



KISS ACROSS TIME SERIES  
BOOK ONE

"Paranormal erotic romance doesn't  
get any more creative than [this]."

*~Chris for Romance Junkies*

KISS  
ACROSS TIME  
TRACY COOPER-POSEY

# Kiss Across Time

by

**Tracy Cooper-Posey**

# **The Kiss Across Time Series Book I**

# About *Kiss Across Time*

*A single kiss can change more than one life...or two.*

Taylor Yates is fired for insisting the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Arthurian poet, Inigo Domhnall, existed. When she hears Domhnall's lyrics in a death metal song, she engineers a meeting with lead singer, Brody Gallagher. An unintended kiss sends them spinning back to the poet's time, when Saxons were pillaging King Arthur's Britain.

Brody's all for kissing her again. More, he wants her to kiss his friend and lover, Veris, to see what will happen. When Veris' kiss sends them back to the time of the Vikings neither man is willing to let Taylor simply walk out of their lives.

But Brody and Veris are more than lovers and sexual playmates, as Taylor learns when they investigate the kisses that send them across time. The secrets they share have the power to completely alter her life.

# Praise for *Kiss Across Time*

[She] has created characters that are engaging, unpredictable, outrageously funny and down-right appealing to readers who will steal their hearts.

Shannon for *The Romance Studio*

I think you'll be as entertained and affected by the chemistry between the characters as I was. A fast-moving romance that spanned several lifetimes and included a

paranormal aspect that was a fun and totally unexpected surprise.

Honeysuckle for *Whipped Cream Erotic Romance Reviews*

This was a great story with wonderful and surprising plot twists. The chemistry between the three is tangible.

Stacey Krug for *Siren Book Reviews*

Paranormal erotic romance doesn't get any more creative than [this].

Chris for *Romance Junkies*

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# Dedication

*For Matthew. Finally, one for you,  
my talented, droogie metalhead son.*

*Thank you for your guidance and  
education. It was fun. So was R.W.*

# Chapter One

*And blood-dipped spears waved  
beyond thy doors*

*Foretelling thy doom to me this day  
of days.*

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

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

—Inigo Domhnall, 5<sup>th</sup> Century  
A.D.

Taylor reread the letter written on crisp, perfectly folded university letterhead again, this time slowly, just in case she had misunderstood, while the sick feeling in her gut told her she had read it clearly the first time.

“I’m fired?” she whispered into the empty air of her tiny office space. Saying it aloud didn’t make it any more understandable. She looked at the signature block, bewildered. *Jeoffery H. Danforth II, Ph.D., M.H., B.A.*

What the hell was Jeoff thinking? She picked up the stiff white envelope the letter had been

delivered in. It had her name and her office number, and the university's logo in the corner and that was all. Fired by letter. He didn't even have the decency to tell her she was fired to her face?

Anger stirred, deep in her gut. She had given her all to this faculty. Seven years...and now her services were no longer required? Just like that? What sort of a piddling excuse was that, anyway? Was that why they had delivered the news by letter? So they wouldn't have to explain why they were booting her out on her ass just before they were forced to offer her

tenure?

Taylor sat back in her creaky chair and looked up at the sky she could see through the high window over her desk, thinking it through. Was *that* why they had fired her? She was up for tenure and they would have to work hard to justify not giving it to her this year. The easy way around that would be to fire her, six weeks before the deadline.

The easy way...and the coward's way.

Her anger swelled and heated, gripping at her throat and making her breath come harder and

shorter.

Jeoffery Danforth the second was not going to get away with a gutless move like that.

Taylor looked up at the spine of her well-thumbed copy of Syrus in the original Latin, sitting on the shelf just below the window. *"Pardon one offense, and you encourage the commission of many,"* she muttered, quoting him. She got up and headed for the door, letter in hand, then came back and picked up the offensive envelope, too. Time for explanations.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jeoff Danforth was the head of the history department and also on the board of the college and his office reflected his tenured and privileged position within the university hierarchy. For a man just reaching forty, he was doing remarkably well professionally. His private life was a shambles, for he had left two wrecked marriages in the wake of his stellar career and was supporting children from both of them.

He was the university's golden boy despite his private disasters and ran the history department with a degree of

efficiency that Taylor had admired until today. She smiled stiffly at Betty, trying for a normal expression. "Is he in?" she asked as she had countless times in the past and just as she normally did, she kept walking into Jeoff's office. She had that special access, after all.

But Betty rose to her feet. "I'll see if he's in!" she almost cried.

Taylor glanced over her shoulder, startled. "I can do that," she replied and pushed the door to Jeoff's office open all the way before Betty could round her desk.

Jeoff was talking on the phone, his chair swiveled all the

way around so he could look out the vast lead-light windows as he spoke, taking in the heat-dazzled day, the tracts of well-watered grass and shade trees spread out below. Students were walking, sitting or standing anywhere one looked.

The phone cord was stretched around the edges of his studded leather chair, straining.

“Jeoff,” Taylor said flatly.

He turned to look and Taylor felt a small sense of retribution when his jaw sagged. She held up the letter and envelope and his eyes widened even more.

“Hey...um...I’m going to have to get back to you,” he said into the phone. “Something has just come up...Sure. Thank you.” He swiveled the rest of the way around to face the desk properly and replaced the phone, all the while watching Taylor.

He was a handsome man... sort of. Twenty years of earning a living purely by the use of intellect had made him a little soft around the edges. He was only an inch or two taller than Taylor, who stood at five nine in her bare heels, and he had gained thirty or forty extra pounds that disguised what had

once been a chiseled jaw and trim hips.

His hair was the same light brown as his eyes, and as soft and feathery as a baby's. He had the clear hazel eyes, sharp with intelligence, that had first caught her attention and he was sizing her up now.

"They sent it to you," he said.

"It's what one does with a letter." She dropped it on his desk. "I'm fired, Jeoff? I'm *fucking fired?*" Suddenly her anger was there, huge and hot and uncontainable. The injustice of this was pushing it out, aiming it at him

like a cudgel.

He stood up. "Now, before you get upset—"

"Too fucking late," she snapped back. "You might have thought of that before you decided to do this by proxy." She stabbed at the letter with her finger. "I thought you had more class."

He winced and held up a hand. "I thought I'd asked Betty to give it to me. I was going to tell you in person. The letter is a formality."

"Well, now that you've formally fired me, do you want to tell me why, beyond the fact that

my services are no longer required?"

Caution flooded his face. Jeoff spread his fingertips along the edge of his desk. "The university is going through some tough financial times. We're off loading a lot of senior staff in order to save overheads. It's not personal."

"Bullshit. Six weeks before I'm up for tenure and *right* after that argument about Doctor Ger —" She halted mid-sentence, staring at him, adding it up in her head, pulling the facts together. "That's it, isn't it? That's why I was put on the list of cuts. I argue with

you too much.”

At the same time she was totting up the possibilities and adding them together, the reminder of Dr. Gerhardsson’s visit sent a quick waterfall of memories through her mind of the evening of Gerhardsson’s appointment. Snapshot images of the man’s incredibly blue eyes. His blond hair. His height. Above all, the width and power of his shoulders under the perfectly-tailored and precisely-fitted suit and the way his presence had seemed to fill the room, making her mortally conscious of the fact that she was a

woman.

She'd had the hardest time concentrating on the subject matter at first, until she had realized that he was genuinely interested in what she thought about Inigo Domhnall...that he really did think she might have serious reason to believe the man had existed. Then the discussion had abruptly sucked her in deep and she had emerged, two hours later, her heart and mind reeling from one of the most thorough interviews she'd ever had. She felt like her thesis and professional career had been filleted by an expert.

Gerhardsson had been polite and friendly when he'd left, shaking her hand warmly and thanking her for her time. He'd given no promises about a follow-up, but she had been elated. Someone believed her. She'd known it in her bones, and the next morning she had sent an email to the members of the history board, telling them about her evening.

Jeoff cleared his throat and sat down. "Academic debate is the backbone of intellectual progress. I'd be the last one to resent a decent argument, but that Gerhardsson thing was the last straw."

She licked her lips. "Because he consulted with me about Inigo Domhnall? Because finally *someone* other than me seemed to have heard about Domhnall? *That's* why you're firing me?"

Jeoff reached into a drawer next to him. "Did you even check into Gerhardsson's credentials before you wrote the report about his visit?"

"It wasn't a report," she protested. "I sent an email to a few people."

"The entire board of the history department and me," he amended. "You were boasting."

He dumped a manila folder on the desk. "Well, I looked into this Dr. Gerhardsson you were crowing about. He's never been near a history faculty in his life."

She stared at the manila folder, her heart thudding unhappily.

Jeoff pushed it toward her, but she made no move to open it. "I never said he had been," she countered weakly.

"You implied he was in our field, and you know it."

She couldn't take her eyes away from the folder.

Jeoff tapped it. "He's a

medical doctor," he said. "I'm not even sure where his practice is located. I couldn't find one."

She flipped the folder open and scanned the printed biography inside. "This says he's a lecturing professor at UCLA and chair of the selection panel of the AMA...you're really stretching it calling him a homeless M.D."

"But he is *not* an historian. That's not a trivial fact and you conveniently left it out of your email when you reported to the board," Jeoff said flatly. "You embarrassed them. You embarrassed *me*."

“It wasn’t —” she began.

“You jumped the gun,” Jeoff continued. “It was unprofessional and verges on unethical. You’re lucky the board is content with just letting you go, quite frankly.”

Taylor just stared at him, astonished at the direction the conversation had abruptly taken. “What the hell, Jeoff?” she said at last.

He had the grace to not be able to meet her eyes. He looked away, his gaze dropping to his desktop briefly. He made a fuss of closing the Gerhardsson folder. “Face it, Taylor,” he said, his tone

more gentle. “Your thesis isn’t going anywhere. In seven years, you’ve found no proof of anything at all. All you’ve got is a handful of theories and a lot of research.”

“That you encouraged!” she protested.

He wasn’t looking at her directly. That was what hurt the most. He was guilty as shit and he knew it. He had coaxed and urged her to follow her theories as far as she could take them. Gerhardtsson had been the closest to validation she had yet come – someone else on the planet that had heard of Domhnall that she hadn’t told first.

Now Jeoff was yanking the rug out from under her professionally, financially, and *very* personally.

“You son of a bitch,” she told him.

He didn’t look at her, but the corner of his eye twitched. He’d heard her.

Taylor walked back to the office door, debating whether to slam it or not when she left. Then she remembered one last piece of business and halted with her hand on the door handle and looked back over her shoulder. “I have some things at your place,” she told

him. "I'll be over tonight to pick them up."

Jeoff finally met her eyes. There was a touch of resignation in his soft brown ones. Then it disappeared. "I'll pack them up and have them sent to you," he told her.

"Even better," she replied crisply. "Why don't you do that with the contents of my office here, too?"

"You're leaving now?"

"I don't have to be told twice when I'm not welcome," she told him.

She shut the door gently.

Driving back home to her modest Brentwood apartment seemed to take half as long as the usual morning commute. Taylor realized that she had more than the odd thought or two on her mind, and that the journey back didn't include the standard snarl of morning traffic.

She pulled into the cramped car park that served her apartment building, slid into her slot, and turned the engine off and listened to the silence inside her car with something that felt like

astonishment.

What was she doing here? Had she really been fired? Was she really unemployed? It seemed... surreal. It was barely ten in the morning and it was a dazzling, beautiful spring day. Beyond the windows of the car, she could hear traffic, car horns, and the usual murmur of L.A. on a week day.

Taylor gathered up her bag and briefcase, her jacket and cellphone and remembered picking them up from the chair by her front door this morning. The last thing she would have predicted as she had headed for work just as she had

for the last seven years was that she would be here, now, and unemployed.

Oh, and busted up with her boyfriend, too.

That one didn't hurt nearly as much as the loss of her job. Her career, really.

She slid out of the car and headed for her apartment. She would make coffee, then sit and make plans...if she could just get her brain to shift into gear.

She checked the mailbox in the foyer on the way through, but it was still too early for the mailman to have delivered the mail yet. So

she climbed the stairs to the third floor and headed down the long corridor to her apartment.

Even from the far end of the corridor, she could hear the steady beat of heavy metal music. From there, with the filtering effects of walls, plaster, carpet and more, it was just a heavy throbbing that filled the air. With most of the apartment building occupants away for the day at their jobs and school or other business, someone was taking advantage of the solitude and had cranked up the volume. Standing next to the speakers, the sound had to be overpowering.

As she got closer to her apartment, the treble came through and she could hear lyrics. Because of the filtering of the walls, it was easier to understand the singer's words than most heavy metal singers...or perhaps this singer simply knew how to enunciate better than most. Taylor found herself listening to the threads of the lyrics as she picked out her apartment key from her key ring.

“...spears waved beyond thy doors...Foretelling thy doom to me this day of days...I knew of thy love before thee spoke of it to me...Say not of what is in thy heart for it

must not be spake.”

The lyrics were Inigo  
Domhnall.

# Chapter Two

Taylor stood in the middle of the hall, her keys in one hand, the other held up in mid-air, her mouth open. She knew her eyes were comically wide with shock.

She turned toward the door where the indecently loud noise was originating and pushed herself into walking toward it. Her legs felt like twin blocks of timber, heavy and uncooperative.

Facing the door, she stared at

the metal “310” nailed there. The zero must have been lost some time in the past and been replaced by another zero that didn’t match – it was larger, cleaner and a different font from the other two digits.

Taylor shook herself, dropped her keys back into her bag and raised her fist to the door. Knowing it was the only way she was going to be heard, she hammered steadily and heavily on it.

It took twenty very long seconds, then the music abruptly cut off.

Silence.

Taylor hammered again.

More silence. Then she realized what her hammering may have been interpreted as. "It's okay. I'm not the police," she called. "I'm your next door neighbor."

The silence lasted another five seconds. "We turned it down, okay?" came the call through the door.

