaned.

Then his tongue moved more forcefully, pushing past my folds to graze my clit. My back arched. My fingers tightened in his hair.

So this was what he'd intended for my panties. He was going to use them to drive me crazy. To tease and torment.

And he did exactly that, nibbling along the edge of the fabric until he touched my naked flesh. He kissed me there, the tip of his tongue tracing a hot path along my sensitive folds. His teeth scraped, and I moaned, my head lolling on the wall behind me. I couldn't see his face, could only stand helplessly as his mouth pressed harder against my sex and his tongue inched closer to my throbbing center.

He snagged my panties in his teeth and tugged. Now the fabric lodged between my lips, the bulk of it pressing right over my aching clit.

And still he ignored it, drawing his hot tongue up one side of my sex and down the other, humming in a way that sent vibrations scattering through my core.

“Bram,” I gasped, my whole body quivering. Hungering. Needing more. I pulled his hair, desperate for more of his tongue.

“Aye,” he chuckled, licking the silk bisecting my folds. “You know right where you want me, don’t you, lass?” He ripped my panties away with one quick twist, leaving me exquisitely bare and trembling.

He stared at my sex for a long moment, then lifted a hooded gaze to mine. “You are so fucking gorgeous. I never dreamed of such a mate.”

I believed him. His expression was one of awe—of a male who couldn’t believe his luck.

He turned his attention back to my sex, placing the softest kiss on my mound before murmuring, “Spread your legs a little, sweetheart.”

I obeyed, my heartbeat pounding between my thighs. I was so wet for him, I could feel the moisture seeping from me.

And he liked what he saw, because he growled and bent his head again, swiping a firm tongue straight up my center. “That’s my good lass, getting so wet for me. Keep it coming, sweetheart, because I’m a thirsty man.”

He spread my folds apart with his thumbs.

Then he began his torture in earnest.

He tongued my clit, making me jerk and moan loudly. I pushed my hips shamelessly against his face, grinding hard against his mouth as pleasure blistered through me. Plenty of nights in Krovnosta, I’d snaked a hand under the blankets as I lay in bed, my fingers fumbling to satisfy a need that was more of an inconvenience than a

source of pleasure.

This was altogether different. A whole new universe of delights I never knew existed. This big, beautiful male had knelt at my feet, and now he was worshiping me with his tongue.

It was so much—too much—and yet I wanted more.

He sucked my clit into his mouth, swirling his tongue in a way that made electricity sizzle from my sex to my breasts and everywhere else. I arched harder, my spine bowing off the wall. My eyes squeezed shut and bright lights burst behind my lids. Something—a wild, unstoppable force—screamed toward me.

He gripped my ass in two big hands and worked me harder, doing something fast and wicked with his tongue.

Page 46

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

My muscles clenched and my body unraveled.

And then came apart.

I screamed as pleasure engulfed me, sucking me under a warm, dark sea. My knees loosened, and my back slid down the tile.

Bram rose and caught me before I could fall. “Easy, lass. I’ve got you.” He moved with brisk efficiency, scooping me into his arms and shutting off the shower while I drifted, semi-coherent, against his chest. Somehow, he maneuvered a towel around us without dropping me, and then the world swayed as he carried me to his bed.

I struggled from my stupor when he pulled the covers back. “My hair’s all wet.”

“So?”

“I need to dry off—”

“Nonsense.” He lowered me to the sheets and settled beside me. “You don’t need a towel when you’ve got a dragon.” He ran a suddenly hot palm up my stomach to cup one of my breasts.

The door opened and Fergus strode in. “Two dragons, actually.”

I tensed, my gaze darting between him and Bram. Would Fergus be jealous? His mate of three centuries had just licked me to a mind-bending orgasm, and now we were naked in bed together.

Bram turned to me. “What do you think, lass? Should we ask Fergus to join us?”

Heat prickled across my skin. Bram was as unruffled as he could be. They both were.

Because they wanted this—the three of us sharing a bed.

Did I want it?

Could I handle it? Them? There was a difference between oral sex and, well, sex. For one thing, sex with them meant accepting the mate bond.

“I don’t know,” I said slowly, unsure if I answered Bram or myself. “Mating is a big step, and I don’t think—”

“It’s not a mating,” he said.

I blinked. “It’s not?”

Fergus smiled, his dimple appearing. “No’ this time, sweetheart. We have to take you together, at the same time, to seal our bond. Do you ken my meaning?”

Oh.

I definitely wasn’t ready for that. Maybe I’d never be ready.

But if this was different, with no conditions or commitments...

“No strings attached,” Fergus said, seeming to read my thoughts. “Just pleasure.”

Still cupping my breast, Bram drew his thumb over my nipple in a casual caress that made my sex clench hard.

Fergus drifted closer, his silver gaze devouring Bram and me both. “Say yes, Halina. I promise to be on my very worst behavior.”

Chapter Fourteen

FERGUS

Halina was exquisite—her pale curves a delectable contrast to Bram’s hard, muscled form. She’d been well-loved, too. Her eyes had that hazy, satisfied glow.

Which Bram had undoubtedly put there.

And, oh, but there was opportunity in that.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I ditched my clothes, mindful of the way he pushed his body up on the pillows, his gaze wary even as he looked me over with unconcealed lust.

Halina watched as well, her cheeks flushed the same dark pink as her nipples.

Deep within my consciousness, my beast stirred restlessly. “MINE.”

“Aye, both of them,” I told it, a wicked grin spreading through my mind as I sat on the bed next to Bram’s hip. I made my voice light. “What have you two been up to? You were supposed to be training.”

“Aye,” he said gruffly. “We did that.”

I ran a hand up his thigh, stopping short of touching his cock, which lay stiff and swollen across his stomach. “Anything else?”

His breathing picked up, his eyes darting from my hand to my face. “I ate Halina’s pussy.”

She sucked in a breath.

“Did you now?” I took Bram’s cock in a firm grip.

He hissed. “Fergus, don’t you dare...”

“What?” I asked innocently, giving him a slow, thorough stroke I knew was certain to drive him mad. Sure enough, he groaned, his stubbled jaw clenching. A drop of

moisture formed in his slit.

“Don’t tease me,” he grated.

I slid a look at Halina, who’d risen to her elbow and watched the tip of Bram’s shaft with lust-filled eyes. I looked there, too, as did Bram, and the three of us watched as the bead of fluid swelled and then dribbled down his dusky head.

“Gods,” he whispered, the thick muscles in his chest bunching as he shivered.

I gave him another languid pump. “I’ve no interest in teasing you. I’d much rather fuck you.”

His eyes went heavy-lidded. For a moment, he seemed to waver, and I was positive he’d turn me down. Then he grunted. “Aye.”

I hid my surprise, but just barely, my own cock going stiff as a poker at this unexpected gift. I’d have to figure him out later, though.

Because tonight was for Halina.

She must have felt my gaze on her, because she lifted wide eyes to mine.

I tipped my head toward Bram. “He can wait a bit longer, lass. I want to start with you.”

Her lips parted. “Me?”

She was so adorably innocent. I had to remember that. My only desire was to make this good for her. My own pleasure—and Bram’s for that matter—was unimportant. This was about so much more than sex. She needed to understand how much she

meant to us. How fate had connected her soul to ours.

“You,” I told her, moving fully onto the bed.

Bram knew exactly what to do, and he lifted her easily and settled her between his thighs so her back was against his chest. Then he pushed her damp hair aside and nuzzled her neck, making her gasp and melt into him.

Perfect.

They were gorgeous together, and desire pumped a steady drumbeat in my veins as his big hands cupped her breasts, caressing the plump swells until she moaned, her little fangs showing between her full, pink lips. He rubbed his thumbs over her nipples, which grew even stiffer under his ministrations.

“Keep doing that,” I murmured.

He pressed a kiss to the side of her neck. “I’ve no intention of stopping.”

She arched, her thighs parting, giving me a glimpse of her glistening core.

But I needed far more than a glimpse. Cock tight and aching, I eased her thighs wide, hooking her knees over his so she was open for my regard.

Page 48

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

My breath rushed from me at the sight of her other full, pink lips.

More perfection—although that was too weak a word for her sleek folds and swollen clit. It stood up from its sheath, dainty yet bold. Begging for my tongue.

She met my gaze, her eyes dark with need, but also hesitant. A little afraid.

Bram slid a hand to her pussy and circled her clit with two fingers.

“Oh...” Her breath caught, the flush in her cheeks spreading down her neck. “I can’t... Oh gods.”

I went to my stomach between her thighs, my throbbing cock trapped under me. I ignored it as I blew gently on her folds, thrilling at the scent of her desire. “I need to taste you, lass.” I puffed another breath over her clit, and she shivered. “Is that all right?”

“Yes,” she moaned. “Please.”

The desire in my blood beat harder, becoming a sort of pain. My beast pushed at me, urging me to rise up and sink into her heat.

But that wouldn’t do. She deserved this first. And if I was honest with myself, I wanted everything she’d given Bram. He’d tasted our mate. I wanted the same.

Always attuned to me, he lifted his hand from her sex, offering a seamless transition from his touch to my tongue. I moved in right away, bending and licking a slow path

around her entrance. Driving my tongue deep before kissing up to her clit and sucking the eager little bud into my mouth.

Fuck, she tasted divine. Like flowers and sex. Her breathy gasps drifted around my ears as I feasted on her juices, lapping greedily. My cock pushed hard into the sheets, and it was an effort not to grind my hips against the mattress like an untested lad.

Her fingers brushed my hair, and then she pulled at the strands, her hips lifting to meet me. Her eagerness was a drug—and like an addict, I went back for more and more and more, tonguing her clit until she tensed and cried out.

Close, but she wasn't quite there yet, and I didn't want her to be.

Not just yet.

I lifted my head and found her sprawled in Bram's arms, her red hair wild around her shoulders and her blue eyes glassy with need. Her nipples thrust out lewdly from her creamy breasts, the tips the same blushing pink as her cheeks. Her splayed pussy was shiny with her desire and the path I'd traced with my tongue. She was the portrait of feminine lust. Fuck, I wanted a painting of her just like this.

"Gorgeous," I murmured, kissing her quivering belly.

"You stopped," she said in a voice thick with censure. Her red brows pulled together, and she gave me a look of such consternation I might have smiled if I wasn't teetering on the edge of coming.

As it was, I had to work not to clench my jaw. I even managed a weak smile as I climbed up her body and braced my weight on one palm next to Bram's shoulder. "Just for a wee moment," I told her. I gripped my leaking shaft with my other hand and positioned myself at her entrance. "I want to feel you come when I'm inside you,

lass. Is that what you want?”

Behind her, Bram stroked her hair, his eyes leaping with fire. He had to be hurting, too, his cock straining against her back. But he waited, as I did, feigning patience at all costs because she was innocent and precious and we absolutely could not fail her.

She reached up and ran the backs of her fingers over my jaw, and I thought I might die from that one demure touch. How could something so simple wreck me so completely? “I do,” she said earnestly. “I want you, Fergus. Please.”

Sweeter words had never been spoken. With a grateful sigh, I pushed inside her.

She clenched around me, instinctively trying to keep me out.

“Relax,” Bram crooned in her ear. He toyed with her breasts, plucking and stroking her nipples. Pinching the peaks until she cried out, her sexy little fangs showing. He switched to Gaelic—an older form no modern human would recognize. He told her how lovely she was. How she’d been chosen for us and us for her. How we’d waited lifetimes for her.

How no other female compared.

