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Man of Both Worlds



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Chapter 1



North of the Kingdom of Neshmire just past the rocky mountains lies a small town called Samuel. It was built a while ago when the war broke out between vampires and draugars. Still unknown even to this day why this occurred. Our story takes place in a massive building in the center of town. It holds a theater, casino, and even rooms to sleep in.

It all begins one day when a young man enters the town. People stop and stare at him because of his long red hair glinting in the sun while it sets in the distance. A couple of women giggle at him, then stop when he glances in their direction. His glowing eyes tell a different story as they turn away in disgust.

Inside the theater, he looks around and spots the counter. Quite a few people step back and notice his physique along with his calm aura. Like an animal ready to hunt its prey. It was always like this for him. Pretty to look at and admire. Sometimes even get a quick night with a lady. Nothing more than that.

The person standing behind the counter scowls at another clerk who steps back. She looks up at him. The tag on the counter says Madrian. "What brings you here?"

"I'm looking for a place to rest for the night and possibly a job," He replies with a deep misty voice.

Madrian studies him for a brief moment. "We do have a few vacancies. They are pricey for each night but if you do our weekly special. I can knock down a few while giving you a bonus." She looks down at her notes. "As for the job, it will have to wait till tomorrow."

"Mm." He ponders that thought for a few. "How much is one night?"

"Twenty-eight silver coins." Madrian smirks at his grimace. "Weekly would be better. For twenty silver coins, not only do you get a week but you also get food to eat along with one hundred free chips to spend at the casino."

Guess prices are heavy. Shouldn't be surprised since this is a casino. He sighs. "I'll take the weekly, please."

"Name?" Madrian picks up a penna.

"Guv. No last name," He places twenty silver coins from his sack there.

Madrian writes down his name on the roster and takes out a key placing it on the counter. "You're in room D35. On the third floor. Your gambling coins will be at the service counter in the casino. You are free to pick them up anytime." She picks up the coins and places them in the cash drawer. "Welcome to Madre of Entertainment Galore and enjoy your stay."

Guv picks up the key and heads up the stairs to his room.

Outside the sun finishes setting with the last rays gleaming on the window frame. The first star reveals itself as the light blue sky turns black, casting their shadows across. The gloom it spreads

is as vast as the wind, almost making the shadows in the dark look alive. Even from inside, you can hear the slot machines binging each spin with their cheers and growls growing louder. Just below you can also hear cheering from the theater.

Guv sits on the bed, waiting for this next part. His long red hair turns black as its silky texture blends in with the night sky while growing shorter. It reaches just past his shoulders. His eyes turn to pitch-black with a red ring surrounding them. Next, he falls to his knees as the sound of crunching flesh crinkles.

Guv's arms shrink a bit smaller while his body shrinks in size. It happens every night with no avail or way to stop it. After, his tan skin changes as it peels off, revealing a white texture underneath. Two fangs appear in his mouth. His breathing is ragged.

After the initial change, Guv stands up only to have his clothes fall off. *Damn. I really hate that part.* He reaches down and picks up his clothes. With a swipe of his hand, forces the pieces of the flesh to disappear. After putting the clothes in the dresser, He takes out a leather jacket and pants from his sack and puts them on. *Pretty much why I'm here.* After sitting on the bed, thinks back to when this all began....



It was on the way to Neshmire from the northwest. The group had left the Port of Loxny heading south. It was for the next heist. Granger on the way made them stop by a nearby tavern called Lude Good and Mood that afternoon. He received a message and stopped by a shop with trinkets.

Guv along with Torin went inside, ordering their food and drinks. As they sit at the table, a waitress brings over their order.

Torin regards the woman up and down with a smile.

Guv shakes his head. "Always the lady's man."

"I'd wager you fall in love before any of us!" Torin picks up his wine and pours himself a drink. "I love the smell of fresh vintage." He picks it up and places it under his nose. The fragrance floats up.

Guv snorts and continues to eat.

Granger sits down ordering a drink. "Looks like I get to tell you about our next objective. Something came up and I have to leave for a bit."

Torin regards him shrewdly. "That important to miss out on this?"

"Afraid so." Granger takes the bottle of shire along with a glass and smiles. "Yup, give me this stuff over the nasty stuff you have."

"I'll have you know this is very fine quality!" Torin hisses at him. "You just like the cheap stuff!"

Granger pours himself a drink. "Care to have some, kitty?" He waves his drink in front of himself, daring Torin to strike.

Torin scowls while grabbing the edge of the table with his hand. His tail furs up while his ears arch back.

"Enough! Geez." Guv growls at them. "Can't go anywhere with either of ya. Either you're related or you had a pre-arranged marriage."

"I did not!" Granger slams the drink down on the table sloshing a bit over the rim. "Damn."

Torin smirks while continuing to eat.