"That's not why I knocked," she called back. "That music you're playing. I have to know the name of the composer. It's very important."

Then she heard whispering.

A hasty conference.

The door cracked open a couple of inches and a single eye, very red, looked out at her. "*Composer*, lady? Are you for real?" It was a man's voice. A young man. She could spot jeans and a black tee-shirt, and some facial hair, but not much else.

The opening of the door also wafted thick, aromatic air over Taylor. The musky smell was unmistakable. She grimaced at the strength of it. "Listen, I don't care about your little pot party, okay? You can stone yourself to death for all I care. I just want to know who

wrote that song you were just playing. Please. It's really, really important."

He opened the door another inch or two. "You're that professor lady. Next door, right?"

"Right." She wasn't going to go into the specifics about university degrees and titles here and now. Instead she gave him her friendliest smile. "That song you were just playing...the words to that song are very old. Incredibly old. Ancient, actually. Whoever wrote the song used the words, you see —"

"They stole them?"      The

man's single eye widened. The door opened up a little further and she could finally see his full face. He wasn't quite as young as she thought. He was closer to her own age of thirty, with full sideburns and shaggy hair. He was skinny to the point of organ failure and at the moment, his bloodshot eyes looked sleepy from the marijuana. "They ripped off the words?" he asked again.

"No, they borrowed them. You can do that with some very old stuff," she told him.

"Oh." His interest flagged. "Then why do you want to know

who did it so bad?"

"Whoever wrote that song had to have access to the words. That means they know about Inigo Domhnall. Well, they had one of his manuscripts, anyway. Or they knew about them. Or knew about one of his stories. They heard the words somewhere," she finished. "I need to find out where."

He tilted his head at her and screwed up his face. "Why?"

She cast about for a simple explanation that he could process in his elevated state. Then she gave up. "Because I just got fired from my job at the university because no

one there believes me that the guy who wrote those words, way back in the fifth century, actually existed. That song you were playing is the first proof I've found, *ever*, that he did."

It took the man a few seconds to process her words. Then his sleepy eyes opened a bit wider. "Oh, wow, hey, you'd better come in," he said and pushed the door aside for her.

Taylor took a deep breath of the last of the fresh air in the corridor and stepped inside.

The apartment was the mirror of hers in layout, with a small living

room and kitchenette separated by a breakfast bar, with an archway that led further into the apartment to the two bedrooms and the bathroom. She used the tiny second bedroom in hers as an office.

That was where the resemblance to their two apartments ended.

There were three other people sprawled in the living room in various poses and attitudes of the completely stoned. They stirred themselves when she walked in, but fell back when they saw she was not a cop or anyone in

authority.

There was a glass bong on the chipped coffee table, and a bowl full of weed next to it. Cans of pop and beer and two butt-filled ashtrays littered the rest of the ash-covered table.

"My roommates," the man told her.

"Hello," Taylor offered to all three in general.

An overweight man with green eyes lay in an honest-to-god denim beanbag, his arm around a slender woman with a tattoo of a dragon on the back of her shoulder. The man belched. Taylor

assumed that was his version of hello.

A Hispanic man lay on the ratty sofa, his head on the arm. He was bare chested, and his jeans button was popped, the boxers riding well above the band.

The guy who had opened the door jerked his thumb toward Taylor. "She just lost her job. She thinks the words on the Nocturnal Rain CD will get her job back."

Taylor opened her mouth to protest over that huge simplification and the need to explain all the steps in between that would be necessary, then clamped

her teeth together. Even *if* she had heard right, there was no guarantee that it would do anything to help her career.

One step at a time.

The Hispanic guy was struggling to sit up. “Yo, death metal inspire you that much, *bonita?*”

“Can I hear the song again?” she asked diffidently. “Perhaps... not as loud?”

“It ain’t worth playing if it ain’t loud,” the girl murmured sleepily into her boyfriend’s shoulder. “Right, Graham?”

The boyfriend nodded, his

eyes closed.

“I’m not used to it,” Taylor reminded them. “It just hurts my ears and I can’t hear details.”

The man who had opened the door was already standing in front of a very expensive-looking media center. He grinned at her as he turned the volume control dial down with a big twist, then hit “play,” then “back.”

Immediately, the same song emerged from the slim speakers placed around the room, but at considerably reduced decibels. Taylor listened to it, absorbing the lyrics, as the man handed her the

CD cover and pointed to the song listed on the back, over the top of a photo of the band playing at a live concert, in front of thousands of screaming fans in a mosh pit.

“8. *Kiss Across Time*,” she read. Well, that fit with the lyrics and Domhnall words. Domhnall lived through years of threat from enemies, and the invasion of his country and the loss of his culture. His stories and epic poems were all full of death, glory, love, battles, dying and more....or would be, if she had ever been able to catch more than a glimpse of him from the corner of her eye, in research

terms.

“So?” the man asked.

“They’re the right words,” she confirmed, lifting her voice up to carry over the sound of the music. She raised the CD. “Who wrote these songs? It just says ‘Gallagher’ on the cover.”

The man turned the player off.

“Andy knows Nocturnal Rain better’n us,” Graham said, from his recline in the bean bag.

Taylor realized he was referring to the man who had let her in the door and she turned to him. “Who is Gallagher?” she

asked.

Andy pointed to the CD. "Lead singer and rhythm guitar for Nocturnal Rain. Brody Gallagher."

"Then that's who I need to talk to," she said.

All four of them laughed, clutching their bellies and chests and mouths, their expressions alert for the first time since she had stepped into the room.

"I know they're probably aloof," she began. "Being a successful band. They're probably surrounded by security during concerts. But all I have to do is explain what I'm looking for. I'm

not a fan. I'm not a groupie. They'll be reasonable, I'm sure."

Graham sat up. "You think they haven't heard every scam in the world before now? They can recognize every bullshit fantasy story coming at them and kick a groupie to the curb before they get within sniffin' distance of the band." He jerked his chin at Andy. "Tell her what she's dealin' with."

Andy shrugged. "Nocturnal Rain are kinda famous," he said apologetically. "They get mobbed a lot, so they're pretty tight. Especially Gallagher."

Frustration curled through her. "This is ridiculous," she snapped. "I'm not a fan!"

"*Benita*, you are more out of it than me if you think you gonna meet the great Nocturnal Rain just because you wanna," the guy on the sofa told her softly.

"Although," Andy said, "They're playing in San Bernardino tomorrow night."

Taylor turned to him. "Please tell me you have tickets?" she begged, excitement flaring through her.

Andy grinned. "Hey, lady, there's a reason I'm at home in the

middle of the day, you know. I can't afford concert tickets."

"Scalper tickets," Graham said. "They'll be out in force for those guys."

"'coz when I said I can't afford concert tickets," Andy told him, "I mean all concert tickets *except* scalper prices, which go about five times the door price." He shook his head.

"I'll pay," Taylor told him. "I'll buy them. You want to go, Andy? Would you like to see Nocturnal Rain live? Take me with you and I'll buy you a ticket."

Andy's eyes widened.

The girl in Graham's arms snorted. "Yeah, she ain't gonna stand out at *all*," she said and laughed, muffling her face in Graham's shoulder.

Taylor looked down at her silver-grey suit and tugged at the hem of her jacket. "I'll even get rid of the suit," she promised Andy.

His relief was as easy to read as newsprint. "Deal," he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

"And blood-dipped spears  
waved beyond thy doors

Foretelling thy doom to me this  
day of days.

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

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

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

She really was here listening  
to this, she reminded herself. She  
really had heard the words. It  
hadn't been her imagination. She

gripped Andy's arm even harder.

"Told you," Andy yelled in her ear. "Can we go now?" He was anxious to get her the hell out of here before he was spotted with his uptight, anal and not-cool history professor neighbor.

At least he could give her brownie points for trying to dress the part. She'd squeezed herself into a lace-up leather miniskirt and black leather bustier she'd borrowed from a Goth ex-student, poured on the black eye makeup and slid into black stiletto ankle boots. But she stood out like a flamingo in the Sonora desert here.

Mentally, she'd shrugged. At least she hadn't worn her business suit and put her hair up. Andy would have been horrified.

"Are you kidding?" she yelled back at Andy. She had no intention of giving up now. "How do I get backstage?"

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

"I have to talk to them!" she screamed in his ear. "I have to find out where they got those lyrics!"

He shook his head, mulish.

“Not unless you fuck one of ‘em, Taylor! It ain’t happening. Not with their security.”

Taylor gripped the railing of the first tier balcony and stared down at the stage in pure frustration. She had to find a way to speak to Brody Gallagher, because he’d had access to the works of Inigo Domhnall and that made him her new best friend.

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

showing a dazzling amount of cleavage.

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

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

“What?”

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

suggested. When he was sober and straight, Andy was smart and quite good company. Since she had barged into his apartment yesterday morning, she had come to like his quiet intelligence. He was not in the slightest dazzled by her academic credentials, or his lack of them and that impressed her a lot.

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

The singer had been attached to a pair of wires and now he began to soar into the air above the heads of the audience, out beyond the

stage. The crowd went wild, screaming and waving. Everyone around Taylor began to shove and press closer to the balcony and she realized that they were trying to get the singer's attention.

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

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

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

the black. A black iron belt buckle down low over an impressive bulge.

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

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

She barely heard him.

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

balcony rail.

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

He kissed her and Taylor closed her eyes. She could still hear the screaming but it changed in quality and became fear-filled. That

made her open her eyes again. Fear was not good.

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

The singer had her in his arms still. There was no balcony between them now.

His hands slid into her hair, keeping her head still. "Not yet," he begged, sliding his lips down her throat, nuzzling her jaw. "There's time yet, Toiréasa," he murmured. "Time to say fare thee well properly."

"We should have returned to Ireland, Breandán," she whispered,

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

"Arthur would have been short a good officer if we had," he said against her breast, just before his teeth caught the nipple. His hands stripped her gown from her and in the soft morning light pouring through the cloth over the door, he lowered her to the bed in the little cot that had been theirs for

the last few years. He unbuckled his sword belt and put it to one side, watching her as she lay waiting for him. He stripped his tunic, trews and boots. He was stiff and ready for her, his manhood throbbing.

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

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

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

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

Toiréasa gasped, her hands gripping his shoulders, her eyes closing. Breandán's mouth came down upon hers, his lips demanding, his tongue thrusting inside. She opened up to him in every way, knowing it might be the

last time, even though neither of them could voice that thought aloud.

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

Abruptly the screams shifted and changed in cadence.

Taylor blinked. Opened her eyes again.

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

around her.

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

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

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

"I did?" Great. Now the last thing on earth she wanted to do

was face that Brody Gallagher  
backstage. She never wanted to  
look him in the eye again.

# Chapter Three

Hands were on her arms, big hands.

She was being hustled out of the audience by beefy security guys. Her backstage pass was being put into immediate action.

*Fabulous.* Didn't she even get a say in this? Most fans wouldn't think twice about this, she realized. A chance to meet Brody Gallagher of Nocturnal Rain?

Was his real name Breandán?

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

The two security guys, wearing jeans and black tee shirts with “security” written on the front and back of them, eased her through the auditorium and out into the front foyer, where they relaxed a little.

The screaming metal music faded to a pulsing beat and scratching throb.

“What’s yer name, miss?” one asked, with a distinct Australian accent, letting her arm go.

"Taylor," she said.

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

"To where?"

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

"Why?" she asked.

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

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

Well at least his name wasn't Breandán.

"You're not a Nocturnal fan, are you?" the other one asked.

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

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

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

They took her through a series of plain cinder-block and linoleum passageways, passing dozens of people who wore either jeans and black tee shirts, or gaudy variations of death metal fashion. Hangers-on,

groupies, hopeful wanna-bees. There were some bored-looking media people, obvious by their equipment and normal street clothes. Eventually, the security guys opened a gray metal door and showed her inside. There were a few chairs and a coffee table. Mini fridge, coffee machine. Magazines. Very little else. "Please wait here," Aussie said.

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

Taylor took a breath,

organizing her thoughts. She'd wanted to get backstage, to speak to Gallagher about that song. Well, now she was here. It wasn't the way she'd wanted to get here but she may as well capitalize on the opportunity.

She would just ignore the unwelcome whatever-it-was that had happened out there when he had kissed her. After tonight, she never had to deal with this death metal world and this Brody person ever again.

Her decision made, she found it easier to perch on the edge of one of the uncomfortable chairs and

wait. The laced up sides of the skirt creaked as she sat and she kept her knees together. The skirt wasn't an aid to modesty.

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

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

Aussie opened a door and ushered her into a room full of people. She looked around. There was at least one of the band members here, but not Gallagher.

Aussie was still moving though, leading her through the room, around people who Taylor knew were measuring her and mentally stripping her as she stepped between them. She longed to be back in her apartment and dealing with just the ordinary problem of being suddenly unemployed. She didn't belong here.

Aussie tapped on another

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

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

The room was empty. Dark colors on the wall, a bookcase in dark wood in front of her and low lighting from two lamps made it seem elegant and completely out of place compared to the concrete and

linoleum decor she'd seen so far. A wide, comfortable sofa took up the width of the room to the left, and a rose-colored wooden coffee table sat in front of it. There was a club chair pulled up beside the table. A suit jacket had been thrown over the arm.

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

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

The bathroom door opened and Brody Gallagher stepped out,

wrapping a silky-looking bathrobe around him. He halted when he saw her, his eyes narrowing.

"It *was* you," he said flatly.

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

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

His eyes widened. "Jesus," he breathed, staring at her. After a second or two he stirred. "I guess I don't have to ask if you

experienced what I did out there, then."

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

He gave a low laugh. "God, no!"

He came toward her and stopped just in front of her. He lifted a hand to her face but hesitated just before he touched it. "May I?"

She appreciated his sensitivity. "Yes."

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

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

"Taylor," she said.

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

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

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

Curiously, she believed him. She nodded.