Slowly, her body yielded, and I slid home with a groan. Even now, she was tight as a fist, her inner muscles strangling my cock. I began to sweat with the effort of holding myself still.

Bram tangled a hand in my hair and brought my mouth to his, giving me a slow, passionate kiss with plenty of tongue. With his mouth on mine and my cock buried in Halina’s pussy, I was damn certain there couldn’t be anything better.

And he achieved his intention, because she gasped and relaxed further.

I pulled back to find her watching us with a fascinated expression. Oh yes, she liked seeing her males together.

I could use that to my advantage.

Right after I made her mine.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“Keep playing with her tits, Bram,” I said, beginning to move. “I think our little mate likes it.”

The lurid order seemed to whip her lust higher, because she moaned...and when he palmed her lush breasts she lifted her hips to meet my thrusts.

I wasn't going to last long at all, not with her pussy gripping my cock like a vise and Bram's fingers toying with her nipples. I dropped my forehead to his shoulder as my control frayed and his and Halina's scents filled my lungs. Honeysuckle and smoke. Incense and fire. “Fuck,” I gasped, pumping faster. Angling my hips so my shaft brushed her clit.

She jolted like she'd been electrocuted, and then she was moving with me, her hips rocking up and up, her lithesome body accepting me at last.

It was insane, the clench of her pussy around my surging dick. Bram's skin against my lips. I turned my head into his neck, breathing like a racehorse as I fucked her harder. The three of us were in a hurricane, our bodies locked in a tight knot of pressure and pleasure.

Then she stiffened—a moment's pause with our souls balanced on a precipice.

“Come,” I growled, beckoning her over the edge. “Come, baby. Let me feel your pussy come all over my dick.”

She obeyed with a keening wail, throwing her legs around my hips and hanging on while I grit my teeth and tried not to pass out from pleasure. A universe exploded

behind my lids, and I realized I'd squeezed my eyes shut—a passenger on a roller coaster screaming down that first drop that steals your breath and fills you with exhilaration and a little bit of fear.

I rode it to the bottom, and then came with a shout muffled against Bram's skin and the fragrant, silky top of Halina's head. Right where I wanted to be.

With them.

Chapter Fifteen

HALINA

As I sprawled in Bram's arms with my sex clenching around Fergus's shaft, I was certain the night couldn't get any hotter.

Then Fergus spoke above me, his breath stirring my hair. "Two choices, babe. On your back or on your knees. Either way, I'm fucking your ass tonight."

My racing heart sped up. I'd nearly fainted when he'd mentioned fucking Bram before. Now that it was actually going to happen, I wasn't sure I could survive it.

Bram's answering rumble vibrated down my spine. "My back."

There was the soft sound of them kissing, and then Fergus whispered, "I'll be careful." He eased back and regarded me with eyes like molten silver. "And how is my wee dhampir? You all right, lass?"

"Yes," I said, my throat scratchy. Probably from screaming, I realized with a rush of self-consciousness.

He brushed his nose against mine before kissing the corner of my mouth. “Your pussy is heaven. I’m sorry if I was too rough.”

“You weren’t.” He’d been so gentle he took my breath away.

His smile curved against my cheek. “I’m glad. You’ll be sore tomorrow, though, so I’ll have to console myself with playing with your gorgeous tits until you get used to taking my cock.” As if to demonstrate, he circled a fingertip around one of my stiffened nipples.

Sparks rushed over my skin. Gods, he was just as incorrigible in bed as he was out of it. Why didn’t that surprise me?

He eased away, and then Bram lifted me like I weighed nothing and settled me beside him. I curled up against the mound of pillows by the headboard, feeling decadent in my nudity, my sex still pulsing and my nipples tender from Bram’s fingers. Later, I could ponder how I’d gone from floor-length gowns to displaying myself so brazenly. Right now, the only thing I cared about was watching the wickedly hot sight unfolding before me.

Bram lay on his back with one fist wrapped around his cock, which looked hard to the point of pain. His thick shaft stood up from his hips, the dusky tip swollen and weeping. Males weren’t typically described as “beautiful,” but no other word did him justice. His body was, quite simply, a thing of beauty, from his sculpted face and broad chest to his rippling abs and long, muscled legs. I couldn’t have looked away even if I’d wanted to.

Fergus clearly felt the same, because he lowered himself onto Bram and took the other male’s mouth in a searing kiss.

My sex flooded with moisture. I didn’t know where to look first, so I looked

everywhere, starting with their strong jaws, which moved against each other in an aggressive display of passion. Just as Fergus seemed to dominate, Bram lifted his head and seized Fergus's lips with a provocative flash of tongue.

And that was just their kiss.

Their lower bodies tangled together, their hips thrusting and grinding. From the way Fergus moved, he was rubbing his cock against Bram's—and the latter was caught between pleasure and agony, because he moaned and dug his fingers into one of Fergus's taut buttocks.

Fergus lifted his head and gazed down with a devilish smile, his dimple on full display. "Come now. Where's that famous McGregor control?" Just as Bram began to scowl, Fergus climbed off the bed and went to a nightstand.

Bram covered his face with his forearm and muttered, "Fuck you, Fergus."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I gnawed at my lower lip, sympathy rising. At the same time, my body hummed with renewed desire. While Bram's frustration was very real, there was a deliberate, titillating edge to it—a sense that he and Fergus played a sensual game they both enjoyed. In another sense—and this was the one that had my breath coming in runaway gasps—they performed for me, giving me an erotic show beyond anything I could have imagined.

Fergus ambled back to the bed with a bottle of lube, which he opened and drizzled on his cock as he knelt between Bram's thighs. "Open up, baby."

Bram kept his arm in place as he bent his knees and spread his legs. "Slow."

Fergus's eyes softened, and for a moment the mischief that always seemed to dance around him gave way to something so tender my heart skipped a beat. "Of course," he murmured. "As slow as you want." He coated his fingers with a generous amount of lube and eased his hand between Bram's cheeks.

For one beat, Bram tensed, the fist over his eyes clenching. Then he sighed. His shoulders lost some of their tension.

"That's it," Fergus whispered. He kept his gaze locked on Bram's face as he moved his hand in an easy, unhurried glide. With his free hand, he dripped more lube into Bram's crease. When he adjusted his fingers lodged inside Bram's body, Bram shivered, and when he leaned forward—perhaps pushing deeper, I couldn't be certain from my angle—Bram's lips parted on a rough moan.

"There," Fergus rasped, a note of triumph in his voice, as if he'd just discovered

something. Silver gaze bright with lust, he pumped his fingers in and out. “Feel good?”

“Aye,” Bram grunted. He spread his legs wider. “More.”

The desire brewing in my veins flared higher. There was something so unspeakably hot about watching Fergus work Bram open, tending to him in a way that was both loving and sensual. Bram moved his hips, thrusting them up to meet Fergus’s fingers. His lips beneath his arm stayed parted, his breath coming in harsh pants mixed with rasping, needy moans.

When I least expected it, Fergus turned his attention to me. “You look lonely, lass. Would you like to stroke Bram’s cock?”

Heat rushed over my skin, and I was moving even as I nodded, rising and scooting forward until my knees touched Bram’s hip. But I didn’t know what to do next. His cock lay across his stomach like a metal pipe, the thick head leaking.

Fergus must have seen my indecision, because he took my hand and placed it on Bram’s dick. “Touch him, sweetheart. I promise he’ll like it.”

Bram moaned.

Fergus winked at me. “Told you.”

I curled my fingers around Bram’s shaft, marveling at the contrast between his silky skin and the steel underneath. My hand slid easily, and I gave an experimental pump.

“Aye.” Bram lifted his arm at last, his green eyes flickering with fire. “Keep doin’ that, lass. Up and down.”

Movement in my peripheral vision had me turning back to Fergus, who'd removed his fingers from Bram's ass and was now gripping himself in a tight fist. With his other hand, he grasped one of Bram's ankles and hiked it aloft, opening Bram further.

My heart pounded. There was no obscured view this time. Now, I saw everything, and I held my breath as Fergus stirred the tip of his cock around Bram's glistening entrance. And when he pushed inside, I squeezed Bram's shaft reflexively, drawing a choked cry from him.

"I'm sorry!" I peered at his face, looking for signs of pain.

But he shook his head, his lips quirked in a self-deprecating smile. "You dinnae hurt me, lass. Squeeze me as much as you...oh fuck." His eyes drifted shut, and he released a shuddering breath. "Fuck."

I knew what was happening even as I dared to look between his legs.

And, oh wow, I was not disappointed.

Fergus pushed his hips forward, his brow furrowed in concentration as he filled Bram's ass—sinking and sinking until his lube-slicked shaft was buried to the hilt. He stayed there a moment, his features stamped with bliss, before withdrawing a few inches and then surging back home.

Bram gave a choked moan, his chest heaving.

The air crackled with lust. A bomb could have struck the castle and I wouldn't have noticed. I pumped my hand up and down Bram's length, wanting to pay attention to Fergus's movements but just as enthralled by Bram's plump cock. More moisture had gathered at the tip, the bead trembling from my strokes and Fergus's thrusts.

Some wild impulse seized me, and I bent and swiped my tongue over it.

“Holy shite,” Fergus mumbled.

Bram gave a guttural cry.

It was all the encouragement I needed. Gripping him at the base, I fastened my lips around his cock and sucked, swirling my tongue around the head. His taste filled my mouth—smoke and cedar and warm male. And just below the surface, his delicious blood. Moaning, I traced my tongue over a fat vein.

He pumped his hips faster, thrusting so eagerly I had to rise to my knees to accommodate him. The second I did, gentle fingers probed my sex.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Oh...gods. I whimpered around his cock and turned my head to find him watching me with glittering green eyes. His body rocked with Fergus's thrusts as he worked his fingers into my channel, gliding easily through the mix of my desire and the come Fergus had pumped inside me. Maybe I should have felt embarrassed but I didn't. All I could feel was blistering lust as I thrust my ass higher, my sex hot and wet and aching.

"Good girl," Fergus breathed, fucking Bram harder. His fingers around Bram's ankle were white, his brow beaded with sweat. "Knees apart, baby. I want to hear every sound that pussy makes."

The filthy words made me blush, but I obeyed, shifting my knees wider and arching my spine. Soft, wet smacks accompanied every thrust of Bram's fingers, and I blushed harder even as I grew delirious with need.

Fergus kept up the orders. "Keep sucking, lass. Take him"—he grunted as he slammed his hips into Bram's ass—"deeper."

I widened my jaw, sucking down as far as I could. I was hardly an expert at this, but Bram didn't seem to mind my lack of experience. He surged upward, his cock leaking into my mouth and his gruff moans joining the sound of Fergus's hips slapping his ass. All the while, he played with my pussy, stroking my folds and massaging my clit until I bowed my spine, my sex splayed so wide cool air touched my opening. Anything to keep his fingers where I needed them.

It was all so unbearably hot—the sounds, the scent of our sweat, the jostling of Bram's body under my lips as Fergus fucked him faster. Pleasure coiled inside me,

winding tighter and tighter until it became too much. I fell over the edge, my cry muffled by Bram's questing cock.

A second later, he gave a hoarse shout and erupted, filling my mouth. I swallowed convulsively, drinking him down.

"Coming," Fergus growled, his thrusts growing wild and disjointed. "Fuck, I'm coming!" He gave a final thrust and held, shuddering through his release with his head thrown back and his chest sheened with sweat. We stayed like that for a while—how long I didn't know—floating in another dimension. A world created just for us.