His mouth touched hers hesitantly and she knew there was a pocket of fear in him, too. That made her believe, more than anything, that this...whatever it was...was just as strange and weird for him, too.

Then his lips grew firmer. More demanding. His tongue thrust into her mouth.

Taylor forgot about visions and daydreams and simply enjoyed the kiss. Brody was a damn fine kisser and she hadn't been kissed like this in a long, long time. She threw herself into the kiss, letting herself be seduced by its power.

She pressed up against him, enjoying the pleasure of simply being held by a man, the scent of a man. She wound her arms about his neck and rubbed herself against him with a soft little moan.

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

"Yes," she agreed. Then she realized that she was draped against him like she was a willing participant.

Worse, his cock was beating between them, signaling his arousal in the most obvious way.

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

"I have to go home." She tried to make it sound convincing. But she really wanted to stay right where she was and continue kissing him.

She had no idea who he was beyond his name and profession. But she already knew what his cock looked like and what it felt like to fuck him. If the vision they had shared had any sort of truth in it, he had loved her once.

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

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

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

She stepped away from him. "It depends."

"I want you to kiss my friend. I want to see if it...this...whatever it is when we kissed the first time...I want to see if it works on him."

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

Brody lifted a brow.

"A very long-term lover," Taylor concluded with growing

wonder. She tilted her head to study him. "What is his name?"

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

She whirled around to face the voice.

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

"You!" Shock made her struggle to recall his name. "Dr. Gerhardsson. You consulted with me last week, about the Domhnall

plays.”

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

Veris smiled. “I did.”

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

“I nearly was,” she said flatly.

“You don’t look like one,” Brody commented.

“Neither does he,” she said, pointing at Veris. He looked nothing like he had when he had first appeared in her university office. Right now he was wearing

leather pants and a sleeveless white cotton overshirt that made the most of the tanned, rounded caps of his shoulders and the bunches of muscles of his arms. Veris crossed his arms over his chest, which just seemed to multiply the amount of tanned muscle on display. His blue eyes twinkled.

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

Even so, Taylor had been left

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

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

Taylor jumped. That was the night.

Veris just shrugged a little. No pride lost there. "I have no objections to kissing the lady now,

if that's what you want." He smiled a little but his eyes were dancing with merriment.

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

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

"Like consulting her about the

Domhnall plays won't have?" Brody shot back.

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

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

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

He slid his hand around her

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

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

He kissed her.

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

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

She opened her eyes. The room was round and there was a hole in the middle of the roof. That was for venting smoke from the fire, she knew.

Veris lifted his lips from hers, trailed them to her ear and thrust his tongue inside. Not Veris. Vidar. She groaned, her whole body

blossoming with arousal. Vidar was home for such a short while. But they were preparing for all-out war. Even now the longboats were being prepared for the journey over the sea to Britain.

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

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

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

She slid the third buckle apart and he tossed the breastplate over his head and onto the floor with an impatient shrug. He pushed her up against the wall, his blue eyes snapping fire. “You are ever an inspiration, Tyra,” he growled. He grabbed the scooped front of her white dress and tugged. The fabric tore down to her knees and he

pushed on it with his boot to get rid of it, pulling the sleeves off her arms as he did so.

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

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

anticipation.

“Hurry,” she whispered.

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

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

Tyra cried out, her hands slapping against the wall, as the pleasurable sensations bombarded her. She was melting into a puddle

of joy. Dimly, she felt Vidar's hands around her waist, holding her up, as his mouth switched to her other breast and continued the medley. She was gasping and trembling and aching to have him inside her. She reached for his head, twining her fingers in his hair, trying to coax him to rise, to press against her.

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

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

It would have to do.

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

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

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

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

“Tyra. Taylor.” Vidar’s voice.  
Breathless. Close by her ear.

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

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

“San Bernardino,” she said. “And you’re Veris again.”

He licked his lips. “And you’re Taylor again.”

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

And his cock was buried  
inside her.

# Chapter Four

Taylor moaned in desperate embarrassment and horror.

“No, no, no.” He rested his forehead against hers. “Shhhh....”

“Let me go!” She began to struggle.

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

came to a halt. Brody was still sitting on the lounge chair.

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

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

She felt something fall around her shoulders. Terry cloth. A robe. With jerky movements, she thrust

her arms into it and tied it shut.

Veris brushed past her again. He was wearing his pants once more. He sat on the sofa. Like Brody, he seemed completely unembarrassed. Well, these two were lovers, after all.

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

"Language and all. It's been a long, long time since I heard the language of my enemies. I had a hard time just sitting here." Brody cleared his throat and glanced at

Veris. "I knew you'd have it down, but her? It was like she was born to it."

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

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

speaking? We were somewhere in Scandinavia, preparing to invade Britain?"

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

Taylor nodded, absorbing that.

Right.

She leapt for the door but Veris was there before her, even though she was closer by a dozen feet. She had known he would be that fast, even before she made the move. Only something more than human could have ripped a leather

skirt and bustier from her body.

“You have nothing to fear from us, Taylor Yates,” he said softly, his back against the door. “Especially now I have tasted your flesh.”

She moaned a little as her fear tried to take over. “Of course..it’s both of you, isn’t it?” She backed up until she could see both of them at once and that put her into the corner of the room.

Brody still sat on the chair in the silk robe, unmoved, but she knew that he could react as fast as Veris if he needed to. “I suppose you really don’t need those wires

they used tonight, huh?" she said.

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

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

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

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

Veris picked her up. "That was one piece of information too much for you, I'm thinking." His

accent was suddenly thicker than she had ever heard it, as if he was relaxing, letting her hear the real Veris. She was lowered onto warmth and heat. "Rub her. Keep her warm. She's hysterical."

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

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

\* \* \* \* \*

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

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

people who could speak that language fluently any more.

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

They both fell silent. Veris glanced at Brody.

"Who said we were enemies?" Brody asked.

"When you kissed me, we went back to fifth century Britain, Brody. I know that time. I'm an expert in it. I can speak the languages without having to kiss you and fall into some sort of spell to do it. I saw the building we were

in and heard the language we were speaking. It was pure Irish, with local idioms for Britain of the time. Plus we spoke of Arthur. *Arturos*, in Celtic. King Arthur. You were an officer for Arthur and you were preparing for all-out war against the coming Saxons, after a period of settled peace. That has to be Camlann. Arthur's death and the Saxon victory." She looked at Veris. "Were you there?"

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

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

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

"Your father was a soldier?"

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

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

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

Brody's fingers were stroking her neck above the robe. She hated

that she wanted to purr as he did it. "You've been together that long?" Even her voice was lower, thick with lust.

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

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

Both of them.

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

Then a cool voice spoke in her mind. Who was she fooling? She had already fucked Veris. In her mind, she had fucked Brody. Because of some technical hitch, possibly the roadies hauling on the wires keeping Brody in the air, they

hadn't physically consummated the act. But in her mind, she was guilty.

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

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

Veris' hands were on her robe,

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

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

Then, showing no sign of effort, he picked Taylor up around

the waist, flipped her over and laid her over the big padded arm of the chair so that her ass was up in the air and her head was in Brody's lap. She saw Brody's already stiff cock twitch and his hand slid into her hair.

His hips gave a little helpless thrust up.

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

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

"I have a better idea," he told

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

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

Veris brought his dampened finger to her anus and pressed it against the hole. Taylor gasped at the strange sensation.

“You’ve never been fucked in the ass, have you?” Veris said.

“No.”

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

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

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

“I’m trusting you,” she said.

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

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

Brody was smiling.

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

Veris pushed out his breath.

“God, that looks so sexy, sliding across your white flesh like that. Makes me want to eat you.”

Brody chuckled. “He means that in the literal sense too.”

She gulped.

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

His fingers spread the gel around her ass and pushed gently into it and it *was* an odd but erotic sensation. She caught her breath and found she was pushing back, encouraging him. He drove more of the gel into her, sliding his finger

around the muscle, stretching it. Then he pushed a second finger inside. It stretched her, but not in an unpleasant way. His fingers moved and pressed open. He was preparing her, training the muscles.

Taylor gasped, her eyes widening.

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

After what seemed an eon, Veris released her. He picked her up once more, with an ease that made it seem like she weighed no more than a rag doll—or *his spear*, her mind insisted—and kissed her quickly and hard on the lips. “Were but it my turn,” he growled.

“Idiom, Veris,” Brody snapped.

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

“He’s a teddy bear, really,” Brody whispered, his hands around

her waist, as Veris crouched down before them and draped her legs on either side of Brody's thighs. As Brody's knees were already apart on the chair, it spread her wide open.

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

She took the deep breath and magically, everything did open up. She felt herself relax as he described and his cock pushed

inside. He didn't thrust inside but nudged in a fraction of an inch at a time until a few minutes later, she was resting with the full length of his cock buried in her.

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

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

"Your coming is not on the agenda, my friend," Veris pointed out with a growl. "Why don't you make yourself useful, at least?"

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

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

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

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

She caught her breath at the

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

Taylor's breath was shortening. Brody's hands on her breasts were teasing, lightly pinching, his fingernails catching on the tips of her nipples and that

alone would have been enough for her to squirm endlessly.

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

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

Brody's hand lifted to her neck and pulled her hair away. "Come for us," he crooned, his lips

brushing the nape of her neck, his teeth scraping lightly over the flesh, making her hypersensitive nerves flare with silvery pleasure.

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

Taylor clutched at his head, as overwhelming sensation slammed through her. Her orgasm was rushing at her now. As it built from her toes, she felt Brody's teeth pierce the flesh of her shoulder. For

less than a second it hurt, not even that.

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

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

power of this special orgasm brought on his own.

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

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

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

She giggled. This time it wasn't a precursor to hysteria. It was just a giggle. She put her hand

over her mouth. "Lord, I haven't giggled like a schoolgirl for years."

Veris was smiling too.

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

Taylor was grateful for the opportunity to clean up. The bathroom was a full one and she showered and cleaned every inch of herself, including the ten pounds of

black eye makeup she was surprised to find was still more or less intact.

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

She slipped it over her head. It was a dress on her. She rolled up the sleeves then pushed them so they stayed above her wrists. The V-neck of the shirt came down between her breasts and could be called provocative—especially as

she had no bra to wear.

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

only one with an agenda.

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

Taylor cleared her throat.

Brody stood up, wrapping the robe about him. "Arena management are shutting up shop. We actually live in Beverly Hills, but they make me stay in a local hotel for the night so fans don't

track me back home. It's a security thing. Anyway, normally we...I would head back home—to the hotel, I mean,”

“Alone, he means,” Veris added.

Taylor nodded. “My friend Andy who I came to the concert with explained about the backstage pass. I realize I'm not the first fan to get a pass back here, Brody. I'm not about to break down and cry about it.”

“Didn't think you were.” Brody grinned. His black eyes were dancing. “But you're not a fan, are you?”

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

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

# Chapter Five

Taylor squeezed the handles on her shoulder bag. “Were you planning on asking anywhere along here?”

Brody gave a short laugh. “No.” He seemed incredulous.

Veris stood up. “Your sensibilities are unnecessary burdens, Taylor,” he rumbled. “You came here with a purpose tonight and it wasn’t to attend a death metal concert. Don’t pretend that

coming back to the hotel with us doesn't further that purpose. You and I both know what your mission in life is."

She licked her lips, her heart thundering. But this time it raged for a different reason. He *knew*. Veris was the source of the lyrics she had heard tonight and in Andy's apartment, not Brody. That was why Veris had consulted with her about Domhnall. But for some reason, he didn't want to discuss the full details in front of Brody.

Why had he given Brody the lyrics for his song, then?

Taylor had done her research

in the last twenty-four hours about death metal bands and Nocturnal Rain in particular. She had discovered that most of the best death metal bands seemed to come of out Scandinavia and while the music tended to be variations of screeching guitars and monotonous bass and drums, the lyrics—naturally—centered around death, dying, the afterlife and all things bloody and fatal.

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

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

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

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

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

"Yeah but the poem is like, what, two thousand years old? You said there wasn't any copyright on it now, right?"

Taylor had shaken her head and shut up. Andy had not

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

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

So why had he wanted to

measure her knowledge of the poet?

The fifth century Celtic poet.

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

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

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

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

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

He blinked.

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

“Are they high?”

Brody’s smile faded. “Yes,” he said frankly. He brushed her face again and ran his thumb over her jaw. “Neither of us knows why this

is happening, these vision things, but we both believe it is for a profound reason we cannot ignore. That is why we want you to stay with us until we learn the reason. Will you, Taylor?"

\* \* \* \* \*

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

"We can't walk through the lobby, anyway," Brody pointed out. "I'd get three feet and be mobbed."

He sounded apologetic. "We'll be using the freight elevator and going in via the kitchen."

"How do you stand it?"

Taylor murmured, staring at him.

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

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

"I didn't."

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

Brody growled.

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

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

hotel. She relaxed.

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

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

four stepped back onto the elevator.

Taylor looked up at Veris.

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

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

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

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

She licked her lips. “You don’t

seem at all troubled about revealing yourself to me. Your nature, that is."

"The visions made it necessary. We have to discover their meaning." Then he smiled and there was an impish wickedness in his eyes. "Besides, if you were to tell anyone about us and actually managed to make them believe you, well...we've had long practice dealing with that before." Brody shrugged.

She shivered again. There was a flatness about his voice that told her they had dealt with such issues with a ruthless swiftness that

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

Veris tugged on her hand. "Are you hungry? Should we order

food for you?"

She shook her head. "I'm fine."

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

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

Veris didn't even blink. "Yes, I shut you down, for the same

reasons it was I who consulted you about Domhnall, an ancient *Celtic* playwright and poet and not Brody himself, the one Celt in the room. Think about that and don't ask him."

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

Domhnall was known to both of them. Whether he was more than just the name of a poet who

might have lived when the mythical Arthur did....

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

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

"Camlann," she said and her voice was hoarse. "You said you were at the Battle of Camlann." She

found she was reaching for his shoulder, her knees suddenly weak. His big hands caught her arms and held her up. "You were there. You know."

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

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

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

It seemed to take forever for

him to answer.

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

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

“Aye, by treachery,” he said. “That one fact continues to

preserve itself, when all the others have gone."

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

"If only it had been that simple," Veris replied. "But even the Celts' version of those days is

lost to us, is it not? Or you would not be struggling so hard to prove your thesis."

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

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

He brushed her hair back and

tucked a curl behind her ear, his big hands moving with gentle dexterity. "No."

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

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

Brody moved so that he was

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

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

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

did she know they were vines? She knew, just as she knew it was her job to pick the grapes from them each summer.

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

# Chapter Six

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

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

annals of history.

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

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

She looked at Verinus. Was

the twenty-first century Veris' mind in Verinus' body too?

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

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

Taylor put the pitcher on the

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

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

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

hard against him. She could feel the steel rod of his growing erection against her hip as he held her.

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

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

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

Veris glanced at Brody.

“Brody?”

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

Veris pushed his hand through his hair. “Yes, we lived here,” he told Taylor. “In 1191 Brody answered Richard the First’s call for all men loyal to him to travel to the holy lands and he went to Acre to fight by the Lionheart’s side...and ‘died’ there.” He stood up. “Because he was run through by a Saracen’s sword, he had to die in the eyes of all men. I was called to collect his body and

we were forced to leave this place and begin again with new identities."

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

"Still is," Veris growled.

There was a rattle of metal at one of the internal doors, heralding the arrival of someone new. Before Taylor could more than look up at the door, Veris reacted. He shifted so that he was standing next to her and bent her over his arm. His other hand ripped both her gown and kirtle open so that her breast was revealed and he cupped it in his big hand, covering it. His mouth

came down on hers as the door opened and shuffling steps entered the room.

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

“We’re busy. Come back later,” Brody said curtly.

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

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

Taylor couldn’t help it. She moaned and thrust her hand into Veris hair. His hand on her breast and the sudden, commanding kiss

were both affecting her. Her pussy was clenching and her clit throbbing. Bent over like this, she longed for Veris to slide his hand along the length of her stretched and vulnerable body. She ached for it.

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

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

She could feel her face flush, even as her body leapt at the idea. His hand was stroking her breasts, his thumb tugging at the nipple,

sending weakening waves of pleasure through her. Brody's hands were sliding up her legs, teasing the sensitive inner flesh of her knees and thighs, bringing the heavy folds of clothing up with them.

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

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

“Here?” Taylor asked.

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

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

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

Brody pushed up against her, his leather-covered shaft pressing against her *mons*. The pressure was perfect, scattering her wits even more and making her pussy quiver. Taylor clutched at Brody's shoulders, feeling flesh and iron muscle beneath. His dark gaze bore

into her as he lifted her chin with his long fingers. "Why you, my beautiful one?" His voice was thick with lust.

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

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

Veris caught Brody's face in his hand. It was a gentle touch. The touch of a lover. "Then enjoy,"

Veris said softly. "Who are we to question fate, hmmm? After all these years, you should know better, *freond*."

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

Taylor trembled at the erotic

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

Between the two of them, there was an overwhelming rush of sensations. Their hands were everywhere on her body and she couldn't keep track of where they

were, as they moved up and down in long sweeping strokes and brushes wherever her flesh was not already covered by their bodies.

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

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

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

hands around her waist.

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

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

"Perhaps that's why," Brody said, almost to himself. He stripped off the last of his clothing. He was

strong, his body hard and enduring and his cock was sharply erect. He loosened Veris' arms and brought Taylor against him, his hand against the back of her hip, pressing her pelvis so that their hips met. "I can't wait," he muttered. "Veris..."

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

human squashing a bug.

As Veris lifted her, Brody pressed in against her, his hands on her breasts, tasting her with his fingers, unable to let her go. His expression was fevered and hungry. Veris brought her up high enough for Brody to sink his cock into her and he barely hesitated. The blunt tip of his cock slipped into her narrow moist cleft and the thick shaft speared into her with a force that made her thoughts groggy.

As Brody's hand tangled in her hair at the back of her neck and he pulled his thick cock out of her pussy in a slow, deliberate

withdrawal, only to ram it back into her again, she realized she was drunk on pleasure.

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

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

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

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

Brody halted, his chest rising and falling hard, his face tucked against her neck. Finally, he lifted

his head and kissed her lips. His eyes seemed totally black to her. "I think you could be addictive, Taylor Yates." He gripped her bottom. "Put your legs and your arms around me."

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

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

It was an erotic sensation. She looked up at him and licked her lips, feeling her pussy clench

around him. "I know," she said, her voice husky.

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

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

His hands stroked her ass cheeks, smoothing over Brody's where they supported her and slipped into her cleft. She bucked at the sensation of Veris' gentle probing even as Brody was buried inside her. She moaned. Her senses

were beginning to reel. "Hurry," she begged, for she knew what he planned.

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

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

The tip of Veris' cock replaced his fingers, pushing at the tiny

aperture and Taylor fought not to close her eyes in response to the dizziness whooshing through her. Veris' cock eased inside her, slippery with the same oily substance. She felt every delightful inch slide in, until he was completely inside her. There was no discomfort. Just the feeling of fullness and of delicate tissues being stretched. A sense of possession.

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

"As you command," Brody murmured.

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

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

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

Hot cum spilled into her. She felt it. Both of them came as she did and that tripped off another secondary climax in her, a small

shock wave of surprise and pleasure as the two cocks jerked and spasmed in her channels. She clung to Brody and leaned against Veris, glad that both of them were there.

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

Taylor opened her eyes, breathing hard, sadness touching

her. "We're back," she whispered.

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

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

"Brody and I used the local language then, as we do wherever

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

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

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

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

Taylor stifled a yawn.

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

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

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

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

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

“You’ll laugh,” she murmured, her eyes slipping shut.

“After all we’ve seen in our lives? Try us,” he coaxed.

She reached back in her mind

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

She must have slept a little for she woke up with a small jerk. She was alone in the bed and from beyond the room, she could hear Veris and Brody talking in hot,

angry, low voices. From the shadows moving across the doorway, she could see they were gesturing too. Tempers were high.

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

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

Brody.

She sighed. Sleep instantly reclaimed her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“No, she’s not,” Veris told him, his gaze steady on her face.

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

The pair of them exchanged another look.

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

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

"Yes."

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

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

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

among our kind.”

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

“We need you to speak to our queen.”

# Chapter Seven

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

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

“Besides, you look like you

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

That and their nervousness.

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

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

elegance.

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

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

They'd even ordered stiletto shoes to go with the dress—strappy sandals with ties around her ankles, also covered in crystals. There was a thick crystal-encrusted cuff to go

around her wrist, that showed every time she lifted her arm and the flared sleeve fell back.

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

By the time she was fully dressed, with her make-up applied and her hair backcombed and sitting just right, Taylor felt sinfully sexy *and* incredibly elegant. She

walked into the sitting room, feeling a touch nervous. "Will this do?" she asked.

Both Veris and Brody got to their feet.

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

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

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

Brody's tongue slid up her

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

While she had been transferring a few of her essential pieces of ID from her old handbag into the handsome leather clutch that had come in one of the boxes, she had quickly checked her phone and been amazed to see nearly a dozen text messages from Jeoffery.

She scrolled through them, absorbing their increasingly more alarmed and concerned tenor.

the courier returned with  
your stuff...where are you?

are you that pissed with me  
you can't return a simple text  
message?

where ARE you?

14 hours. Officially  
concerned. Call me. I mean it.

She bit her lip. She *had* dived  
off the face of the planet. The only  
person who knew where she was  
wouldn't think to tell anyone else,  
and Jeoff wouldn't dream that she  
knew Andy well enough to even  
know his name.

"Problems?" Veris had  
murmured, standing next to her

shoulder. “Do you need to reach out and call people?”

“He doesn’t deserve that much courtesy,” Taylor told Veris truthfully. She started thumbing out a reply text. “You don’t fire someone then expect to be treated like a decent human being the next day.”

Veris’ eyes narrowed. It was the sum total of shock he allowed to show. “Because of me,” he said flatly. “They fired you over me. The timing is too perfect for it to be anything else.”

She shook her head. “You were the perfect excuse they

needed, that's all. If you hadn't shown up, they would have found another way. I was an embarrassment." She hit 'send' on her text message, shut the phone down and shoved it in the clutch and smiled at him. "And now I'm done with that part of my life for another day or so." She touched Veris' arm. "I'm fine," she assured him.

He nodded. "Very well," he said reluctantly as Brody came into the room carrying coats.

Taylor blinked as the limousine came to a halt, dispelling the memory. They were

somewhere in the financial district. San Pedro? She had been so busy with her own thoughts and nervousness, she'd failed to pay attention. She wrapped the faux fur coat around her. "I wish I had sunglasses," she groused.

"We need them. You don't." Veris picked up her hand. "I'd rather see your eyes." He helped her out of the limousine.

As they crossed the busy plaza, she saw from the corner of her eye that they were garnering startled looks and many people were tapping each other on the shoulder, digging their friends in

the side with their elbows and pointing. Whispering to each other. Brody was drawing huge amounts of attention.

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

“Who do you think she is?”

“Gotta be a movie star,” the other said.

“And look at the two men she’s with...lucky bitch.” A deep sigh followed.

Startled, Taylor nearly tripped as she lost track of her footing. Brody’s hand was suddenly under her elbow. “I heard,” he murmured

in her ear. "Keep walking like you didn't hear it. Look straight ahead and don't react."

She was shaking. Veris' hand slid under her other arm, strong and supportive. "Your old world can nag all it must, but you belong with us," he said quietly. "Even strangers can see it."

Fresh shock slithered through her as the meaning of his low words sunk home. "Appearances mean nothing," she told him.

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

She couldn't think of an answer to that. This time yesterday

she had been visiting her Goth ex-student, to borrow a leather bustier to wear to a concert she didn't want to go to because she had been fired two days ago. Now she was here. "Life has me on a carnival ride. I just have to see where I end up before the ride finishes."

Brody gave a low laugh. "I've been on this ride for centuries. It doesn't end. The view keeps changing and it keeps going round. You have to throw yourself off if you really want this ride to end, Taylor."

"I'll keep that in mind," she said. "I never did like carnival

rides, anyway.”

Veris gave a low chuckle as they stepped into the building. He took off his glasses and put them in his breast pocket. “I’ve always said women were stronger, when it came to pure courage, haven’t I?” he said to Brody.

Brody stabbed at the top elevator button. “There’s a reason we have a queen and not a king.”

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

occupants all carefully streamed past them, glancing sideways at them.

Once the car was empty, they stepped on and Brody produced an electronic key card that he slid into a slot on the control panel, before punching the penthouse floor button.

The elevator rose swiftly through the floors and neither man spoke. Taylor could feel their growing tension. Brody took off his glasses and squared his shoulders. Veris smoothed his tie and fussed with the knot. Both of them looked exactly like high school kids about

to face the principal for transgressions known and unknown.

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

When the elevator opened, Taylor almost squeaked in alarm and that told her that their nervousness had communicated itself to her. She was wound up, just as they were, and expecting trouble.

They stepped out into a perfectly normal foyer of a business suite, just like millions the world over. This one was a touch more elegant than most, given the

address. It was empty except for a male receptionist behind a curved desk. He looked up from the computer he was working on but didn't show any surprise at their appearance. Instead, he simply nodded. "You're expected and everything is ready. Boardroom C."

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

She followed him, with Brody behind her, through wide corridors that were just as empty as the reception area, into a wood-paneled boardroom. The walls were

hung with what looked like classic nineteenth century original art to her, that glowed in beautiful frames each lit by their own small overhead lights, while the cherrywood board table gleamed with pools of light from the overhead spotlights spilling upon it. The light in the rest of the room was very low, leaving shadows.

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

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

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

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

Veris pushed the big chair that was behind the table well out of the way and stood before the nameless

mass, looking at it. He glanced at Taylor as she stepped beside him.

“We owe you an apology, Taylor,” he said softly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

stroked her shoulder.

“Yes, he was real, my lover.” Veris’ voice rumbled against her, deep and comforting.

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

“I had to, Taylor,” Veris said. “This manuscript was carried

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

"Why?"

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

She lifted her head from his shoulder. There was something in his voice, a core of determination

that she recognized. It was the steel of a man who would stop at nothing.

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

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

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

They were watching her now, to see what she would say. If it were possible for two large, strong

men with little in the way of a human conscience to look sheepish, then she thought they carried a touch of guilt in their expressions too.

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

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

This must be the queen, then,

Taylor realized.

As the queen continued to speak, she moved further down the room and the overhead spotlights illuminated her as she stepped into their radius. She was tall for a woman, about five feet nine, and slender to the point of skinny. But she did not look ill. She looked radiant. Her skin was olive colored and glowed. Her black hair was shoulder length and groomed in a fashionable straight bob. She was wearing a designer business suit. She had elongated, big, dark brown eyes that stared into Taylor's in a way that made her feel like the

queen was scooping out her thoughts wholesale.

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

Taylor scrambled to process the meanings and secondary meanings behind the woman’s words, then gave up. Veris was going to have to explain to her afterward.

The queen had already moved on to Veris. "Now, how are we to clean up this mess you have created, hmmm?"

"What mess?" Taylor asked.

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

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

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

chairs and sat. "Tell her," she ordered with a wave of her hand.

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

yes?"

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

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

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

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

she was in denial.

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

Taylor moaned as the lilt in his voice triggered a flood of memories, of the man with the dark eyes murmuring his stories as she

drifted off to sleep, while her father was on the phone dealing with problems at the plant, as he always was.

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

“Aye, ’twas,” Brody said softly. “I didn’t remember it was you until you spoke last night about the man telling you bedtime tales. You’ve changed of course...all except the eyes, now that I’ve

recalled those times." He gave a shrug, a tiny lift of the shoulders. "There are so many humans and they move through my life so fast and then they are...gone. I learned a long time ago not to try too hard to remember them all. I'm sorry."