When we all crashed back to earth, I ended up sandwiched between them, Fergus facing me and Bram spooning me from behind with one big arm slung around my waist. Fergus gave me a sleepy smile as he brushed hair off my forehead. "Well, lass? Did we live up to your expectations?"

I gazed at him as awe spread through me. "I had no idea it could be like this."

His smile grew. "Beautiful girl, we're just getting started."

Chapter Sixteen

BRAM

It was a shame I healed so quickly. I rather enjoyed seeing Halina's mark on me.

As I stood before my bathroom mirror, I canted my jaw up so I could get a better look at the spot where she'd fed from me. We'd had another training session this morning, which had led to another feeding session.

Which had not led to another sex session.

I'd hoped for it as she pressed her soft body to mine. But when I'd cupped her cheek and asked if she was too sore from last night, she'd turned a brilliant shade of red and stammered something about "needing to work through some things."

Then she'd left without a backward glance.

That couldn't be a positive sign. What was she working through? An escape plan? Mating Fergus had been easy. We'd met, fucked, and bonded.

Simple as that.

So why wasn't it the same with Halina? We'd been intimate and now she needed to work through things?

"What things?" I asked my reflection.

Fergus walked in and raised his eyebrows at me in the mirror. "Talking to yourself? That's a bad sign."

"Don't you own a shirt?" He wore nothing but a pair of cotton joggers slung low on his hips.

"Is that a hickey?" His eyes widened as he moved to my side.

I put my hand over my neck. "No."

"It is." A knowing look entered his gaze. "You let Halina feed from you again. Just what kind of training program are you running, Bram McGregor?"

I lowered my hand. “I think training drains her.”

“And then she drains you.” He eyed my neck. “I bet you just hate that.”

“If your next question is did I sleep with her, the answer is no. Far from it, actually.”

He was abruptly serious. “What happened?”

“She ran from the training room like her arse was on fire. Said she needed to ‘work through some things.’” I drew a deep breath through a chest that felt suddenly constricted. “If she’s thinking of leaving—”

“She’s not.” He put his hands on my shoulders and turned me toward him. “She won’t.”

He couldn’t know that. Neither of us could read her thoughts. Hell, we had a hard enough time reading her. At least I did.

“Everything was going so well,” I said. “She seemed happy last night.”

“She was happy.” He gave my shoulders a reassuring squeeze. “Think of what we’re asking of her. We want her to abandon everything she’s known and bind herself to us forever.”

“I can’t understand why she’d cling to anything from her past. She’s only known cruelty.”

“Trauma affects everyone differently. You know that better than most.”

I grunted—and I couldn’t help envying him his own happy childhood. His parents were still living, his mother doted on by her mates in a castle in the Hebrides.

“Give her time, babe. She’s already ours.” He leaned against the counter.

I stared at him. “What?”

“Nothing.”

“Out with it.”

He gave a mock sigh. “Fine. Why did you let me fuck you last night?”

I’d known the question was coming. The only surprising part was that he hadn’t asked me the second we woke up this morning.

Evening.

Fuck, my days and nights were all turned around now that Halina lived with us.

Fergus was waiting for an answer, so I shrugged. “Can’t you just enjoy it and leave it at that?”

His eyes gleamed. “Oh, I enjoyed it. But I know it’s...” He hesitated, as if he was unsure of himself. Almost flustered.

He never got flustered.

So I took pity on him.

Slowly, I moved in front of him and placed my hands on the counter on either side of his hips.

And just like that, the air between us shifted.

Leaning in, I spoke next to his ear. “I let you fuck me because you wanted to. And

because Halina needed to see that mates do things for each other, even if it means departing from our comfort zones.”

His breathing grew rougher. “Well, if it was in any way unclear last night, I liked it a fucking lot. So thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” I caught his ear between my teeth. “Just don’t get used to it.”

“No?”

I leaned back enough to meet his gaze. Then I shook my head slowly.

His cheeks were flushed, and anticipation rolled off him in thick waves.

“Turn around,” I murmured. My cock ached for him, the tip already leaking.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

The sexiest sound—not quite a whimper—emerged from his throat as he obeyed, his gaze meeting mine in the mirror.

I smoothed my hands down his sides, smiling when he shivered. “You know, I think I like you going without a shirt, after all.”

He swallowed. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.” I gripped his waistband and yanked his joggers down to his thighs in one rough movement.

“Fuck, Bram,” he breathed.

I cupped his bare ass, a cheek in each hand. “No underwear, either. It’s almost like you came in here to get fucked.” I pressed his cheeks apart. “Maybe you wanted me to reestablish who does the giving and who does the receiving around here.”

He didn’t answer. Just continued his ragged breathing, his gaze locked with mine.

“Aye,” I whispered, “I think that’s what you wanted.” I put a hand between his shoulder blades and bent him forward.

He went with a groan, bracing himself on his forearms, and he tracked my movements as I pulled lube from a drawer and squirted a liberal dollop on the counter. When I swiped my fingers through it and carried them to his hole, he cursed.

“Tight,” I said, pushing a finger inside to the second knuckle. “Fuck, that’s nice.” My

cock strained against my jeans, and I unzipped and pulled it out, letting the damp tip prod his cheeks. I didn't give him much time to adjust before adding another finger, and I twisted both deep as I leaned forward and kissed his nape. "You want me in this tight ass, Fergus?"

His response was a choked groan and a backwards thrust of his hips.

I nipped the back of his neck. "That's fortunate, because you were getting fucked either way." I pulled my hand from his crease. Then I quickly lubed my shaft and guided it to his hole. I gripped his hips and pushed into his body, not stopping until I was buried to the hilt.

"Gods," he gasped, sagging forward, his joggers around his ankles. He reached for his dick, but I grabbed his wrist and pinned it in the small of his back.

"No," I said firmly, pushing him flat against the counter. "Not until I say." I kept his arm trapped behind him as I began to thrust, groaning at the hot clench he gave me. The way his passage tightened at my rough command. I didn't take my time, just launched straight into a pounding rhythm that rocked him forward and forced grunts from his chest. He made a token effort to pull from my grip, but we both knew he couldn't do it unless I let him.

And, anyway, he didn't really want me to.

Which left him doubled over, incapable of doing anything but lying there and taking his fucking. His moans grew louder as I pummeled his ass. When I changed the angle and hit his prostate, he switched to harsh cries, his cheek pressed to the marble. I'd been generous with the lube, and the sound of me entering him was deliciously filthy.

It spurred me on, making everything better. Hotter. I lost myself in the feel of his hard body under mine. His tight ass squeezing my cock. His cinnamon and evergreen

scent filling my lungs. The play of muscle over his back as he absorbed my thrusts. The rhythmic slap of my balls against his cheeks.

My orgasm boiled up, and I pulled out at the last second and shot all over his back. Marking him in the most carnal way possible. I growled, my hips jerking violently. It seemed to go on forever, pearly ropes of come painting his sweaty skin.

When I could speak again, I touched his hip. “Fergus.”

He muttered against the marble countertop. “Let me come, you sadist.”

Biting my lip against a smile, I grabbed a hand towel and wiped my mess off his skin. Then I urged him up and around to face me.

His cock bobbed between us, the tip swollen and wet.

I patted the counter behind him. “Up, baby. Back against the mirror.”

With a frustrated groan, he hoisted himself onto the marble, his dick slapping against his taut abs. “Don’t make me wait,” he mumbled, his eyes full of fire. A glance in the mirror confirmed mine were the same.

“I won’t,” I promised, yanking his joggers off his ankles and pushing his legs up so his feet were flat on the counter and his legs were spread wide. I scooped the last of the lube from the marble and smeared it over his cock, making him hiss through his teeth. When I’d gotten him nice and slick, I stepped back and folded my arms. “Stroke it. Remind me what’s mine.”

He did as I said, his hand working his dick before I’d finished my sentence. He put himself on display, his expression almost defiant as he jerked himself for my pleasure. His body was totally revealed to me, from his gorgeous cock to his glossed

hole still open from my possession.

And that was symbolic as hell, because Fergus was always open to me. From the beginning, he'd flung himself at me, loud and generous and absolutely unwilling to be ignored. He was a gift. And I didn't deserve him, but I'd taken him anyway.

How could I not?

His hand flew up and down his cock, his gaze never leaving mine. Even now, he waited for me, willing to give more of himself if I wanted it.

My heart swelled with gratitude, making my voice husky as I said, "Come for me, Fergus. Right now. Let me see it."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

He shot right away, his strokes faltering as he soaked his hand, his chest, his abs. His shoulders shook and his chest heaved, his breath sawing in and out. When he sagged forward, I was there to catch him, my arms going around his sweaty back. We stayed like that for a moment, his head on my shoulder and his legs dangling off the counter.

At last, he sighed, his breath fluttering against my neck. “That was hot.”

“Are you all right?” His heart was still beating so fast.

He lifted his head, and his eyes gleamed with amusement—and maybe a little exasperation. “You always worry I can’t handle you.”

“I’m bigger,” I said gruffly. And I hadn’t prepped him as much as I should have. I’d been so desperate to get inside him.

He rolled his eyes. “So what? I get thrown down and pounded by a big, strong man? Perish the fucking thought.” He squeezed my biceps. “I like your muscles, Bram. And your big cock. I’ll tell you if that changes, aye?”

“Aye,” I echoed, and I lost the battle not to smile.

* * *

“As it happens,” Fergus said a short while later, “I did come in here to talk to you.” We’d showered and now sat before the fire in my suite with our legs propped on a leather ottoman.

I pulled my gaze from the flames. “What about?”

He straightened, serious for once. “It’s about the tears. The messenger we sent hasn’t returned. I worry the vampires killed him.”

Damn. It had been over a week. If Ludovic’s people had killed our demon messenger, I was going to have to answer to the Razroth. They were one of the few tribes that could pass for human, and they had no problem visiting the earth plane to seek revenge. Even if they didn’t blame me, they might demand satisfaction from the vampires.

I cursed. “I should have delivered the damn tears myself. If this starts an inter-species war, we can expect a visit from Niall.” With Cormac out of commission most of the time, the king’s consort handled the day to day business of court. And unlike Cormac’s, his mind was sharp as a tack. He was also part witch and scary as hell when he got angry.

I knew that better than most.

“Niall has his hands full,” Fergus said, his silver gaze sharper than he probably realized. “Besides, we’d just found our female. Neither of us were in any state to make that journey.”

He had a point. Separating from Halina before we’d cemented our bond would have been torture. Niall—and any other dragon—would understand that.

But there were still unanswered questions. Chief among them: Where were the tears? If they hadn’t made it to Krovnosta, Halina’s father was likely dead.

Fergus frowned, obviously guessing the directing of my thoughts. “We have to tell her.”

“Aye,” I said, but something about the prospect unsettled me. What if she demanded to go home? She might think it her duty to pay her last respects—and that meant letting her return to that nest of vipers in the Urals. “Perhaps we should think about it, though.”

“What’s there to think about? It’s her father, Bram.”

“A father who cared nothing for her.”

He shook his head. “That doesn’t matter. Family ties, however tattered, are still important. I’m no lover of leeches, but they’re part of Halina, for better or worse.” His frown deepened. “We’re her mates. We cannae start this union with a lie. And withholding the truth from her would be a lie of omission.”

He was right, of course. But that didn’t mean I had to like it. “All right,” I said.

His shoulders relaxed. “So we’ll tell her tonight?”

“Aye. Tonight.”

Chapter Seventeen

HALINA

It was going to be tonight.

As I studied myself in the mirror, my stomach fluttered with nerves. I can’t believe I’m doing this.

“This” being telling Bram and Fergus I accepted the mate bond. I’d gotten cold feet after my training session with Bram earlier in the evening, but now I was ready to

admit what I'd known for days.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Fate had brought us together. Maybe it sounded dramatic—especially when I'd whispered it in the shower as I prepared for my big announcement—but there was no denying the pull I felt toward the men.

One by one, they had reversed every preconceived notion I'd had about dragons. They weren't a vicious species that kidnapped and abused females. They were the charming, funny males who'd taken me swimming and surprised me with a birthday cake. Bram had taught me to fight—or at least he was trying to. Fergus had helped me discover a fledgling sense of self-confidence.

And together, they had given me the most mind-altering sex imaginable, making me feel cherished. More than that, they'd made me feel wanted.

I'd never felt that before.

I wanted to feel it again. This was nothing like sila. I didn't need a drug to make me want Bram and Fergus. This was real, and it was worth keeping.

I gave my reflection one last critical sweep. I'd arranged my hair in soft waves that fell down my shoulders, and I'd experimented with some of the makeup Fergus had left in my bathroom. My dress was by far the most revealing piece of clothing in my closet. The black material clung to my hips and thighs, and the neckline plunged provocatively low. I'd skipped a bra, and the fabric was thin enough to show the shadow of my nipples. My panties were nothing but two tiny patches of silk held together with pink ribbons—which, if everything went according to plan, the guys would soon be untying.

And then they'd take me...together.

My stomach fluttered again, and I drew a deep breath to calm myself. There was no reason to worry. They'd been nothing but gentle until now. Whatever happened, they would make sure I enjoyed it.

I kept that thought foremost in my mind as I left my room and entered the hall. There was a strip of light under Bram's door, but I didn't need it to know the guys were there. My enhanced hearing had yet to fade, and the murmur of their voices drifted around me as I knocked.

Within seconds, Fergus was at the door. He glanced down my body, and his jaw dropped.

"What is it?" Bram asked, walking from the fireplace. He caught sight of me and froze in place.

I shifted on my feet, warmth creeping up my neck. "Um, could I come in?"

Fergus recovered first. "Please do." He stumbled back so I could enter and then appeared at a loss as to what to do next.

Both of them did. They stayed frozen, their gazes roaming my body. Bram reached down and not-so-discreetly adjusted himself.

If I'd possessed any doubts about their attraction to women, they vanished in that moment. My nerves vanished, too, and I smiled as I looked between them. "I'm glad you're both here. I have something to say."

Fergus cleared his throat. "Ah, so do we, actually—"

“Can I go first?” I blurted. “It’s important.” And who knew how long my confidence would last? If I waited too long I might chicken out and run back to my room.

“Of course, lass,” Bram said. “We’re listening.”

I sank to my knees—a move I’d practiced in my room. I wasn’t sure how dragon brides acknowledged their mates, so I’d settled on the vampire ritual, which required a female to symbolically bend before her lord.

In this case, lords.

My heart pounded. “I wanted to say...I accept our bond. And I offer my fealty as your mate.”

For a moment, they were so quiet I wondered if I’d made a horrible miscalculation. Then they came forward slowly. Bram took my hand and raised me to my feet.

“You never bow to us, lass. You’re our other piece. Our equal.”

Fergus touched a lock of hair that had fallen over my shoulder. “And our love.”

“You love me?” I breathed.

He smiled, and it was devastating in its tenderness. “How could you have ever doubted it?”

Bram touched my other shoulder. “Let us show you,” he whispered.

This was it. The point of no return for all three of us. It was like we stood on a cliff, our bodies poised for a fall into something irreversible.

Did I dare go over?

“Yes,” I heard myself whisper back.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Bram swept me into his arms. Fergus made it to the bed before we did, and I could have almost laughed at how typical that was. But I was too busy watching as he stripped off his shirt—surprise, he was actually wearing one—and pants. He wore nothing but skin by the time Bram lowered me to the bed, and his silver eyes glittered with lust as his gaze moved over me.

“Take that dress off.”

The command stroked over my skin, and the last of my nerves withered away as I obeyed, gathering the hem and pulling the sheer material over my head. My breasts felt heavy, the nipples tingling, as I rose to my knees in nothing but my panties.

Fergus released a groan so deep it seemed to come from his soul. “Gods, Halina, it’s like you want to kill me.”

“Do you like them?” I asked. His admiration sent lust shivering through me, making my whole body pulse with need. I put my arms over my head, stretching like a cat. My breasts lifted, and I could feel the weight of the men’s gazes there. Moisture flooded me, my sex already aching for them.

Fergus licked his lips, one hand idly stroking his cock. “Like is no’ really the word I’d use.”

The mattress dipped and Bram knelt on the bed.

And, oh goodness, he was naked, too. Dark hair spilled over his forehead, and his green eyes danced with flames. His dick stood out from his hips, the bulbous head

shiny with moisture. Without conscious thought, I went to my hands and knees and crawled toward him, my breasts swaying.

His eyes narrowed to emerald slits. “Fuck, yes, lassie. Bring those gorgeous tits over here.”

I reached him and curled my hand around his cock, marveling anew at its silky feel and the unyielding hardness underneath. I sat on my heels, my sex so wet my panties stuck to me, and pumped my hand up and down his length.

And when Fergus appeared on my other side, his cock thrust toward me, it was the most natural thing in the world to grab it and give it the same treatment. With a dick in each hand, I stroked them simultaneously.

Both men groaned and pressed their hips toward me.

I bit my lip, scarcely able to believe this was actually happening. For a moment, it was like I could see myself from above, my smaller body bracketed by their larger ones, my hands working their cocks.

And a little devil on my shoulder suddenly urged me to make it even hotter.

Seizing the impulse, I turned my head and took Fergus’s dick into my mouth.

“Fuck, yes,” he growled, thrusting his hips forward. He cupped my jaw, pumping eagerly.

Breathing through my nose, I took him as deep as I could, savoring his taste and the way he filled my mouth. After a minute, I released him and turned to Bram.

He was waiting for me, and he slid quickly between my open lips.

“Good lass,” he murmured, fucking my mouth. “Suck me, sweetheart.” He held my gaze captive as I did what he said, hollowing my cheeks and pulling hard. His girth made it difficult to take him as deep as I’d taken Fergus, but I made a good effort, loosening my jaw and running my tongue over his length.

After a minute, his breath hitched, and he pulled from my mouth with a shaky laugh. “If we don’t stop now, sweetheart, I’m going to give you my come. And I’d much rather put it in your pretty pussy.”

As if that was a signal, Fergus lowered me to my back and tugged open the tie on one side of my panties.

“Unwrapping a woman?” I asked with a lift of my brow.

He bent and kissed the hip he’d just bared. “The most gorgeous woman in the world.”

Bram had moved to my feet, and he ran his swordsman’s hands up my legs, easing them apart as he went. When he got to the strip of silk on my other hip, he bent his head and caught the fabric in his teeth.

With one yank, I was totally nude.

Fergus curled a hand around my leg and pulled me open wider. Cool air touched my hot center, and my stomach went concave as I sucked in a breath.

Bram pressed a gentle thumb to my cleft and stroked through my wetness.

“I’m going to fuck this pussy tonight, lass.” He carried his thumb to his lips and sucked, his eyes drifting shut like he adored my taste. When he opened them again, they danced with green fire. “I’m going to be here.” He pushed a thick finger inside me, filling me with the pressure I craved. He gave me a gentle pump and then

dragged a slow path down to my most secret, sensitive place. He watched me closely as he rubbed the pad of his finger around my puckered hole. “And Fergus is going to be here.” He kept stroking, sending a novel rush of pleasure winding through me. “Is that all right?”

Fergus moved up to my breasts and sucked a nipple into his mouth.

“Yes.” I arched off the bed, spreading my thighs even wider as Bram continued playing with my ass. Gods, the feel of them both tending to me was incredible. Two sets of hands on my body. Two males giving me pleasure. Before the night was through, I was going to be filled everywhere, and I realized I wanted that more than anything.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“But first,” Bram said, “I want you to sit on my face.”

They maneuvered seamlessly, Bram stretching on his back as Fergus lifted me and settled me astride Bram’s shoulders. Bram took over, sliding his hands under my ass and hiking me to his mouth. His stubble scraped my inner thighs, and I squirmed from the ticklish, pleasurable sensation.

Then he tugged me even higher and fastened his lips around my clit.

Unbearable pleasure.

Aching, spiraling bliss.

For a second, I couldn’t breathe as he worked his tongue all over me, licking from my core to my clit and back again. All the while, his hands played with my ass, kneading and squeezing my cheeks. His slid his fingers back to my hole and teased me there, too, sucking my clit hard as he pushed a wet fingertip into my ass.

I seesawed between the two dazzling points of pleasure, rocking my hips into his tongue and then back toward his questing finger. It was better than what he’d done to me in the shower. Better than anything I’d ever experienced.

He growled against my clit, and his tongue worked me harder...faster, as if he’d grown more excited.

Some instinct made me look over my shoulder, and my heart sped up at the sight of Fergus between Bram’s thighs, his blond head bobbing up and down Bram’s dick.

But he didn't stay that way for long. He treated Bram's cock like it was a work of art, sliding his tongue up and down the shaft. Sucking lovingly at the crown. Opening his strong jaw wide and taking Bram down to the root. He swiped his tongue over Bram's balls, tracing the delicate seam before swallowing Bram's shaft once more.

Bram did something wicked with his tongue, and I gasped and swung around to find him watching me as he ate me, his tongue spearing me over and over. He pushed his finger deeper into my ass, and suddenly I was coming like fireworks bursting in the sky.

My cries rose around the bed as I shuddered through my release, wetness flooding my sex. He moved his hands to my hips, holding me steady when I might have fallen. Aftershocks were still rippling through me when Fergus lifted me and then resettled me over Bram's hips.

I didn't have the chance to worry about accommodating Bram's size, because Fergus was already lifting me up while Bram guided his glistening shaft to my opening. I sank down, and Fergus reached a hand around and rubbed tight circles over my clit.

"Oh..." I leaned against his chest as I continued sliding down Bram's shaft, feeling every inch as he stretched me. When I'd taken him fully inside, Fergus pulled my hair back and kissed my neck.

"You're perfect, lass." He smoothed his hands up my rib cage to lightly pinch my nipples. "So gorgeous with Bram's big cock filling your pussy." He trailed his right hand down to my sex and fondled my clit again. "Now I want you to ride it until you come. Can you do that for me, sweetheart?"

I couldn't answer. Couldn't think with his fingers stroking like they were. Everything was more intense with Bram's cock filling me so thoroughly.

Then Bram began to move, and another orgasm hit without warning. I came on a strangled cry, my hips rolling as Bram gave me easy, shallow thrusts from below.

How many orgasms was it possible to have? Could I handle this many? Wild thoughts spun through my head as I fluttered back to earth and registered Bram's hands on my waist and his cock stroking even deeper inside me. I rode him, my palms on his chest and my hips rolling. It felt so good to grind my clit against the thick cock filling me.

Fergus moved behind me, and I realized he'd left the bed at some point. But he was back now, his lips planting feathery kisses across my shoulders. He traced a fingertip down my spine, and then gently bent me forward.

Bram met me halfway, his hands sliding into my hair and pulling me down for a kiss. He stroked his tongue against mine, by turns bold and gentle. My breasts mashed against his chest, and I moaned, savoring the drag on my sensitive nipples.