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

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

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

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

"This should never have happened," the queen said. "Your bedtime stories have put into action

a series of events that have very nearly affected the course of history. Veris' attempts to have your father's name recognized are honorable, Brody. But you have stirred up history itself with your poems."

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

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

He swallowed.

“Stop it,” Taylor said. “Please, just stop.”

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

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

She stood up. “Don’t you think Veris, the strategist and politician, didn’t already lay it out for him last night when he realized

exactly how badly Brody had screwed up? They came straight to you this morning because they knew it had to stop and they brought me with them, because they knew it was that bad.”

Taylor stepped in front of Brody and turned to face the queen again. “You don’t have to paint the picture for Brody, ma’am, because he’s already imagined it twice as bad as you could ever possibly explain it to him. I know that, because I know he lay beside me all last night and imagined what it would be like if he’d never met me and what it would be like if, after

today, I go back to my life and they go back to theirs and we never meet again. I know your race doesn't sleep but Brody just went through one of the longest nights of his life, ma'am. You don't need to add to it."

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

# Chapter Eight

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

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

Tira's eyes narrowed. "Explain."

Veris explained quickly and frankly and Tira's face became immobile as he spoke. Her gaze seemed to focus inward.

When he finished speaking she sat silently for nearly a minute. Then she stirred, sighed and smiled sadly. "I know of this thing that is happening to you," she said softly.

“For it once happened to me. Long ago. It does not happen often among us. I have not ever heard of it happening with a human, for their mind cannot usually cope with the span of history but your mate clearly has an extraordinary mind, capable of holding the leap of history and the chaos of centuries and languages without imploding upon itself.”

“I have been trained to deal with that sort of chaos,” Taylor said simply. “I have been training to deal with it since high school. That is one outcome of Brody’s accidental nudging. He pushed me

in the direction of studying history, immersing myself in it."

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

they are.”

“What are they?” Taylor said bluntly.

Tira blinked. “You do not see it?”

“No.”

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

“Yes.”

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

“I know the circumstances of their raising. Both of them.”

“The sum total of their

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

Brody's fingers tightened against her flesh.

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

"It's a chicken and egg thing," Tira responded, nodding. "Don't get caught up in trying to resolve that issue. You never will, believe me, young one." Tira waved the point away with a flick of her slender hand. "These waking

dreams, these experiences, are so real because they are as close to time travel as we will ever get. While you are in the dream, you can walk around that time and place and touch, feel and taste, hear and smell everything as it was. You already know that you can make love there, eat and drink. Be warned, all of you, that I believe it is possible that you can die there too. You can be run through with a sword, or shot with a gun. You can be harmed, just as you can do harm."

"But *why*?" Taylor insisted.

"Because a bond is forming

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

have. You will have shared their lives as symbiotically as they have shared each other's. You get to play catch up in a very real way."

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

Taylor realized that Veris was suddenly standing closer to them. A *lot* closer. His shoulder was almost blocking her view of Tira.

Was he shielding her from the queen?

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

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

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

"I'm a laughing stock at the

university, ma'am. I doubt anyone in their right minds will seriously consider following in my footsteps." Taylor didn't have to embroider the truth to make it sound bad enough. "I was an embarrassment to them. That's why I was fired. I refused to change my thesis despite pressure from the dean. He thought I was insane. They've probably buried my research in a deep dark hole and hope it'll never be found again."

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

"I can't," Taylor said simply.

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

“Not anymore,” Brody said. “Veris’ people burned them all as they came through the town. That

book is the only thing I was able to pull out of the monastery library before the roof caved in from the fire the Saxons set. I buried it in a box in a cave in the mountains nearby, where it stayed for the next fifteen years, because I was caught coming down out of the mountains."

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

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

Veris' shoulders lifted and settled heavily. A sigh.

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

Taylor looked at Veris, her eyes stinging with tears.

"Don't blame him, young one," Tira said, her voice harsh. "The Saxons were no meaner or softer than any other conquering race in any other land. They needed

land to farm for food to feed their young. It was the way of survival and slavery was part of it. We knew no better then. Besides, four hundred years later, Veris' people became the whipped underdogs when the Normans took their lands and treated them like diseased vermin. History is an interesting cycle of patterns, if you live long enough to watch for them."

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

"That just leaves the matter of

your mate," Tira replied. "A human who *does* know of Domhnall."

Taylor could feel Brody standing at her back. He was so close, his jacket was brushing her flesh. Veris was standing almost in front of her and she knew it wasn't her imagination that he was shielding her. Both of them were.

Her heart squeezed and thudded unhappily.

Tira gave a small smile. "This could be resolved quite simply if she were not human."

"No," Veris said flatly. Instantly.

Tira's head tilted as she studied him. Her eyes narrowed.

From the corner of Taylor's vision, she saw Brody's hand lifted to press against the back of Veris' shoulder in warning. Or perhaps in support. It was a gesture that was hidden from the queen.

Veris drew in a breath. "Your idea has merit, my queen, but Taylor has a long *human* life ahead of her and too many influential associates who would notice her change. She has lost her job and been removed from further harm and she is ethical – her word and our monitoring of her activities

should suffice.”

“It’s not the same guarantee that turning her would give me.” Tira crossed her arms.

“With all due respect, ma’am,” Brody said softly, “there’s no such thing as a certainty in this world. Not even turning her would give you the peace of mind you’re looking for.”

“You don’t know Taylor, my queen. You’re just as likely to make her rebel if you forced her turning,” Veris added.

Tira’s brow lifted as she looked at Taylor. “Is that so? A stubborn human woman. I begin to

understand your attraction to her. I wish you well, the pair of you. You will find life a merry hell if you insist on keeping her human." She waved them away. "Go. Monitor her. Keep Domhnall out of the history books and the news and I will be satisfied."

"My queen," Veris intoned with a low bow.

Brody picked up their coats and shepherded Taylor out of the room. Both men were hurrying even though they didn't appear to be walking fast at all. Taylor could barely keep up with them.

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

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

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

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

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

"Because we wiped your fucking people off the face of the Earth! For Christ's sake, Brody!" Veris sat up, pulling off his glasses. "People don't even know if Arthur really existed! We did such a great fucking job of it, they call it the *dark* ages!" He stopped and took a breath and Taylor was shocked to

see that his hands were shaking. "You think I don't still remember them screaming as we herded them back into their huts?" He pointed to Taylor. "Or Taylor's expression back in the boardroom when she realized it was my people that sent you into slavery?"

He thumped the cushions. "One key. *One* piece of proof. They're not stupid. That's all humans need to unravel history and figure it out. Domhnall could have been the key. He wrote about it all. Arthur, Saxons, Celts, the life at court, the life of peasants, everything. It was in all of his plays,

all his poems, the lot. If I gave humans that, I could..." He stopped. Took a breath. "I could give them back what we took." He looked away. "Fuck," he muttered.

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

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

Brody kissed him, his lips hard and firm and Taylor caught her

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

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

Her attention was dragged

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

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

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

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

Veris shrugged out of his coat

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

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

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

the car and made her feel small, weak, feminine and pathetically human. Her nipples hardened beneath the dress. She was suddenly very aware of the tiny lace panties she was wearing and how damp they were.

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

Yates, in more ways than you know."

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

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

She drew back, shocked.

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

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

not make a relationship.”

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

The whiplash command in his last words made her reach out and take the velvety length of him in

her hand. He hissed in a breath as she drew her hand along his shaft, his pelvis thrusting. He leaned forward, resting his hand on the back of the seat, his well-muscled arm thrusting forward to support him, as she stroked. His tight hips jerked in little twitches.

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

Her breath hitched unsteadily,

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

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

Brody was tugging at her

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

Encouraged, she closed her

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

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

inside her.

She felt a hand on her wrist and snapped her eyes open and looked down. Brody's hand was on her wrist, lifting up her arm. "No, you don't," he said. His own voice was guttural, thick with lust. And it took her a second to realize that he had spoken the Irish Celtic of his birth. His control was narrowing down to a pinpoint.

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

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

Brody spread her arm along

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

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

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

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

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

“Say ‘yes’, Taylor,” Brody told her.

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

The two exchanged looks.

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

“No,” Veris told her. “Not

yet."

She groaned.

He was spreading her thighs wider, exposing her delicate folds. Then he stroked them.

She trembled. The blunt tip of his cock was mere fractions of an inch away from the entrance to her pussy and every erotic fold rippled at the thought of his thick rod thrusting into her. She looked up him. "Now. Please."

Veris tugged on her hips so that her bottom was almost off the seat. His hand cradled her ass. He bent over her again, his arm pistoning out alongside her head to

prop himself up against the back of the seat once more. "Now you get to scream for us, Taylor."

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

"So hot," he muttered, pausing.

Brody rested his hand on her pussy where Veris' cock penetrated her. "So lovely," he murmured. His long fingers slipped into the heated

folds of her labia and nestled for one delicious heartbeat against her starved clit, then they were gone. She gasped. Brody leaned down and kissed her briefly, then turned his head to kiss Veris. Then he moved behind Veris.

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

Brody's hands settled on Veris' hips from behind and Veris' eyes closed briefly. He lowered his

head to touch his lips to Taylor's forehead. "You like to watch," he said hoarsely. "Then watch." He turned his head and jerked his chin at the smoked glass in the windows.

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

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

“Say ‘yes’, Taylor,” Veris gasped hoarsely, as he pumped his silken shaft into her. “*Say it.*”

The chaffing of his cock against her pulsing cunt sent off another climax. She shuddered and screamed again and this time she

felt Veris' cum spurting inside her as her rippling vagina milked his cock into an orgasm. Then his mouth was at her neck.

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

When she could focus once more and her heartbeat was steady, Veris was still holding her, waiting for her to recover. His eyes had a sleepy, satiated look but she sensed a dangerous edge to his expression. His cock was no longer inside her

and Brody was sitting on the other seat, thrusting his legs into his pants.

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

When she was fully covered by the coat, she picked up his one-way aviators and slid them on and

looked at Brody. "Can you tell the driver I want to be dropped off at my apartment?" She gave him the address.

Brody considered her for a long moment. "You're leaping from the carnival ride, then?" he asked.

"Yes," she said flatly. "While I have that choice."

Veris looked away, toward the smoked glass window, but not before she saw his eyes shut.

Then Brody lowered the blackened glass that divided their compartment and the driver's just enough to speak to the driver.

# Chapter Nine

“Taylor?”

Taylor turned from locking her apartment door to face Andy, who stood in the hallway, his hands thrust deep into his jeans pockets, his head tilted to one side quizzically.

“Hi Andy,” she said, extending the handle on the suitcase and walking toward him, dragging it behind her. As she pushed her hand into the pocket of

her coat, her cellphone vibrated, announcing another text message. It was the fourth in the last hour and they had all been Jeoffery. Her last message to him had not satisfied him at all.

Andy's mouth dropped open and his hands came out of his pockets and up to his cheeks in stunned amazement as she reached him. "Oh my god!" he said, giving a surprised laugh. "You look... wow, you look amazing!"

Taylor clutched the neck of the faux fur coat tighter around her throat. She hadn't even stopped to put on clothes, yet. Apart from the

stockings and stilettos, she was naked beneath it. Brody's warning as she had climbed from the limousine had forced her to pack and do nothing else.

"Don't stay in your apartment, Taylor. Not for the next few days. Find somewhere unexpected to hide out that the queen won't be able to find."

"But she said she would be happy with you two watching me, as long as Domhnall never shows up in the history books," Taylor pointed out.

"And there's never been a powerful leader who has flat out

lied, ever,” Brody replied, his expression patient.

Taylor felt stupid. “Oh,” she said.

Brody shifted his arm on the top of the limo door. “In a few days, we’ll know if she has tried to come after you or not. Then you’ll be able to make more permanent plans for your life.”

“Jesus, Brody, what have you got me into?”

He just looked at her.

“Yeah, okay,” she agreed. “I got into this myself.”

He smiled and touched her cheek gently. “And now you’re

getting yourself out. That takes guts, Maggie Taylor Yates. I wish you well."

She clamped her jaw tight against the need to protest that she had changed her mind that was welling up inside her. Now that she was on the brink of walking away, she wasn't sure that she wanted to.

She glanced past Brody's shoulder to where she could see Veris' knee, all that was visible of him, where he sat in the corner of the limousine, refusing to say goodbye. "Take care of him," she whispered.

Brody nodded.

Taylor blinked at the scalding hot tears building in her eyes and whirled and walked away quickly, across the sidewalk to the front door of her building. She had forced herself not to look back at all, but to keep walking until she was safely inside the building.

Once she was in the apartment, she packed hurriedly - clothes and essentials for about a week - and all the while she felt like someone was standing behind her, watching her. It made her move faster and faster until she was almost sprinting around the

apartment.

She was relieved when she finally shut the door.

Now she faced Andy, her suitcase next to her, the faux coat hiding her nakedness, and realized that all he could see would be the glittering stilettos, silk stockings, fur coat, and elaborate makeup.

"You look...fabulous," Andy ventured. "Holy hell, that was some backstage pass!" He looked at the suitcase. "What, you're moving in with them?"

She shook her head. Her cellphone buzzed in her pocket again and ideas fitted together

quickly. "It was a great time, Andy. The best. But my ex-boyfriend is stalking me and...I need somewhere to hole up for a few days, where he wouldn't think to look for me. Do you think...would you mind if I camped at your place until I sort it all out?"

Andy's expression grew indignant and then angry. He reached out as if he were going to take her arm, then dropped his hand shyly. "Damn right you can," he said. "As long as you don't mind the sofa? It's kinda lumpy."

"It'll be just heaven, I'm sure," she told him.

He waved her toward his apartment. "C'mon. The others are out. I can make coffee and you can tell me about the band."

"I'll do my best, Andy," she promised, prepared to lie her head off to not let him down if she had to.