Warm palms ran over my ass, and then Fergus pressed a slick finger to my hole.

I lifted my head, stiffening instinctively.

"Relax, lass," he murmured, pushing inside. I was still stretched from Bram's preparation, so his entry was less shocking than it might have been. There was no pain—just a strange but satisfying fullness that made goosebumps rise on my skin.

Wetness dripped into my crack, and I looked over my shoulder to see Fergus focused on my ass, his gaze rapt as he pumped his finger in and out, lubing me up. His voice went deeper than I'd ever heard it. "You should see how gorgeous you look, lass, with your pussy wide around Bram's dick. So pink and pretty."

The dirty talk spurred my lust higher, sending waves of buttery warmth rushing

through me. “Please,” I moaned, not really sure what I was asking for. My clit buzzed, another orgasm hovering just out of reach. Sprawled on top of one powerful male with his cock buried inside me and another powerful male’s finger deep in my ass, I couldn’t help feeling like a lush, pampered pet. A sexual plaything made for their pleasure.

After a few more minutes of fingering my ass, Fergus withdrew. A second later, the blunt head of his cock pressed against my hole. “You ready for me, sweetheart?” he whispered.

“Yes,” I gasped. “Please fuck me. Fuck my ass.”

Bram slid his hands to my cheeks and gently pulled them open, preparing the way for Fergus to enter me.

Fergus put one big palm in the small of my back and eased forward.

And his cock was far bigger than his finger.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

His entry burned, and I squirmed, willing myself to relax.

“Easy, baby,” Bram murmured. He squiggled a hand between our bodies and found my clit. He massaged the slippery bud, his wicking fingers working me over. It was like he knew exactly which buttons to press to get me moaning again.

And I did, writhing shamelessly on his dick.

There was the faint click of a lube cap, and then Fergus drizzled more moisture down my crack. And when he pushed forward this time, the sensation was incredible. The burning was gone, replaced with pressure and a stretch I now welcomed. Everything in my sex was hypersensitive now—my channel clamping fiercely, my clit pounding with need.

“So full,” I breathed, my ass squeezing Fergus’s dick. I couldn’t stop moaning. Couldn’t help rocking back and forth, overwhelmed at the feeling of having two cocks inside me.

“That’s it, baby,” Fergus murmured, praise thick in his voice. “You’ve got us both, lass. All the way inside.” He was on his knees, and now he planted one foot next to Bram’s hip and braced a hand on my shoulder, holding me in place as he began to thrust.

Bram thrust, too, and they fell into a sexy grind, Bram thrusting up as Fergus withdrew. Then they reversed it, their cocks sliding in and out in a coordinated rhythm that set me on fire.

It was too good. Nothing could ever be better. I panted, breasts jiggling, my forearms on Bram's solid chest and his heart pounding against my skin. Their hands were all over me, stroking and petting. Every few seconds, one kissed me—a brush of lips across my shoulder, a soft kiss on the edge of my jaw—until every touch blended together.

The room filled with the whisper of twisted sheets, soft moans, and the wet sounds of their cocks entering me over and over. Languid pleasure suffused every part of my body, pushing me to a wild, trembling edge.

Fergus squeezed my hip. “You ready, gorgeous girl?”

“Yes,” I whispered. I was ready to come. Ready to seal myself to them for eternity.

He spoke, but not in words. His voice rose and fell in a soft, sibilant hiss that lifted the hair on my nape. And I felt his strange language—the sounds slid over my body, making me gasp. Bram and Fergus still fucked me, but now Fergus's voice did, too. It flowed faster, caressing my breasts and dipping between my legs. It swirled over my clit and delved between my cheeks to press a fleeting kiss to my hole. Something deep within me clicked, and I knew in that moment my soul was bound to theirs.

And then I was coming, my sex and ass squeezing so hard I screamed, shuddering as my body flew apart. Strong hands gripped my waist, and Bram grunted and thrust up, pumping his own release deep inside me. A second later, Fergus growled and emptied into my ass. Their heat flooded me, filling me completely.

Their cocks softened, and we collapsed in a heap with me in the middle. Fergus kissed me, then lifted his head and kissed Bram, giving me an up-close view of hard jaws and several flashes of tongue. When they broke apart, Bram lowered his mouth to mine, and I tasted Fergus on his lips.

Fergus snuggled against me, his lips at my ear. “Happy, lass?”

“Yes.” I touched each of their faces, absurdly grateful for fate. I was perfectly, utterly happy.

Nothing could ruin this.

Chapter Eighteen

FERGUS

When I woke, Bram was gone and Halina was fast asleep beside me—and judging from the way she was burrowed into the pillows, she’d been sleeping a while. I turned onto my back and rubbed my eyes, trying to gauge the time in the darkened room.

Memories from the night rushed back. After we bonded, the three of us had drifted in a haze of exhaustion and fulfillment. Sleep had tugged hard, but I’d hauled my ass out of the warm bed long enough to tack a blanket over the window while Bram stumbled to the bathroom. He’d come back with a warm washcloth, and we’d tended to Halina and ourselves before tucking her between us and diving into oblivion.

And we hadn’t told her about her father.

I sighed and looked at the ceiling. “The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley.”

Halina stirred, stretching under the blankets.

I turned and found her watching me. Her eyes had the dreamy look of a woman who’d been sexually satisfied. And damn if my chest—and other parts of my

anatomy—didn't swell with pride. Bram and I had put that look there. We had our female at last, and nothing could take her away from us.

She gave me a drowsy smile. "What were you saying just now?"

"Just a bit o' Scottish poetry written by a man far wiser than I."

"Do you know him?"

I smiled. "I did, aye. He died a long time ago."

Sympathy rose in her eyes. "I'm sorry."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“‘Tis the way with humans, I’m afraid.”

The look in her eyes shifted, her blue irises darkening with desire. “I love your accent.” She hesitated, the tip of one fang pressing into the plump pink of her lower lip. “Sometimes it’s like I can feel the sounds you make in my—”

“It’s about time you two got up,” Bram said, the unexpected boom of his voice making me bolt upright.

He crossed the suite, bringing the scent of the mint shampoo he used. His dark jeans hugged his hips and his gray T-shirt clung to his impressive abs.

For once, I didn’t stare. “Thank you, Bram,” I said, not even trying to keep the irritation out of my voice. “Halina was just telling me something important.” I looked at her, prepared to sell my soul for the rest of her sentence. “Go on, lass. I’m dying to hear it.”

Bram stopped at the foot of the bed. “Why are you being so weird right now?”

Halina laughed and flung the covers back. “As much as I’d love to continue this conversation, I’m in desperate need of soap and hot water.” She left the bed and strode across the suite, drawing our gazes with her sleek body and tight ass. Just before she entered the bathroom, she looked over her shoulder, her red hair cascading down her back in a sultry tangle. “You boys be good out here while I’m gone.”

She disappeared, and I groaned and flopped back on the bed, my erection sailing up and smacking me in the stomach.

Bram raised an eyebrow. “That looks painful.”

I pointed from him to my dick.

“What?” His brow inched higher.

“You break it, you buy it.”

“Halina told us to be good.”

“Trust me, you sucking me off will be very good.”

“Aye, for you.”

“I’m willing to return the favor.” I put my hands behind my head. “If you please me.”

He sighed and rounded the bed. “Using my line now, are you?” He spit into his hand and wrapped it around my shaft.

Lust snaked through my veins. “That’s dirty, Bram,” I murmured, already jerking my hips.

“And you like it.”

“Can’t argue with that,” I said breathlessly. Then I shut up and let pleasure take over. He didn’t give me his mouth, but I wasn’t complaining. He was just as good with his hand, his mint-and-Bram scent falling all around me as he worked my dick. I came on a noisy cry a few moments later, and he pressed his other hand over my mouth to muffle the sound. Which was, of course, just as hot as anything else he did. It was a long fucking list.

When I was finished, I sprawled boneless on the bed.

“Better?” he asked.

“Aye.” I looked pointedly at his crotch. “Want me to...”

“No’ right now.” He jerked his chin. “Up. I want to change the sheets. And we should probably ask Halina if she needs to feed.”

That catapulted me right back to reality—and cleared my post-hand job brain fog. “We need to tell her about Ludovic. Like right now. Immediately.”

He looked away, but not before I saw the annoyance in his eyes. “Why the rush?”

I stood, snagging a sheet and wrapping it around my hips. Something was brewing, and while I had no problem being naked, it seemed prudent to gird my loins, so to speak.

I moved into Bram’s line of sight. “We talked about this yesterday.”

“I remember,” he said tightly.

“So why the hesitation? We agreed honesty is important—”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“We’re newly bonded.” He glanced at the bed. “It’s only been a few hours. I just...” He sagged a little, like he bore the weight of the world on his shoulders. “I’ll feel better if we wait a bit. Let our connection sink in.” He nodded, as if that settled it.

I stared. “This isn’t the kind of information you withhold from someone.”

“I’m trying to protect our mate bond,” he huffed, the and you’re not hovering in the air unsaid.

“No.” I shook my head, my exasperation slipping closer to anger. Since when were he and I not on the same page? “That’s not at all what you’re doing. What you’re doing is putting everything at risk. Dammit, Bram, if you won’t tell Halina, I will.”

“Tell me what?”

Bram and I swiveled toward the bathroom, where Halina stood in the doorway, confusion on her face. Her hair was wet, and she was wrapped in a white bath sheet—one of several I’d bought Bram since regular towels were too small to fit around him.

He’d tensed when she spoke, and now he frowned, all that weight back on his shoulders.

I crossed the suite and pulled her to the sitting area in front of the hearth. “Sit, lass. There’s something you need to know.”

“Wh-What is it?” She perched on the edge of a sofa, her worried gaze moving

between Bram and me. “Is something wrong?”

I sat on the opposite sofa. There was no point tiptoeing around things. Better to just rip the bandage off. “The messenger we sent to Krovnosta should have returned by now, but he hasn’t. There’s been no word from Krovnosta, either. We don’t know if your father is alive or dead.”

Her lips parted. For a moment, she appeared at a loss for words. Then her brow furrowed. “I think I would have felt it if he died...”

Bram moved to stand in front of the hearth. “What do you mean?”

“The Blood chooses the prince. Aleksander is next in line, although my uncle has always wanted the throne for himself. He couldn’t kill Aleks outright—not if the Blood has already chosen my brother—but Grigory is smart. If there’s any possibility of bypassing the Blood, he’ll find it and act on it.” She stood, one hand clutching the bath sheet to her chest. “Do you think I should go back?”

“Absolutely not,” Bram said. “You’re not going anywhere near there.”

My nape tingled, my brain registering the incoming oh shit moment before it landed.

She looked at him, obviously startled. “I never said I was going alone. You could—”

He cut her off. “You’re not going at all. Your place is here.”

I stood and stepped between them, doing my best to project an aura of authority while wearing a bed sheet. “Bram, be reasonable. This is her family we’re talking about.”

“What’s unreasonable is allowing her to put herself in danger.”

Halina stiffened. “Allow?”

Alarm bells clanged in my head. I stared him down, trying to warn him away from the extreme peril he was hurtling toward, but he ignored me.

“You can’t return to Krovnosta. It’s out of the question.”

Oh no. The alarm bells turned to sirens. I let my gaze bore into him, silently communicating my ardent desire for him to shut the fuck up.

Instead, he delivered the coup de grace—and I could have sworn it unfolded in slow motion, like those videos of car manufacturers testing crash test dummies.