\* \* \* \* \*

By day three, Taylor knew that her own mother would have trouble picking her out of a death metal mob. She had borrowed clothes and accessories from Andy, Graham and Jesus, and jewelry and makeup from Amber, along with

application tips, and with careful mixing of her own clothes, she looked almost indistinguishable from Andy's roommates. She washed her hair and let it dry naturally, so the curl and bounce came back with a vengeance. It was naturally black already, so she didn't have to dye it.

With an over-application of dark make-up and excessive silver jewelry, a studded belt, ripped tee-shirts, and a sleeveless denim jacket over skinny black jeans, she felt sure that she could walk past Jeoffery and maybe ask him the time and he would never recognize

her.

Hopefully, if the queen and her people were looking for her, they would fail to recognize her, too.

Suitably disguised, Taylor felt comfortable going out for supplies and food, which she bought generously for the whole apartment, as her part of the rent.

Graham sniffed when he saw the stocked fridge. "Moving in?" he asked her.

"It's a thank you," she amended. "There's beer in the mini fridge."

He grinned, straightening up

and shutting the fridge door.  
“Now yer talkin’.”

On the third day, she made a gumbo stew and invited everyone to sit down at the battered hexagonal metal table that served as a dining table of sorts, and have dinner.

“Is Creole. Fancy. My thanks, *benita*,” Jesus declared and wolfed down big mouthfuls of the gumbo with his spoon clamped in his fist, his studded wrist bands clinking against the side of the bowl in little musical taps.

“Is this another thank you?” Amber asked, sniffing at her

spoonful.

“Sort of,” Taylor told them. “It’s also a farewell. I’m going to move back into my apartment tomorrow. I think it’s safe now. It’s been three days and there’s been no sign.”

Andy put down his spoon. “You *can’t*,” he said flatly. “He could be sitting and waiting for you to turn up. You move back, and he’ll show up, sure as shit.”

Taylor gave him a smile she hoped was reassuring. “I’m pretty sure I’ll be okay. I’m going to make a couple of calls to people first and give them a heads-up. I’m not

going to just move back in blind.”

“I figured you’d be here for days yet,” Graham said, washing back a mouthful of gumbo with a mouthful of beer.

“Aren’t you glad I’m not?” she returned, with another smile.

He shrugged. “Got used to you. You can stay if you want.”

There was a stunned little silence around the table.

Graham looked around at them all. “She’s being beat up by her professor prick boyfriend, ain’t she?”

Taylor winced. “He wasn’t beating me,” she said.

“Whatever. He was giving you a hard time, the asshole,” Graham replied.

Taylor cleared her throat. Guilt for the lie she had spun to hide away in their apartment lay heavy on her. Jeoffery’s text messages had grown increasingly more desperate, worried and concerned until they had stopped, yesterday. He had given up. Had he called the police? Filed her as a missing person? Meanwhile, she had maligned him as a stalker boyfriend.

But he had fired her to save his ass.

She gave Graham a small smile. "Jeoffery is not a nice person," she said truthfully.

"Then you should stick around," Graham said firmly.

"I can't. I have to get my life back in order. I have to find another job, at the very least."

Andy put his spoon down. "Where did you go last night, Gray?" he asked quietly.

Graham snorted. "What'd you care?"

Andy sat back and crossed his arms. "You had a hangover this morning. A whiskey hangover. The bathroom stunk like a Johnny

Walker factory. So where were you?"

"None of your fuckin' business," Graham growled and began eating, his eyes on his bowl.

"You've been late on rent for three months, bro," Jesus added, just as softly.

"Is that a new belt? A leather belt? You couldn't hardly hold up your jeans yesterday. You was using duct tape round the buckle," Andy said.

Graham shoveled in another mouthful of shrimp and rice. "So?" He shrugged.

Taylor could feel the tension

around the table, but she didn't understand why. Not yet.

Andy's generous, open face was closed and hard as he stared at Graham. "Where did you get the money, Gray?"

"Yeah, Gray?" Jesus echoed, putting his spoon down. "And why you so insistent the *benita* stay?"

"He sold some stuff, okay?" Amber said, looking around the table. She gave a tight smile. "Some of the weed, for the cash."

"That is what he told you, but the stash has been under my bed for the three days Taylor has been here," Andy said. His gaze didn't

leave Graham. "He got the money somewhere else and now he's trying to make Taylor stay here."

Taylor stood up, feeling icy hot fingers running up and down her spine. "Who did you tell I was here?" she asked Graham. "Who wanted to know?"

Graham finally met her eyes. He gave her a slow smile. "Who the fuck do you think I told? Your ever-lovin' ex, Mr. Professor with the high-falutin' job. He was ever so grateful I called. *Very* grateful."

She stared at him, trying to work it out. "You called him yesterday around noon? That's

when he stopped trying to reach me. You got his number from my cellphone."

"You should take your phone with you to the bathroom, lady," Graham told her.

"He gave you money for telling him where I was? That doesn't make any sense at all," Taylor said slowly. Jeoffery was concerned, yes, but bringing money into it made it seem like he had an agenda, which he didn't.

"The money was for me to make sure you stayed put," Graham told her. "Which I intend to do." He gave her another small smile.

“You ain’t goin’ anywhere, lady. Not until they get here.”

All the air seemed to leave her chest in one hard exhalation, as fear fizzled through her.

“Who gets here?” she whispered.

“I didn’t ask,” Graham told her. “Whoever your ex sends, I suppose.”

Andy’s hand was on her arm. “You’d better sit. You’ve gone all pasty.”

She shook her head. “I can’t. I’ve got to go. Now.” She looked at him. “You should, too. Andy, I don’t know for sure who will be

coming, but I have this horrible suspicion...I don't even know how it is possible, but if I'm right, then the...people who will come for me...you don't want to be here when they arrive."

Andy licked his lips. "Your ex was into some black shit, huh?"

She shook her head. "I don't think he has any idea what he's into. I think he's being used. Just like Graham."

Graham snorted. "Sez you."

Andy scowled and stood up. "I always figured you was smart. Guess I was wrong." He touched Taylor's arm. "Let's get you out of

here."

Graham slapped the table. "No one is going nowhere," he repeated stoically.

The door to the apartment busted open and at the same time, the big sliding glass door/window that gave access to the tiny strip balcony imploded inwards. The noise of the plate glass giving way was shockingly loud, and punctuated by Amber's screams.

As bodies clambered into the room from the window and pushed through the doorway, Jesus ducked under the table with a pithy Spanish oath, showing a better

sense of self-preservation than anyone else in the room.

Graham stood up to face the invaders with a smile on his face.

They looked like ordinary men. Tall, short, young, middle-aged, balding, fit and unfit. They wore no uniforms and carried no weapons, and that told Taylor immediately who they were.

Vampires. The queen's people. Only they would attempt a home invasion without weapons.

She had been found.

Amber was still screaming, and when the first of the invaders reached her, he calmly reached out

and grabbed the girl's neck and squeezed. There was a horrible sound of flesh and bone grinding together. Amber's screamed cut off abruptly. He let her go and she dropped to the floor like a puppet whose strings had been cut.

Graham's eyes widened almost comically. "Hey...!" he began.

The man, the vampire, whose eyes seemed almost tawny in the last of the sunset light coming through the window, turned to Graham. His top lip pulled back and he snarled. It was an inhuman sound. His two teeth, his canines,

were extended.

Graham gave out a helpless, choked, shocked sound. It was the last one he made, before the teeth clamped into the side of his neck and tore out his throat.

Taylor caught Andy's hand in hers. "Don't resist. Don't fight back," she murmured. "Just stand here with me."

He was hyperventilating, but she saw him nod from the corner of her eye.

"They're here for me. Once they have me, they'll leave and you will be safe, I think."

"Taylor..." Andy whispered.

“I want to help.”

“Tell who comes to find me what happened,” she whispered back.

The tawny-eyed man's hands gripped her shoulders and she was ripped from Andy's grasp and pulled across the room. There was so much strength in the man she was barely able to touch her feet to the ground. There was no way to resist. She was borne across the room and out the door in seconds, and she felt a trickle of relief as the others who had been behind the tawny-eyed man turned and followed him out of the apartment.

Andy was safe.

# Chapter Ten

The Menzies Horowitz Theatre had been built in Victorian times, to match a grand vision of theatre at its finest, refined audiences, culture that would fill the auditorium and the coffers for a generation or more. Then came two world wars and a depression that diminished audiences beyond the point of return.

The Menzies Horowitz Theatre shut down in the thirties

and was a lemon; every buyer who had attempted to get the building constructively operating in some fashion closed up a few months later, their money spent and their spirit conquered.

The sad, defeated air seemed to wreath the inside of the theatre with shadows and damp dust, sucking it of color. Everything looked like a monotone shade of brown, to Taylor. But she was having trouble adjusting her vision after being blindfolded for so long. Even stationary objects were jumping around, her focus not quite keeping still long enough to

anchor them in her mind.

She tripped and would have fallen flat on her face if Tawny Eyes hadn't been gripping her arm. He hauled her back onto her feet and pushed her forward, which put more pressure on the socks tied around her wrists, making the tendons and bones in her wrists ache just a little bit more.

There was a set of rough wooden steps pushed up against the old fashioned stage and Tawny Eyes steered her toward them. As they reached the foot of the stairs, Taylor heard voices from backstage, coming closer. One of them

sounded familiar. Male. But the ancient panels and stage flats were muffling the sound, making her uncertain.

Then the owners of the voices stepped onto the stage.

Tira. And Jeoffery.

Taylor *did* trip, her whole foot and shin sliding down the front edge of the roughhewn step. Sharp pain speared her shin and she hissed. Because she couldn't prop herself up, she fell forward.

Tawny Eyes, as silent as he had been throughout the hour long journey to this theatre, yanked her up by her arm once more, saving

her from smacking her face right into the edge of the stage. Only this time, he kept on lifting, his other hand boosting under her knees. She was tossed onto the stage, where she rolled a couple of times over the dusty old planking, to come to a sprawled stop on her back, her arms held awkwardly underneath her because of the sock-ties.

“Who is...*Taylor*?” Jeoffery said. “What on earth are you wearing?”

The urge to giggle was insanely strong. She lifted her head to look up at him. “You always had

a problem with priorities, Jeoff. I'm lying tossed on the floor with my arms tied, barefoot, because you betrayed me to these monsters, and all you can worry about is what I'm fucking wearing?"

"I *betrayed* you?" He crouched down next to her. "I'm doing you a favor. You have no idea what I have done, the strings I have pulled to get you here."

Tira stepped up to Jeoff and put her hand on his shoulder. She was inordinately pleased with herself.

Taylor looked at Jeoff again. He was clueless. Pity trickled

through her. "Yeah, I do know exactly what you've done," she told him. "It's you who has lost the plot."

He blinked. Then he cleared his throat and stood up and faced Tira. He towered over her, even though he wasn't a tall man. "Are the bindings really necessary? Treating her this way is not what I had in mind."

"You wanted to speak to her," Tira told him, her voice melodious and full bodied in comparison to his light tenor. "It was necessary to bring her here one way or another."

"This sort of violence is

completely superfluous," Jeoff protested. "We're all civilized people. I just want to talk to her, to make her see reason."

"Too late, Jeoff," Taylor told him.

Tira reached up and tucked a stray lock of Jeoff's baby fine hair behind his ear. "Far, far too late, my handsome one. Taylor understands far more than you do. But please go ahead."

"Untie her first," Jeoff insisted.

Tira smiled and kissed his cheek. "Very well." She turned and crouched down next to Taylor.

“Taylor knows very well how strong everyone in this theatre really is, and how weak she is in comparison. She values her life and won’t try anything silly. Will she?” Tira removed the ties and looked Taylor in the eye.

Taylor sat up and rubbed her wrists. The top layer of skin had been burned away by the chaffing of the socks. “I’m not an idiot,” she told Tira.

“No, I don’t believe you are,” Tira agreed. She stood up and stepped back. Then she waved Jeoffery forward. “Now it is your turn, Dr. Danforth.”

“What, here?” he asked, astonished, looking around the dim interior of the theatre.

“We won’t interrupted here,” Tira assured him.

“She means, there won’t be any inconvenient witnesses,” Taylor interpreted.

Jeoff shot her a look that was pure annoyance, but there was an expression in his eyes. He was troubled. Taylor knew he was listening to her and deep in the back of his mind, he was processing what she was saying.

He cleared his throat. “Taylor...” He shook his head.

“God, look at you. I can’t believe I’m offering a tenured position to someone who looks like they just walked out of an east side mall.”

Taylor climbed slowly and painfully to her feet, giving herself time to hide her first reaction. “You’re offering me my job back?” she asked.

“Your job and tenure,” he said.

“If I drop my thesis,” she clarified.

“Well, yes. But there were other promising lines in your research – I’ll help you find another one. You won’t lose all your work.”

She couldn't help herself. She glanced at Tira. "Validation, as long as I don't mention Domhnall, right?"

Tira smiled, showing perfect, white and very human-looking teeth.

There was a steady buzzing in her mind, and a heavy thudding in her chest. Taylor looked at Jeoffery, trying to think past the noise in her mind. "You really think the history board will go for that? Taking me back?"

"They've already agreed," Jeoffery told her. "Once I explained that this silly Domhnall

business would disappear, they were actually very pleased with the idea."

"And that's the only condition?" she insisted, playing desperately for time.

"Well..." Jeoffery gave her a smile. "I want you back, too, Taylor. But I won't make that a condition."

She could only stare at him.

"Why did you think I did this?" he asked.

Tira's smile broadened even more.

"For power," Taylor said helplessly. "For the influence Tira

could give you. What bargain did you set with her, anyway?"

Jeoffery's warm expression fled and he looked at Tira. "You were right," he said. "She guessed straight away."

"I told you she would not come back to you."

"How did you know?"

"Let's call it a woman's intuition." Tira rested her hand on Jeoffery's arm and looked at Taylor. "Of course, there is a condition of my own, if you accept Jeoffery's very generous offer."

Understanding dawned. Taylor looked from the queen to

Jeoffery. "That was the bargain between you. He stalks me and finds me for you, so you can get me here and dangle his stupid offer, with your condition tacked on to it." She pointed at Tira. "You're not interested in Jeoffery at all. You want me."

Tira's smile grew even more. "And you know the condition, too."

To be made a vampire. The queen's vampire. A virtual slave at her command. Taylor shivered. "What if I refuse?"

"Why would you refuse?" Jeoff asked. "You've worked for

tenure all your life.”

Taylor laughed. It wasn't a healthy laugh. “Jeoffery, you're out of your league. You need to shut up now.”

“Taylor!” He sounded both affronted and shocked.

Tira hissed at him.

“Don't hurt him,” Taylor told her quickly as Jeoffery recoiled, astonished.

“He's at the end of his usefulness,” Tira told her. “He's in the way.”

“He's just a human,” Taylor replied. “He has no idea what is happening. You've used him. Let

him go. There's no need to harm him."

Tira studied her. "He betrayed you, quite willingly, and now you defend him. Yet you patently do not like him. Why do you do this?"

"I value life. All life. You seem to have lost that focus."

Jeoffery swallowed, his throat working. Sweat dotted his upper lip, showing that he was following the conversation just fine, now. "What *are* you?" he whispered, staring at Tira.

"You don't want to know what it is you were dealing with.

Just be glad it wasn't the devil."

He shivered.

"Leave," Tira spat at him.

"Now, before I change my mind."

He nodded and hurried backstage, almost running.

It left Taylor and Tira alone on the stage, but Taylor knew that Tawny Eyes and the others would not be far away. Besides, Tira could probably tear Taylor's head from her body without too much effort.

Taylor took a deep breath.

"You can speak plainly now. You want me turned. Why?"

"There is something about you, Maggie Taylor Yates. You

captured the hearts and minds of two of the most powerful vampires in the city, inside twenty-four hours. You are the first among humans and vampires that can travel through time with their mind the way I can. And you stand defiant before me, bargaining for the life of a mere human who has betrayed you." Tira crossed her arms. "I want you by me, where I can watch you. I want you *mine*."

"And how is that any different from slavery?"

Tira smiled again. "Slavery can be very comfortable."

"Taylor just walked away

from love because she didn't like the bonds that came with it. I don't think she's going to accept yours, Tira."

*Brody's voice.* From somewhere above them and echoing around the theatre in a way that made it impossible to locate where he was.

"Ah, the cavalry. Right on time," Tira exclaimed. She looked around the auditorium, searching for a glimpse of them. "Shall I explain what happens if she doesn't accept?"

Silence.

"What happens?" Taylor

asked, feeling a deep sense of foreboding. Why was she even asking the question? Did she really want to know?

"I can make your life such a misery, Taylor. I can destroy everything you hold dear."

"I'm alone in the world," Taylor assured her.

"First, I'll make sure Jeoffery and his children are utterly destroyed in soul and spirit, one step after another."

Taylor drew in a shaky breath. Jeoff's youngest was barely three and sweet and fresh as a daisy.

“I’ll turn them all,” Tira assured her. “Then I’ll dismantle the life of your friend Andy, and *his* friends.”

“Stop,” Taylor said, holding up her hand. “I get your point.”

“But I haven’t finished yet. There’s still Brody and Veris to deal with.”

Taylor sucked in her breath in shock. “But what could you...?”

“They’re my subjects,” Tira assure her. “What I reserve for them will be the most creative punishment possible. They will suffer before the end, I guarantee it.”

“End?” Taylor whispered.

“Do you think I cannot end the life of a vampire, little one?”

Taylor’s vision blurred as tears filled her eyes. “No,” she whispered.

There was a rushing sound in her head, like a great wind. Thudding, as if her heart couldn’t strike properly. Taylor sank to the floorboards, her hand thrust out for balance, her vision fading as the tears multiplied.

“Stop them!” Tira screamed.

Taylor looked up, turning her head to glance down the ancient auditorium where the dusty leather

seats sat in serried rows. In the wide, elegant corridor between them, Tawny Eyes was struggling. There was an arm around his neck, choking him from behind, and another arm holding his hand away from the gun at his belt.

The struggling pair revolved slowly and Taylor saw that it was Brody behind Tawny. There were more people coming down the passageway, Tawny's people. Brody was outnumbered.

There was a whisper of sound above her and Taylor looked up in time to see Veris dropped from high up above the stage, onto the

flooring with a heavy impact.

Tira immediately turned and began to run for the backstage area, but Veris was faster. He leapt for the slender woman and grabbed her by the throat.

Tira was powerful and old, and would have defended herself more than once in her long lifetime. As soon as Veris touched her she turned and grabbed his wrist and kept turning, trying to throw him. It would have worked, except that Veris lifted a stake to her chest and pressed it hard against her flesh. If she continued the toss she would drive the stake into her own chest.

She drew instantly still, her chin lifted high over the top of his big hand.

"You know what I want," he told her.

"Give me air to call out," she croaked.

His fingers eased.

"Everyone...*halt!*" she called, her voice rolling across the auditorium.

Veris stepped behind her, keeping his hand on her throat and the stake against her chest, so that everyone could see the threat to their queen. The struggling in the auditorium slowed, then ceased.

Brody stepped around Tawny, then punched him in the face. "Slipped. Sorry." He seemed cheerful as he climbed up onto the stage in two big steps, and helped Taylor to her feet. "I love the metal look on you," he told her and kissed her hard.

"I'm getting old here," Veris complained.

"I'm done," Brody told him, and tucked Taylor up against his side. "Terms," he told Tira.

"Go to hell," she spat.

"You'll never see Taylor again, without them," Veris told her. "Or either of us. Think about that."

Tira growled. "Name your terms." Her neck was still artificially stretched and extended by Veris' hand around it and she was forced to look up and over everyone as a result.

"Taylor is ours," Veris growled.

"Yes, yes, terms beyond the obvious," Tira hissed.

Taylor stiffened and tried to move away from Brody's side, but Brody kept her clamped next to him by sheer force. He glanced at her and shook his head and she understood that for now she needed to stay there. She stopped

struggling to move away.

"You want guarantees that Domhnall is gone?" Brody asked Tira.

Tira pursed her lips together. After a moment, she said, "I'm listening."

Taylor sighed.

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

"*Human* memory?" Tira repeat sharply. "You guarantee it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She nodded. "Then the matter is settled."

“Not quite,” Veris replied.

“No?” Tira tried to look at him, but his grip was too tight.

“The successful end of this negotiation ends this matter here tonight. There will be no more recourse once we have left,” Brody told her. “You don’t get a second dip at the well.”

“I’m not getting a first dip!” Tira railed.

“You are getting as much of a sip as we let you,” Veris growled, shaking her neck a little. “We could always call in the Council if you like. I’m sure you’d appreciate an oversight committee auditing

your affairs.”

Tira hissed. “I should kill you both for this.”

“The affair ends once we agree to terms,” Brody reminded her. “Or we don’t agree and Veris shoves that stake into your heart.”

“Agreed,” Tira snapped. “Get on with it.”

“There’s the matter of compensation. By insisting that Domhnall pass out of human memory, you’ve neutralized Taylor’s career and wiped out seven years of expertise. She’s struggled for the last seven years to make a career out of a field of

interest that technically doesn't exist, which we should compensate her for too."

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

"In matters of keeping history straight, we report to you, yes?" Veris said smoothly. "We came directly to you as soon as we realized the breach."

"Yes, you did," Tira admitted.

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

Tira pouted. "Fine," she

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

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

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

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

"Twenty-five."

"Forty."

"Thirty."

"Thirty-five."

“Northman,” she said, her voice thick with frustration.

“My queen.” Veris released her and bowed low. When he straightened, he was smiling. “I’ll be in touch with your finance minister when he rises.”

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

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

Brody bowed his head, picked up Taylor’s hand and pulled her across the stage.

Veris was crowding right up behind them.

# Chapter Eleven

Outside, it was deep, still night. Taylor had no idea what the time was. She had lost track of it and Tawny had taken her cellphone from her.

Her bare feet were too sensitive on the rough bitumen and she couldn't keep up with Veris and Brody as they strode down the middle of the deserted road. Brody turned back to her and saw her predicament. "You should have

said something," he chided her and picked her up in his arms. He turned and started striding down the street again, as if she weighed no more than a feather.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"My car. Then...we'll figure that out," he told her.

There was an electronic warble and the flash of headlights that told her Veris had already reached the car. It turned out to be a very ordinary black Mustang. "I thought you'd go for something flashier," Taylor confessed. "This seems...pedestrian."

"It's his streetwear, for when he doesn't want to be recognized," Veris said, opening the passenger side door.

"I prefer the Maserati, when I don't mind drawing attention," Brody said. He handed her over to Veris, who gave Brody the keys.

Veris sank into the low slung passenger seat with her in his arms, as if she weighed nothing and he had no burden in his arms at all. He settled her on his thighs and shut the door as Brody slid behind the wheel and started the engine.

"Home," Veris declared.

"That's up to Taylor," Brody

replied, looking at her. He eased the Mustang out of the row of parked cars and accelerated with a snarl of the powerful engine. It might look like an ordinary Mustang, but whatever was under the hood had been souped up and supercharged.

“Didn’t you just tell the queen I’m basically yours?” Taylor asked.

“We implied it,” Brody replied. “She heard what she wanted to hear.”

“Veris said ‘Taylor is ours,’” Taylor quoted. “How is that just an implication?”

“You bloody great lummoX,”

Brody growled. "You had to go all he-man, after you sent her running the last time. Did nothing I say register with you?"

"That was for the queen's benefit," Veris said, his voice low.

"You were lying?" Taylor asked.

The silence lasted for five long heartbeats.

"No," Veris said, his voice still low. "You *are* ours, Taylor."

"*Fuck*, Veris!" Brody groaned. "You're killing me. Do I really have to stop this car to punch you in the mouth to shut you up?"

"It's the truth. You want me

to lie?" Veris said flatly. "Over something this critical?"

Brody stayed silent. Instead, he wrenched the wheel, skidding the tires as the car veered onto Ventura Boulevard. The car accelerated with a roar.

Taylor clutched at Veris and his arm came around her back, as solid and trustworthy as an iron band. "You can fight it," Veris told her, "but there is a bond between us and the queen gave in so easily because she knows this, too. We have already marked you - that will never go away. All you must do now is acknowledge this."

Taylor shook her head. "And where in any of this does free will come into it?"

"Fate doesn't allow for free will," Veris told her.

"Then fuck fate." She looked at Brody. "I want out. Stop the car, Brody."

"I can't stop on the freeway, but as soon as I can, I will," he assured her.

"Taylor—" Veris began.

"No, you listen to *me*," she shot back, overriding him. "You spent...how many years, looking for a way to drop Domhnall into human history so humans could

discover Brody's people and Arthur after your people wiped them out? Ten years? Fifty?"

"A while," Veris said flatly.

"Eight three," Brody supplied. Veris sighed.

"Brody's slavery upsets you, doesn't it?" Taylor asked, trying to make her tone softer, more gentle. She could see the same deep pain in Veris' eyes that had been there when he had exploded in the limousine after their first visit to see Tira.

Veris turned his head away from her. "It offends me."

"He feels guilty," Brody

added.

Taylor caught Veris' face in her hands and turned it back so he was looking at her. "How is what you're doing with me any different than what your people did with Brody?"

Shock slithered across his face. His blue eyes widened and his lips parted. "No," he whispered.

The car slowed and the road beneath the tires grew bumpy and gritty. Brody pulled the car to a halt and put it in neutral. "Out," he said shortly.

Veris looked through the

window. "You can't dump her here. It's the middle of fucking nowhere."

"I'm not," Brody replied. "Taylor, open the door and hop out for a second."

She was more than eager to get out. The car had become claustrophobic. She looked around. "I don't suppose you could lend me a twenty for a taxi?" she asked, bending down to look back in the car.

Brody shook his head. "No need. I'll see you safely home. Veris, get out."

Veris sat for a moment, his

jaw working, looking straight ahead. Then, still silent, he climbed out of the car.

“Taylor?” Brody called, putting the car back in gear and revving the engine.

She looked at Veris and bit her lip.

“Get in,” he told her. “Brody will take you home.”

She sighed and turned back to the car.

Veris caught her hand in his. “You’re wrong,” he said softly. “I would spend the rest of my life proving that if only you would let me.” He held the door open for her

and shut it when she was in the car.

“Where will he go?” Taylor asked, watching his figure diminish as Brody pulled away.

“Unlike you, Veris has a wallet, ID, and about six centuries more experience at surviving on his feet. I imagine he’ll walk to the nearest phone and call himself up a cab home. Frankly, I don’t care. He needs the exercise.” Brody touched her thigh. “Are you alright?”

Taylor shook her head. “No,” she said truthfully. She was shaking again and all at once, the events of the evening seemed to

rise up and overwhelm her. Veris was the last straw.

“Agh...*Mo Taylor álainn chroí* ....” Brody pulled her up against his shoulder, his arm around hers. “It’s been a few centuries, but I’m seem to remember that tears don’t make me melt. You’ve had a hard few days, haven’t you?”

The rough, low bur of his voice and the soft sympathy unraveled the last of her restraint. Taylor turned her face inward against his shoulder and wept, while Brody gently stroked her back and shoulder as he drove.

When the last of her tears had

been shed, she tried to lift herself away from him and move back to her side of the car, but Brody held her there. He pressed his lips against her forehead. "You're fine as you are," he told her. "I want to steal the last few moments while I can."

He didn't say it with any particular emphasis or tone, but his words made fresh tears slide down her cheeks. "Oh, Brody," she whispered. "I—"

"Not now," he said. "We'll talk in a minute, but I can't drive, hold you, and give you my full attention as well, and I want to

hold you above all else, so shh, hm?"