“I’ll lock you in a tower before I let you get near those leeches.”

I groaned.

Halina’s eyes widened. “Leeches? You mean like me?”

“You know what I meant.”

Anger flowed off her like lava. “I’m starting to think I don’t know you at all. Because if you think you’re going to lock me up anywhere, you are out of your sick, Scottish mind.”

Fire leapt in his eyes. “I’m out of my mind? I’m not the one who was nearly thrust into the sun by a bunch of abusive psychopaths. Gods, Halina, you can’t be serious about going back there. They’ll kill you. You’re so weak.”

I drew a sharp breath.

She flinched as if he'd struck her. Which, in a way, he had.

And he knew it. Immediately, his eyes filled with regret. He stepped toward her—

“I need to be alone,” she said. The knuckles on her hand holding the bath sheet turned white. “Am I permitted to take a walk? I need some fresh air.”

He wanted to say no. It was there in the way his shoulders tightened and his brows pulled down. But how could he restrict her freedom after the insult he'd just thrown at her? It would simply add insult to injury.

I chewed the inside of my cheek, wondering if I should intervene. What was the etiquette here? My mates were arguing, and now one was ready to gut the other. Maybe I should keep my arse out of it. I made a mental note to ask my fathers how they handled these situations. If memory served, my mother had won every disagreement I'd overheard as a lad. I'd always suspected my fathers, who did not enjoy being locked out of their own castle, had engineered that outcome.

If there was ever a time to test that theory...

“Of course, lass,” I said. “Everything is open to you. This is your home.”

She looked at me, her eyes so stark a fist squeezed my heart. And as she turned and walked away, I wasn't at all certain she believed me.

Chapter Nineteen

HALINA

“You’re so weak.”

Bram’s words tumbled around my head as I strode away from the castle, moving quickly through grass bathed in moonlight. I wasn’t sure where I was going, only that I needed to get away. To be alone so I could think about what had just happened.

The grass was wet, and dew quickly soaked my jeans up to my calves. Should have worn boots. Then again, I hadn’t been worried about my outfit when I fled Bram’s suite in nothing but a towel. I’d gone straight to my closet and pulled out the first clothes I touched. Besides the jeans, I wore a thin, long-sleeved shirt and a knit cardigan that fell to my knees. No jacket, though, which I regretted as the breeze picked up.

I stopped and looked back at the castle. Lights blazed from Bram’s window, and I knew he and Fergus were watching even if I couldn’t see them. There was no way they were letting me out of their sight.

Not that they had to worry. I wouldn’t get far on foot. The sun was just as an effective prison as any tower Bram might lock me in.

And where the hell did he get off threatening that?

I fumed all over again, anger rising so fast I nearly choked on it. Last night, when I’d knelt before him and said I accepted our bond, he’d told me we were equals. Apparently, that sentiment only applied when I was doing exactly what he wanted. The moment I pushed back, equality went right out the castle window.

The thing was, I hadn't even been dead set on going to Krovnosta. When I suggested it, I'd still been reeling from Fergus saying the messenger had gone missing—and that my father's status was unknown. If I was honest without myself, I didn't really want to go back.

Yes, there was a small part of me that worried about Aleksander. He'd saved my life, and he'd seemed to harbor at least a little affection for me. He had shown me the occasional kindness through the years. An outsider might have dismissed his random bursts of benevolence, but any crumb of compassion was precious when you were starving.

However, I had no illusions about his true nature. Like our father, he cared more about power than any family connection. He'd been angry when Grigory insisted on getting the dragon tears. He would have preferred to let our father die so he could become prince.

But as ruthless as Aleksander was, I wasn't convinced he could take on Grigory if our uncle decided to make a play for the throne. I wasn't sure Grigory could get around the Blood, but it seemed naive to think in absolutes. Anything was possible, right? Aleksander was hundreds of years old and he'd never heard of Black Settanis.

But Grigory had. Was it that much of a stretch to think he might also know how to circumvent the Blood's prohibition on killing the rightful prince?

It was a question I couldn't answer. The only thing I was truly certain of was that I couldn't help my brother. Even if I had a way to get home, what help could I offer?

“You're so weak.”

I turned my back on the castle and kept walking. Bram was right. I was no match for the “leeches” in Krovnosta. Training in the gym was one thing. Squaring off with my

father's battle-hardened warriors was another. And if Grigory was in charge now, the best I could hope for was spending my life as a concubine to some minor prince.

The worst? Torture, followed by a slow and agonizing death.

Ice slid down my spine. With a shiver, I pulled my sweater more tightly around me. The loch sparkled ahead, and I walked faster, my strides eating up the ground. I wasn't as fast as Bram or Fergus when they displayed those dazzling bouts of speed, but I was much faster than I used to be.

Another side effect of dragon blood. Its power hummed under my skin. Fergus claimed it would fade—or that I'd get used to it and stop noticing—but part of me hoped that wouldn't happen. I'd been powerless for so long, it was refreshing to feel strong for once.

And maybe that was why Bram's words cut so deeply. He and Fergus were effortlessly powerful. Even with my newfound abilities, I could never measure up. It was Krovnosta all over again. There, my human heritage had put a target on my back. I'd been the product of an embarrassing indiscretion, allowed to live only because I might one day prove useful.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I'd believed things were different with Bram and Fergus. That they wanted me for me. That they didn't care about my too-short fangs or my inability to channel or my pitiful fighting skills. And maybe they didn't.

But that didn't mean they had the right to restrict my movements—even if they claimed they did it to keep me safe.

I reached the loch, which was a lot bigger than it looked from the castle. The water stretched so far I couldn't see the other side. But I knew it was there—and probably closer than it seemed. The promise of endless water was an illusion. Everything had its limits.

Had Bram given me a loch and told me it was an ocean?

I looked down at the hand he'd healed the night he and Fergus took me to dinner. The skin was so perfect, it was hard to believe it had ever been scarred. But as Bram himself had said, the scars underneath were much more difficult to heal.

“You're so weak.”

Part of me—a bigger part than I was comfortable admitting—wanted to shrug it off as no big deal. Who wouldn't want two big, strong men looking out for them? But there was a difference between protecting me and trampling my independence. Bram had spoken in anger, when he was unguarded and more likely to blurt his true feelings. And he'd seemed perfectly serious when he threatened to lock me in a tower at the mere suggestion of me returning to Krovnosta. He was over three hundred years old. There was a very real chance he considered imprisonment an acceptable way to end

an argument.

My throat went dry. Bram and Fergus and I were mated. There was no reversing our bond. But if they viewed me as a possession instead of a partner, no amount of mind-blowing sex could salvage our relationship.

And that raised another question—and one I definitely didn't want to answer.

Had I escaped one prison just to walk into the arms of another?

Chapter Twenty

BRAM

“Can you see her?” Fergus asked for the hundredth time. Maybe the thousandth. I hadn't kept track. I'd been too busy kicking my own ass for screwing everything up with Halina.

“Aye,” I said without turning from the window. She'd been outside for an hour now, just standing at the edge of the loch. When it appeared she had no plans to wander off, I'd persuaded Fergus to ditch his bed sheet and put some clothes on. He'd been reluctant, but he'd finally complied—setting a record for the fastest shower ever recorded.

He came to my side now pulling on a shirt and smelling like my shampoo. “Is she still by the loch?” He stared outside, and his tone turned anxious. “You don't think she'll go in, do you?”

I looked at him. “What, to drown herself?”

“No, to practice her backstroke. Aye, to drown herself.”

“You’re being dramatic. She’s immortal. A lack of oxygen won’t kill her.” As soon as I said it, though, worry crept into my mind. I wasn’t actually sure I was right. She was half human. Maybe dhampirs could perish that way.

Fergus’s disapproval was like a weight pressing against my skin.

I sighed. “Go on and say it.”

He was quiet—and that was how I knew he was truly angry. Fergus never yelled. He just shut down, switching off the energy that flowed around him. I would have rather he shouted. Or even hauled off and punched me. His silence was more devastating than any blow.

I faced him. He’d folded his arms, and his blond hair was darker because it was wet. “Fergus.”

He kept his gaze on Halina. “I’m not being dramatic,” he said quietly.

“Halina isn’t suicidal.”

“She’s been abused her whole life.” He looked at me. “I don’t ken what she’ll do, but I’m sure as hell not going to be flippant about it. Every part of me wants to go down there and get her but I can’t. That would make me as bad as you.”

Anger flared in my gut. “Are you serious? You heard her. She was talking about going to Krovnosta.”

“I heard her ask if she should go. It was a knee-jerk reaction to learning her father might be dead.”

I clenched my jaw. He was right. Probably. “I’ll apologize when she comes inside.”

“And what if she never does?”

I opened my mouth, ready to dismiss the idea for the absurdity it was. But he was serious, his gaze meeting mine head on. There was a challenge in the silver, and it wasn't subtle at all.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

My chest tightened. My beast stirred, and a growl entered my voice. “Then I’ll go fetch her. She can’t leave us.”

“That’s her call, not yours.”

“You won’t let her leave, either.” My heart began to pound. Why was he talking this way? No one was leaving.

“Aye, I would. If she truly wanted it.”

“I don’t believe that.” The constriction in my chest grew worse. It was hard to breathe. “You tied her up when you found her.”

“Before she accepted our bond. She needed time to get to know us. But now?” He shook his head. “I wouldn’t restrain her, no matter the consequences.”

“She’s not leaving. She can’t leave.” I’d make sure of it. I turned from the window, but he blocked my path. “Get out of my way, Fergus,” I said through clenched teeth.

“No.”

Dammit, I could make him move. He knew that. “Now.”

“You cannae go get her. Not this time. She has to come to you.”

“She won’t.”

“She will.”

My chest ached. I could hardly draw a breath. I went to step around him.

He moved fast, blocking me again.

I shoved him.

He stumbled but held his ground. “You can’t force her back to you, Bram.”

My control snapped. “Why the fuck not?” I yelled, shoving him again.

He seized my arms and yelled back. “Because she’s not me! Whether it’s sex or life, you can’t hold someone down unless they want it!”

I froze, my heart running a race in my chest. Our faces were an inch apart, and I could see my stunned expression in his pupils.

He moved his hands to my face. “Because she’s not me,” he repeated softly. “I ken why you hold on so tightly. I won’t break, babe, but Halina might. And I’m no’ talking about what we do in bed.” His voice grew even softer. “Everyone you might have loved left you...and then you were alone, a babysitter for a madman when you were little more than a baby yourself.”

Memories rushed me. The screams... The roars... A little boy covering his head with his arms, hoping the fire didn’t get too close this time. It hurt when it kissed his skin, even though his other form could heal it...

“Bram.” Fergus rubbed his thumbs over my cheekbones. The memories receded, replaced with a pair of clear silver eyes. He pulled me from the past. He’d been doing it for years.

No, centuries.

He stroked my cheeks again, petting me like someone might comfort a cat...or a dragon wearing human skin.

Something inside me tore a little. My heart, maybe. “You...” I drew a shuddering breath. “You think I’d force you to be with me?”

He sighed, but he was smiling. “It’s no’ even a question with us. You needed me young and fate made it happen. We’ve been bound so long I hardly remember a time when we weren’t. I wouldn’t change it. Not for anything.”

My chest tightened all over again. Had he needed me? He was a naturally happy soul. And I was...damaged. What did I really offer Fergus, anyway?

“I know that look,” he said. “You’re thinking something stupid.”

I huffed. “You shouldn’t have to shoulder my burdens.” In my head, I changed it to me. He shouldn’t have to shoulder me. I was the burden.

“You’re not a burden,” he said, reading me as uncannily as always. “I love you. And if you think I don’t need you as much as you need me, I’ll just have to work harder at showing you.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I didn't deserve him. I just didn't.

He slid a hand down to mine and turned us back to the window. Halina was still by the loch, her red hair like a beacon in the moonlight. "She needs us both," he said. "Me to loosen her up. You to show her how to punch things. Both of us to fuck her silly."

I grunted, my cock twitching.

"But we can't force her to stay." He gave a soft laugh. "From what I know of females, we can't force her to do anything. She has to make her own decisions. And we have to be strong enough to let her make them." He squeezed my hand. "If you're patient enough to let her run into your arms, she'll never leave them."

He'd know. He'd been patient enough with me.

I leaned my head on his shoulder, my gaze on our reflections in the window and, beyond it, Halina's slender form next to the loch. "We'll probably make a ton of mistakes before we figure this out."

"Aye," he said, but his voice hummed with his usual happiness. "Love is messy."

Two vampires appeared out of thin air on either side of Halina, their armor glinting silver.

She screamed and spun toward the castle. The vampire on the right grabbed her by the hair and jerked her backwards.

“NO!” Later, I couldn’t remember if the bellow came from me or Fergus. Maybe both. We were in shadow form and outside within seconds.

But it was too late.

The vampires channeled Halina away, all three of them blinking out of sight.

I streaked to the spot where she’d stood and took human form, my feet slamming into the ground. “Fuck!” White-hot rage pumped through my veins, singeing my nerve endings. My skin smoked. I wouldn’t be able to hold this form for long.

Fergus reformed beside me, his eyes dancing with fire. “Those bastards came back for her. What does it mean?”

“I don’t know, but it’ll be the last thing they do.”

He was already shifting, his pupils vertical slits. “We fly?”

“We fly.” I shifted, too, my words flowing into the ancient, hissing tongue of our forefathers. “And then we rain fire until they give us our mate.”

Chapter Twenty-One

HALINA

As I sat on the stone floor of my father’s audience chamber, I wondered how long it would take for my spine to crumble to dust. I’d been waiting for hours, although I didn’t know exactly how long. It was impossible to keep track of time.

I rested the back of my head on the cold, stone wall behind me. I’d been so stupid to go outside. I’d let my guard down. I’d felt safe.

I should have known better. I could never be safe.

The warriors had appeared by the loch without warning, their fangs sharp in their smiling faces. “Time to go home,” one had sneered. As I’d turned to run, his fist had tangled in my hair.

The world had spun and we’d landed in Castle Krovnosta, where he’d shoved me into the audience chamber and slammed the door. His chuckle had sounded from the other side. “Make yourself comfortable.”

Asshole. He knew there was no comfort to be had.

Although, maybe he didn’t know. Because the warriors who’d grabbed me weren’t from Krovnosta. Halfling though I was, I could scent my own kind. They’d looked like mercenaries—vampires who hadn’t pledged their allegiance to any prince. Territorial vampires regarded them as nothing more than thugs who traded their loyalty for gold. They weren’t welcome in any court.

So it was entirely possible they were unfamiliar with the audience chamber, which was the oldest and most primitive part of the castle.

I straightened and looked toward the throne—a smaller version of the one in the Great Hall. It was the only piece of furniture in the vast space, and that was by design. My father had carried out his day to day business here, receiving representatives from other territories and mediating disputes among his subjects. He was the only one allowed to sit. Everyone else had to stand. Aleksander claimed it encouraged people to speak quickly.

The only other feature in the room was a massive balcony that overlooked the surrounding mountains. Vampires weren’t fond of large openings that let in sunlight, but my father had made an exception so he could stare at his territory when the mood

struck him. In past centuries, thralls would drag heavy wooden screens in front of it during the day. But in recent years, Grigory had ordered an automatic metal shade installed.

It was down now, which helped me relax a little but also made the audience chamber dark as a tomb.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Which was fitting, since I was probably going to die here.

My stomach twisted. I didn't even know who was going to kill me. My father? If he was alive, he probably wouldn't have bothered to send warriors after me. That left Aleksander or Grigory, and I honestly wasn't sure which one was worse.

"Welcome home, Halina."

My brother's voice rumbled in the darkness. He sat on the throne dressed in black leather, his long hair pulled back from his face. My father's ruby ring hung on a gold chain around his neck.

Grigory stood next to the throne, his reddened gaze pinned on me.

I jumped to my feet. "H-How long have you been there?"

Aleksander's smile didn't reach his eyes. "Long enough. I forgot how poor your night vision is."

For some reason, the insult didn't land as hard as it used to. I dusted off my butt. "Yeah, well, maybe if you weren't dressed like Catwoman I would have noticed you."

He frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Just a movie."

His expression soured. “You’re different.”

“Because she’s been playing the whore for those creatures,” Grigory said, giving me a look like he’d like to kill me and then stuff my corpse and use it for target practice.

Aleksander went very still, his gaze never leaving mine. “Did you mate with them, Halina? Is that what happened?”

Apprehension lifted the hair on my nape. If they killed me, Bram and Fergus might die. Heartbreak was the only surefire way to kill a dragon. It had killed Bram’s parents. I couldn’t let that happen to Bram...or Fergus. But I had no options! The only tactic I could think of was to drag the conversation out as long as possible.

I met Aleksander’s stare. “You sent me for the tears. Didn’t you receive them?”

Grigory hissed. “You’re in no position to ask questions!”

“You’re wearing father’s ring,” I told Aleks. “And his dagger.” The hilt glinted on Aleks’s hip.

Aleks shrugged. “I was his heir.”

“Was? Is he dead?”

“Don’t you feel it?” His gaze grew intense, like he genuinely wanted to know. “The Blood has chosen.”

I...didn’t. But I wasn’t going to admit it. He didn’t need any other reasons to mock my weaknesses. “Well, congratulations on getting the throne.” I’ll just see myself out.

“What happened with the dragons?” Aleksander asked. “Did you sleep with them?”

Every cell in my body recoiled. I wouldn't let him take something sacred and make it tawdry. I'd watched from the shadows as my father wielded diplomacy in this very room. Sometimes, the best way to answer a question was by asking another one. "You sent me for the tears. I got them and I sent them back. Why didn't you give them to father?"

"He died."

"Before or after you withheld the tears?"

Grigory's voice was sharp as a knife. "Watch your tongue, whore."

Rage flooded me, and I forgot to moderate my tone. "If I'm a whore it's because you made me one, Uncle. Or did you forget about threatening to rip out my throat?"

"A role you were born to. Like mother, like daughter." He flashed his fangs. "You should have never been permitted to live. I should have smothered you, just like I did her."

All the air left my lungs. "You..." He'd killed my mother. My voice went hoarse. "Why?"

His eyes flashed as red as my father's ring. "Every weakness makes the territory vulnerable. Ludovic fucked anything that would stay still long enough, and look what it got him. A bastard halfling with no power and a humiliating death."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“So you didn’t give him the tears?”

“Of course I fucking didn’t!” His snarl rang off the stone walls. “He was putting the whole territory in danger. He wasn’t fit to be prince.”

“Then I sacrificed for nothing. You dumped me in the Highlands for nothing.”

“We had to send you,” Aleksander said. He flicked a glance at Grigory. “The Blood demanded it.”

A memory tugged at me—Grigory lowering his voice as he spoke to Aleks in my father’s chamber. “She doesn’t have to succeed. The Blood only requires that you try.”

“You didn’t want me to be successful,” I said. And I understood that part. They’d made a token effort to get the tears, hoping the gesture would satisfy the Blood.

But why drag me back home now that they’d gotten what they wanted?

Why were they angry I’d survived?

Something was wrong here...

A flash of red caught my eye. I looked at the fat ruby nestled against Aleksander’s chest...then at Grigory standing stiffly beside the throne.

“It didn’t work, did it?” I guessed, meeting my brother’s gaze. “You refused Father

the tears, and the Blood rejected you.”

Aleksander stared at me, and I couldn’t decipher his expression. He looked almost...puzzled. “You shouldn’t have bedded the dragons, Halina. Something has changed. Their power—”

“Aleksander,” Grigory said, an undercurrent of warning in his voice. “Just get on with it.”

Get on with what? My heart started to pound.

Grigory pulled something—a small remote—from his pocket and clicked a button. Behind the throne, the metal curtain began to ascend, revealing the balcony and a purple sky.

A predawn sky.

The sun was coming up.

My brother stood at last, his hand going to the dagger at his hip. “We know you mated the dragons. We can feel it. And Krovnosta won’t be threatened by their kind. I may not be able to kill them.” He moved toward me, a purposeful look in his eyes. “But I can kill you.”

I backed away, my heart racing. “You don’t have to do this. The dragons are no threat to you.”

“Yes, they are.” He drew the dagger and kept moving forward. But he was slow about it. Almost cautious.

I dared to look at Grigory, who watched us, his features tense.

Why was he just standing there? And why hadn't Aleks simply channeled to me and cut my throat? Instead, he continued to advance, backing me up.

Heat touched my shoulders, followed by a flash of pain.

The sun.

He was herding me to the balcony. Gods, he was going to force me into the light—finishing what the warriors had started all those years ago. Except this time Aleks would be my murderer instead of my savior.

And after he finished with me, Bram and Fergus could be next.

No. No way was I letting that happen.

I bent my knees, centering myself the way Bram had taught me.

Aleksander's eyes widened, but only for a second. He refocused quickly and gripped the dagger more tightly. Grigory stayed silent. Observant. Waiting to watch me die.

You'll be waiting a long time, Uncle.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

Someone was going to die tonight, but it wasn't going to be me. Because I had a score to settle. Before the sun rose, Grigory was going to pay for killing my mother.

And then he was going to pay for threatening my mates.

Chapter Twenty-Two

FERGUS

Faster. Faster. Faster.

The word throbbed in my head like a mantra, its beat matching the sweep of my wings as Bram and I streaked toward Krovnosta. We'd crossed the continent in a blur, rocketing over green fields and gleaming cities shining like gems in the darkness. Now the Urals rose all around us, the jagged peaks capped with snow. We approached Ludovic's territory at last.

But I didn't relax.

Over and over, the scene from the loch replayed in my head. The vampires had been huge, their armor-clad bodies looming over Halina's petite form. When she'd whirled, the look on her face had cut me to my core.

She'd been terrified.

What did they want with her? She'd said the leeches cared nothing for her. That her father barely remembered her name.

A fool. And probably a dead one.

Which meant her brother was prince.

Aleksander. Tonight, Krovnosta would have another dead prince. No one harmed a dragon's female and lived.

But I had to find her first.

Faster. Faster. Faster.

My heart raced. My muscles screamed. My beast roared, thirsting for revenge. It burned inside me. I opened my mouth and released a stream of fire.

Beside me, Bram shot me a disapproving look. But only for a second. As soon as the expression appeared in his eyes, it was gone, replaced with something flat and emotionless. It was the look of a Sovereign Guard—a cold-blooded killing machine trained to eliminate threats. He saved his fire for those who had taken our female.

My beast purred, pleased with our mate.

Clouds parted, and a turret appeared.

Castle Krovnosta. Vampire territory. A place dragons were forbidden to venture.

Fuck that.

I plastered my wings to my sides and canted my head down, slicing through the air. The sky around me lightened. Dawn was coming. More turrets appeared, and rays of sunlight sparkled off the snow that dusted the castle's towers.