She settled back against his shoulder and let him drive as he had requested. All too soon, he was slotting the Mustang through the streets of Brentwood, steering with no hesitation.

"You know where I live," she said.

"Of course. We've known since the morning after the concert. You left your bag lying around and Veris was desperate to know everything he could about you."

"I'm surprised he didn't try an

Internet search, then."

"He did."

"Oh."

"He spent a lot of the night reading your published papers, the ones he hadn't already read before going to see you the week before." He brought the Mustang to a halt in front of her apartment block. "You were heading in the right direction, you know. About my father. You would have found him, if there had been anything left for you to find." He turned the engine off.

"You're coming in?" she asked.

"I'm seeing you safely home.

I promised Veris. And you.”

Taylor bit her lip. “My next door neighbor is a Nocturnal Rain freak, and his roommates are all into death metal. If they spot you...”

Brody grinned and reached over to the back seat. “This is my street gear car, remember?” His hair was already pulled back and tied in a neat ponytail at the back of his neck, which did an enormous amount to change his general appearance. Now he slid on dark wraparound sunglasses, and shook out a light weight, full length dark rain coat that would disguise his

clothes.

“Come on. You need your beauty sleep,” he told her, and got out.

\* \* \* \* \*

Brody was a comforting presence next to her as she climbed the shabby stairs to the third floor. The wraparound sunglasses and long coat did a lot to disguise him, as did the tied-back hair. The plain black jeans and muscle shirt did the rest. Any self-respecting death metal fan could walk right past him on the street and be no wiser.

When she got closer to her

apartment, she slowed. "I think that's Andy," she told Brody. "Against my door."

Brody took off the glasses and narrowed his eyes, looking along the corridor. "He's asleep." He glanced at her. "He's a fan?"

"Huge fan. He took me to your concert."

Brody shrugged. "Ah, well." He strode forward.

Andy was curled up in a tight ball on the floor, leaning against her front door. He was asleep, his mouth slightly open, his arms around his middle, one shoulder propped against the doorframe.

Taylor shook his shoulder.  
“Andy.” She shook harder.

He came out of his sleep slowly, blinking owlishly up at her. Then his face crumpled for a second. “I couldn’t sleep in my apartment. Not after the police, after Graham...”

“It’s fine,” she told him. “You can sleep in mine.”

“You’re okay,” he said. “The big guy said you would be.”

“The big guy?” she asked.

“The one you said would come after you. He came and talked to me. Really big guy, lots of muscles. Blue eyes. Soft way of

talking that was real scary. I was so glad he wasn't going after me..."

He blinked some more and focused on Brody standing patiently by her side.

"Oh holy mary motherfucker," Andy said and scrambled to his feet. He staggered, his legs stiff from being folded under him, and reached out unsteadily, grasping at Taylor's shoulder. "Oh, fuck," he added in dismay. He looked back at Brody. "Holy jesus!" he added softly.

"Hi Andy," Brody said. "Do you want to let us in?"

"Andy," Taylor said. "Shut

your mouth."

Andy shut it with a snap.

\* \* \* \* \*

Brody was still sitting at the tiny breakfast bar when Taylor emerged into the main room, twenty minutes later.

"Andy's asleep. He's exhausted, I imagine."

Brody pushed the spare apartment key he had been playing with back next to the sugar bowl. "We'll make sure he comes out of this okay. No police hassles, that sort of stuff. He was there for you in a major way. He deserves a

break.”

“I think he would define a break as landing a job. No one can see past his heavy metal appearance, but he’s a good guy.”

“A job is definitely something we can arrange.” Brody grinned. “Figure he’d like doing something for the band?”

Taylor grinned back. “He’d think he’s died and gone to heaven. That would be perfect.”

Brody stood up. He was a big guy, too. It was just that when Veris was around, Brody’s size was diminished in comparison. When it was just him in the room, his true

height and the width of his shoulders became apparent.

He studied her with his dark eyes. "Is there anything I can do to win you back, Taylor? Is there anything that will undo the damage?"

"Oh, Brody, it's not you who did the damage...."

"We're a package deal. You know that, or you wouldn't be walking away from both of us." His chest lifted and fell. "But I'm not proud like Veris. I'm here to beg." He shifted his stance and she knew he was lying. He was every bit as proud as Veris but he'd

subsumed his pride for this, for Veris' sake.

"How can you stand being with a man who talks about reparations for your own slavery, but casually speaks of the enslavement of others like it is his God-given right?"

"You know that was not his meaning."

"It came out that way."

Brody shook his head. "Veris has been walking this earth since the fifth century. That's over sixteen hundred years. The attitudes he grew up with have changed so profoundly. He has

changed with the times, but sometimes when it is very important to him, he reverts back to his old Viking self and all the old values emerge. He can't help it, Taylor. He wants this too badly and he's tripping over his own need."

"You're as old as he is. You don't have any problems with modern attitudes."

He took a deep breath. "I was the one who was enslaved, remember? That teaches you a lot about adaptation, believe me." He shrugged. "My father was a poet. I think some of his ideas about love

rubbed off.”

Frustration tore at her. “But all I want is for him to *ask* me! Why can’t he simply ask, instead of all this posturing and demanding?”

“How much more can a man do to make it clear he wants you in his life?” Brody shot back. “He tracked you down when the queen took you, he risked her fury so he could bargain for your freedom. It lets you come to us as an independent woman—”

“What are you talking about?” Taylor cried.

Brody studied her, his chest lifting. He looked as puzzled as she

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

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

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

Taylor reached for the nearest chair and dropped into it.

Brody lowered himself to his knees in front of her and wrapped his hands around her waist.

"Taylor, come back to us," he

said, his voice low. "We had you for a day and you've been gone for nearly a week and we already know we can't stand it without you. Veris is like a dog with a sore tooth and my chest aches all the time."

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

Brody nodded. "Stay with us and when you're ready, in ten years or so, we'll turn you, so that you can be with us forever. *We* turn you. Not the queen." He got to his

feet, leaned down and kissed her. "I love you, Maggie Taylor Yates. So does Veris, although right at this time he'd rather chew razor blades than admit it. I think my father's poems were preserved this long just so we might find you. Don't let his heritage go to waste."

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

He shut the door gently behind him, leaving her alone with the stiff white business card and her thoughts.

# Chapter Twelve

Two days later, a courier tapped on Taylor's door and she signed for the simple business envelope, puzzled.

Andy was sitting at her kitchen table. He had shown no inclination to go back to his apartment, and Taylor would never in a million years admit she was enjoying the company. Andy helped her keep her thoughts off Veris and Brody.

Taylor returned to her cooling cup of tea and studied the envelope.

"Special mail. They're usually bad news," Andy observed.

"They don't have to be," Taylor told him.

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

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

Then her hand started to tremble.

“This has to be a joke,” she said, and wasn’t surprised when her voice came out wobbly.

“Why? What’s so funny?” Andy asked. He took the check from her and looked at it. “Some funny joke,” he said. “It looks real to me.”

Taylor licked her lips. “It is real,” she said, her voice bodiless.

Andy looked at the check again. He gave a long, low whistle. “Who writes checks like this? For real?”

Taylor covered her face with her hands, trying to block out the

sudden rush of memories – sense memories, images, even scent. She could *taste* them...both of them. It was almost like they were there in the room with her right now.

The yearning to actually be with them, this instant, was almost overpowering. She moaned with the strength of her need.

“Oh man, you don’t mean...*Gallagher* gave you this?” Andy asked, his voice nearly a whisper of excitement.

“And Veris,” she said into her hands.

“The big guy? *That* Veris? The Viking dude you told me about?”

Andy blew out his breath. "They're *that* loaded? Shit, Taylor, you must be one hell of a lay. 'scuse my language, but..."

She gave a tight laugh and sat up. "They didn't give me this money. They arranged it. Someone else is paying up. The same people who killed Graham. Brody and Veris...um...talked them into paying me for screwing up my career."

"Good," Andy said shortly. "You deserve it."

She stood up. "I think you should go back to your apartment, Andy."

His face fell. “Jeez, have I hung around too long...?”

She shook her head. “No, I’ve liked your company, Andy, but I have a feeling you’re about to get a phone call and you need to be home to take it.”

“A phone call about what?”

“A job.”

He smiled shyly. “Did you do something...?”

“Brody and I talked.” She gave him a smile. “Go home, Andy. I have things to do.” She pulled the stiff white business card out from under the sugar bowl.

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

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

"Just like that?" she said.

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

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

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

“I’m looking for —”

“Come,” the maid insisted,

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

“Oh...”

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

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

The door she had just stepped

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

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

His response caught her by surprise even though she had deliberately baited him. Moving faster than human perception could

follow, he came at her. She was swooped up in his arms, carried to the rug in front of the fireplace that crackled with a real fire and placed on her knees on the rug, facing the fire. His arms were around her and his fangs were out and piercing her neck, before she even realized what was happening.

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

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

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

“Take me,” she moaned.  
“Make me yours.”

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

His fingers pushed inside her, and gently stretched her, working

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

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

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

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

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

Medieval, she judged.

There was a flickering candle beyond the curtain, and it was the only source of light.

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

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

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

them.

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

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

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

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

me.”

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

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

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

Veris touched her chin and brought her gaze to meet his. “But know this, Taylor. You’ll never be alone. *Never*. That’s a guarantee no

human can ever give you. You'll never be harmed while either of us walks this earth."

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

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

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# **The Kiss Across Time Series Book II**

*The magic continues...Find out  
more about the very special lives of  
Veris, Brody and Taylor in:*

# ***Kiss Across Swords***

*To save them all they must win back one reluctant heart...again.*

Taylor Yates never dreamed growing up she would end up happily living with two drop-dead sexy vampires and time-hopping through their thousand years of personal history. Her life is complete...or is it?

When she finds herself at the seige of Jerusalem during the first crusade, Veris doesn't know her at all and doesn't want to. Worst of all, he and Brody are total strangers,

and Taylor drives a wedge in deep between them by trying to seduce Veris at their first meeting—*not* something a lady of the day does if she wants to keep her head.

Taylor and Brody must woo Veris using the customs of medieval England, win his heart and his full commitment before Jerusalem falls in four days time—or when they return to their own time, their lives as they know them will be gone...

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This is a story, and these are characters, that stay with the reader long after the story is finished. *Kiss Across Swords* speaks to the very

heart of what it means to love somebody. I have to give a hearty thanks for this unforgettable tale.

Clare for *Happily Ever After Reviews*

Not only immensely imaginative, but incredibly ingenious – it's an unforgettable journey.

Chris for *Romance Junkies Reviews*

*Kiss Across Swords* is a wonderfully imaginative story that will grab readers from the first page and hold them transfixed. Her ability to create a story that captures readers and characters with depth will keep me coming back for more.

Claudia for *A Romance Review*

She shows the reader how beautiful and seductive two men can be when they unleash their desires for each other. It's a romance that has a number of elements, all combined to make a very captivating story. I'm looking forward to reading more in this imaginative series.

Leslie for *Leslie's Psyche*

A thrilling exploration of battle, self-loathing, trust, and a soul-shaking love that time cannot erase.

Rhonda for *Vampire Romance Books*

*Kiss Across Swords* will be available June 1, 2013.

# **The Kiss Across Time Series Book III**

# ***Kiss Across Chains***

When dying becomes an act of love.

It is four years since Taylor and Brody almost lost Veris during the First Crusade. Now they know how to control time jumps, they have settled into a very nearly perfect, nearly human life, raising their daughter Marit.

When Brody defies Queen Tira to protect Marit, the three of them jump back three days in time to collect evidence the queen set up Brody for a drug bust in

retribution. The jump sends them back to Brody's personal nightmare: Fifth century Constantinople.

While Brody survives as a flogged slave, Taylor masquerades as the wife of an aristocrat and searches for Brody to release him. They must wait for Veris to find them before jumping home and Taylor watches each brutal chariot race, wondering if this will be Brody's last. Brody once died in the Hippodrome and he is human this time, too....

*Kiss Across Swords* will be available July 1, 2013.

# About the Author

**Tracy Cooper-Posey is an Amazon #1 Best Selling Author. She writes erotic vampire romances, hot romantic suspense, paranormal and urban fantasy romances. She has published over 50 novels since 1999, been nominated for five CAPAs including Favourite Author, and won the Emma Darcy Award.**

**She turned to indie publishing in 2011. Her indie titles have been nominated four times for Book Of The Year and *Byzantine Heartbreak* was a 2012 winner. She has been a national magazine editor and for a decade she taught romance writing at MacEwan University.**

**She is addicted to Irish Breakfast tea and chocolate, sometimes taken together. In her spare time she enjoys history, Sherlock Holmes, science fiction and ignoring**

**her treadmill. An Australian, she lives in Edmonton, Canada with her husband, a former professional wrestler, where she moved in 1996 after meeting him on-line.**

**Her website can be found at <http://TracyCooperPosey.com>**

# Other books by Tracy Cooper-Posey

## **Blood Knot Series (Urban Fantasy Paranormal Series)**

*Blood Knot*

*Blood Stone*

*Blood Unleashed* (Upcoming)

*Blood Revealed* (Upcoming)

## **Beloved Bloody Time Series (Paranormal Futuristic Time Travel)**

*Bannockburn Binding*

*Byzantine Heartbreak*

*Romani Armada*

## **Kiss Across Time Series (Paranormal Time Travel)**

*Kiss Across Time*

*Kiss Across Swords*

*Kiss Across Chains*

**Guardian Bonds (Gargoyle Paranormal Series)**

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*Beth's Acceptance (As Teal Ceagh)*

*Mia's Return (As Teal Ceagh)*

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**Guns 'n' Lovers Series (Romantic Suspense)**

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*To Soothe a Savage Heart (Upcoming)*

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*The Duchess of Winter (Upcoming)*

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1.Vampires                      2.MMF      romance  
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8.Menage 9.Death Metal 10.Time Travel  
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