Movement caught my eye—and my heart skipped a beat.

On a balcony high on one of the castle's walls, two miniature figures edged into the open. Sunlight struck one's hair, turning it to fire.

It was Halina...and a taller, black-haired male advanced on her with a dagger.

Putting her between his blade and the sun.

Fire gathered in my throat.

At my side, Bram roared, the sound like a sonic boom.

The sun's warmth heated my wings.

I flew faster.

Bram flew faster.

Halina's skin began to smoke.

And then it caught fire.

Chapter Twenty-Three

HALINA

Aleksander had backed me right up to the line of sunlight when the dragon's roar shook the castle.

My eardrums burst.

Aleksander stopped and winced.

Fire licked up my arm, followed by searing agony. Choking on panic, I jolted forward and slapped my skin with my other hand, snuffing out the blaze. My ears popped.

Got my eardrums back. Thanks, dragon blood.

Bram and Fergus approached, but I didn't dare look over my shoulder. Because Aleksander had recovered, too, and now he snarled, his eyes fully red.

"Your lovers can't save you, Halina." He slashed the dagger through the air, narrowly missing my stomach.

But he didn't step any closer. He stayed put, his body safely in the shadows with me balanced on the edge of the sunlight.

He bared his fangs. "Back up!"

"Fuck you!" Smoke curled around me. The scent of burning flesh—mine—assaulted my nostrils. "You don't have to kill me, Aleks. I'm no threat to you!"

Grigory growled from his place beside the throne. "Finish it! Kill her and the dragons will follow."

Aleksander slashed the dagger again. Still, he didn't move.

Why was he just standing there? He had room to maneuver.

A breeze stirred, tossing my hair. Dragons' wings. My mates. They'd come to save me. But if I died, nothing could save them.

Aleks lifted his gaze, taking his eyes off me for a moment. The ruby ring glinted in the sun, its facets reflecting light in all directions.

Fire licked over my shoulder, the flames dancing in my peripheral vision. There was no going backwards.

Only forwards.

My brother was distracted.

I blinked and I was behind him, my head spinning. Had I channeled? No time to think. I grabbed Aleks's dagger and thrust it into his back hard before yanking it out.

He hissed and spun around, the ruby swinging. Behind him, two dragons swept to the balcony and shifted to smoke. Twin black columns streamed into the audience chamber and then reformed into Fergus and Bram.

They were magnificent and terrifying, their eyes burning with fire. No one would have mistaken them for human.

Aleksander went to one knee, his face a mask of shock.

Grigory hissed at Bram and Fergus. “You have no right to enter our territory. You break the treaty.”

Fergus looked at him, all traces of the jovial, charming male I knew gone. Something deadly and forbidding stared out from his eyes, which swirled with the promise of death. “You abducted our bonded mate. All bets are off, leech.”

For the first time in my life, I saw fear in Grigory’s gaze. He moved at last, drawing a knife from somewhere as he lurched toward me.

Page 69

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

I raised my dagger. “No farther, Uncle.”

He stopped.

Awareness tingled down my spine. And somewhere deep in my mind, I knew one thing with absolute certainty: He couldn’t come any closer.

My heart pounded, and the knowledge swelled, becoming larger and more profound.

I moved without thinking, reaching down and snapping the chain around my brother’s neck.

And he let me. Because he couldn’t move, either.

Because he couldn’t raise his hand to his prince.

The Blood had chosen—and it had chosen me.

The ring slid on my finger so easily, its weight perfect for my hand. I gazed at it for a moment, and the ruby winked up at me. A smile spread in my mind. Hello, beautiful.

I looked at my uncle, and the smile fled.

His eyes went wide. He sank to his knees, the knife slipping from his hand to clatter on the ground. “Princess,” he murmured.

The doors to the audience chamber burst open, and warriors filled the doorway, their

faces stunned as they surveyed the scene.

Bram pointed at them. “Stay where you are, cocksuckers.”

Power rushed through my veins. Not dragons’ blood. The Blood. I’d felt it this whole time and hadn’t realized it.

I looked at Grigory. “You let my father die.”

He swallowed. “Everything I’ve done has been for the territory.”

“You killed my mother.”

He glanced at the warriors in the doorway. Then he raised his voice. “She’s a halfling! She isn’t fit to rule.”

No one moved.

“Kill her! She’ll set her creatures on all of you!”

I looked at Bram and Fergus, understanding passing between us.

They moved with supernatural grace, crossing to Grigory and hauling him up. He screamed, begging for mercy as they dragged him to the balcony. They paused, waiting for my order.

My heart pounded. The vampires in the doorway watched me, waiting to see what I would do. Gods, how was I going to rule over an entire territory? I was so not cut out for this.

But I wasn’t alone.

Fergus looked over his shoulder, his gaze steady.

I put my shoulders back and lifted my voice. “You ask for mercy, Uncle. I’ll show you the same mercy you showed my mother.” I nodded to Fergus.

He and Bram tossed Grigory into the sun.

My uncle screamed. In an instant, his body turned to ash. The dust filtered into the audience chamber and drifted to the ground.

I looked down to find Aleksander looking back at me. A puddle of blood had formed on the flagstones under him.

“You sent me to die,” I said, tears burning my throat.

Page 70

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

He swallowed. “A prince must be ruthless. I was serving the throne.”

“No,” I whispered. “You were serving yourself.”

I signaled to Bram and Fergus.

Aleks didn’t struggle as they lifted him, and he made no sound as they carried him to the balcony. But just before they thrust him into the light, he craned his head around and met my gaze. “You finally learned to fight, Halina. I’m...proud.”

Tears ran down my cheeks. I nodded to my mates.

They pushed him into the sun.

Epilogue

HALINA

I doubled over with my broadsword braced on my knees, struggling to catch my breath. “Just...a...minute. I’m dying.”

Bram stopped and swung his sword around his body in a fancy whipping motion, not looking winded in the least. Now that it was summer, we’d been training by the loch. The moonlight on the surface made it easier to see—and when we finished our session, we could strip and cool off in the water.

And do other...stuff.

“Come on, Halina!” Fergus called from the blanket he reclined on, his legs crossed at the ankle. He was (shockingly) shirtless. “I paid for this!” He tossed a grape in the air and caught it in his mouth.

I straightened enough to glare at him. “You didn’t pay anything!”

“Sure I did.” He gestured to Bram. “I paid Bram to get you all sweaty.”

I wrinkled my nose. “That’s gross.”

He dipped a deliberate gaze to my sports bra. “To each his own.”

I glanced down. Sure enough, the fabric was soaked, and my nipples poked under the material. I looked at Bram. “You went along with this?” On the blanket, Fergus tossed another grape and caught it with a snap of his teeth.

Cheeky dragon.

Bram shrugged. “We were going tae train anyway.”

“We were supposed to do yoga today. He bribed you and you changed it to broadswords.” I huffed. “I hate sword fighting.”

Fergus snorted. “Could have fooled me.”

I pointed my sword at him. “Eat your grapes.”

A vampire appeared a short distance away.

I jumped. Even though I was getting better at channeling, I still wasn’t used to seeing my people appear out of nowhere.

Fergus sat up and scowled at the newcomer. “Kneel, dickface, or she’ll chop your head off.”

The vampire dropped to his knees. “M-My apologies.” He gulped and added a belated “my lord.” He darted a nervous look at Fergus from under his eyelashes.

Fergus settled back down and popped a grape in his mouth.

I hid a smile. The vampires of Krovnosta still didn’t know what to make of Bram and Fergus—especially Fergus, who took particular delight in tormenting them.

“What is it?” I asked the vampire. “Is everything all right?” The guys and I weren’t due to return to the territory for three more days. I’d left a trusted steward in charge, but sometimes issues cropped up and I had to channel back to solve a mini crisis. It was exhausting and stressful.

But Bram and Fergus were always by my side to help—and they had unique ways of helping me relax.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 5:10 am

“Yes, my princess,” the vampire said. “I mean, no.” His brow furrowed, his gaze on the grass at my feet. “Some of the warriors would like to know if they can feed from the vein if they don’t use their fangs. They say it tastes better.”

A sigh rose in my chest. “We’ve been through this before. I have no problem with them doing that as long as they don’t inject any sila.” Banning thralls had been my first edict as princess. The warriors weren’t happy about it, but I was hopeful they would accept the change with time. If vampires wanted to join the rest of the Firstborn Races in interweaving with the human world, we had to stop slowly killing humans. And I wasn’t going to rule over a territory that kidnapped people and made them slaves.

The vampire nodded and got to his feet. “Thank you, princess. I’ll relay the order.”

“Good.”

The vampire hesitated.

“Was there something else?”

“The messenger who delivered the tears... We still don’t know his whereabouts, and now the Razroth demons have requested an audience.”

My stomach knotted. I’d only been in power for three months, and now it looked like I’d made my first enemy—and my first strategic error. I hadn’t thought to press Grigory or Aleksander about the missing demon messenger. I’d been too busy grappling with the realization that the Blood had chosen me to rule.

“Halina,” Bram said quietly. “May I take this one?”

“Yes, of course.” Some of my anxiety eased. I wasn’t in this alone.

Bram addressed the vampire. “The dragons maintain good relations with the Razroth. I’ve spoken to our king’s consort. He’ll travel to the demon plane and address this matter with them directly.”

The vampire inclined his head. “Thank you, my lord.”

Fergus crunched another grape.

The vampire slid a look in his direction, his cheeks going pink.

“Like what you see, lad?” Fergus asked with an arched brow.

The vampire gasped and channeled away.

Fergus chuckled. “He totally did. Gods, these vampires are so uptight.”

Bram went to the blanket and sat. He gripped Fergus’s chin and gave him a quick, hard kiss on the mouth. “Behave yourself. You’re taken.”

I joined them, and Fergus smiled as he pulled me down to his other side. “I am,” he murmured. “I’m completely taken.” He leaned in and kissed me, tasting of grapes and mischief. Then he turned his head and kissed Bram, and I had to struggle not to moan as their jaws moved against each other. Fergus was right, I thought with a dreamy sigh. I loved sword fighting.

But when they broke apart, worry gnawed at me. “Are you sure you’re okay dealing with Niall?” I asked Bram. He and King Cormac’s mate weren’t exactly on the best of terms. There was the small issue of Niall basically holding Bram prisoner for

twenty-five years, forcing him to serve as Cormac's emotional support dragon.

Fergus pushed Bram's hair off his forehead. "She's right, babe. You dinnae have to do this. Halina and I can handle it. Like a tag team." He winked at me. "Bram loves television wrestling."

"I'm fine with it," Bram said mildly. "Also, go fuck yourself, Fergus."

Fergus's eyes twinkled. "I'd much rather you fuck me." He gave me a scorching look. "And I'll eat our princess's pussy and then fuck her while you pound me."

My panties went instantly wet.

Bram smiled. "One amendment. I eat her first, and then I pound your ass while you make her scream."

Fergus reached over and stroked a finger along my bottom lip. "What say you, princess? Do you like that plan?"

"Yes," I breathed. "I like it very much."

He grinned, his dimple showing. "Who do you reckon is faster? Me and Bram in shadow form or you channelin'?"

"I d-don't know." It was hard to think when my brain was melting with lust.

"One way to find out." He stood and tossed Bram and me a playful look. "Last one in bed changes the sheets." He shifted to smoke and streaked away.

Bram and I grinned at each other.

Then chased after him.

* * *