"Talk. What is our next objective?" Guv asks, then drinks his water.

Granger taps his fingers on the table. "You know our next stop is Neshmire. Well, there is a rumor going around about a group of people infiltrating the council. Word is they have an item called the mystic Eye of Balid."

Torin glances at him surprised. "The Eye of Balid? Are you sure?"

"Positive. Just verified it with my contact."

Guv frowns and places the spoon down on the table. "I've never heard of it. What is it?"

"Only a treasure hunter would be interested in that kind of stuff. Many stories spread around about it, but no one has ever seen it. That isn't the issue here." Granger sips his drink with a twinkle in his eye.

"Mm." Torin's lips twitch. "You want to see what they are really hiding and even if it's worth stealing?"

"That and also Admiral Gensin will be there. Word is they will be opening a certain vault during this time. Thought it might be a good idea since a lot of people are going to be there. Tons of stuff to steal." Granger chuckles at their faces. "I thought this might peak your interest."

Torin smirks. "You know me too well, friend. The temptation is strong." He spots Guv staring down at his hand. "You alright?"

"I," Guv forces himself to relax. This bad feeling doesn't go away. "Just a feeling."

Granger glances at him while sipping his drink. He takes a few more swallows before lowering it.

"Bad or Good?" Torin asks.

"Don't know. We will be going through the gate north of the thieves guild or the one here past the mountains?" Guv leans back in his chair while crossing both arms.

"I'd recommend the one past the mountains. I've been hearing awful stuff about the guild lately and not looking forward to getting anymore involved with them." Granger warns. "I'll meet up with you in a week. You can reach me using that method."

"I'm sure we can reach the gate by mid-morning." Torin pours himself another drink. He is very careful and doesn't slosh it. "If memory serves me right. I'm pretty sure there used to be an old pub we can stop by at night before we hit Neshmire the next day."

Granger stands up and picks up the bottle of shire. "Meet you at the special place?" After receiving a short nod from both of them, leave them at the table.

The meal finishes. They pay for it and head up to the room to rest for the night. Torin is sound asleep lying on his back with his two hands up in the air like a cat.

It makes Guv smile every time, but this time he doesn't. He stands up, then walks to the window gazing outside. The pale blue moon rises with its eerie glow resting on the grass. *I can't shake this feeling, I shouldn't go with them. Maybe it's just me being paranoid.* He sighs.

Minutes pass by. The moon passes over, disappearing while only leaving its shadow below. The lights dim.

Guv lays down on the bed and stares up at the ceiling. Restlessness consumes him, being unable to sleep. The next morning, Torin hands him something to eat before heading out. It doesn't take long to reach the gate. Quite a few people are in line to enter.

Torin draws out an old and worn cape with a hood and places it over him. He brings out a small vial and puts a couple of drops on it. The smell envelopes them.

Guv scowls. "That stuff is awful. Wish you had something else to use." He crosses his arms, aware his sense of smell is a bit strong.

"Makes for a great trick. I mean could you imagine." Torin twirls around with the cape shrouding everything. "Me. A man of social standing smelling like something the cat dragged in?"

"I'd say you smell like something else, but then we would get into a heated argument again." Guv walks with him to stand behind the last person. They look back with a frown, then hold their hand over their nose. "See?"

Torin shrugs.

The line trudges forward slowly. A few people stand behind them. They are a few feet not eager to get very close to the smell. Guv keeps his eyes lowered since this always gets him into a bit of trouble. The line stops. He peeks over spotting a person with a green cape over themselves.

The guard raises a spear at them. "Show us your face, you dam half-breed!"

Half-breed? Guv peers over a bit more. He is suddenly jerked back by Torin who shakes his head.

"I'm not a half-breed. Even if I were, that shouldn't matter since I've traveled through here before." He pulls off the cape revealing a tall slender man with pointy ears. His short auburn hair gives him a rakish appearance. "Besides, a normal vampire can't walk during the day."

"At Ease, Men!" A higher rank soldier stands behind the guard. His posture shows he takes his work very seriously.

"But-"

"That is Mr. Baywright. A day walker. I assure you, I don't want a confrontation with him. Is that clear?" His gaze forces the

guard to lower the weapon. He regards Mr. Baywright.

"Apologizes. I hope your voyage will be a fruitful one."

Guv watches him pass through. *Day walker, eh? I wonder why they are so eager for a half-breed. Right. I had better keep my eyes lowered.* They progress forward, not having any trouble passing through the gate. He casts a side glance to the soldier noticing he isn't even paying him attention.

They travel up the mountain coastline. The sun begins to set as Torin hangs a blanket over a few branches.

Guv steps behind and waits for his form to change.

Torin sorts out his sack, then glances behind them.

Guv walks out in his vampire form and glances at Torin.

"Something the matter?"

"Probably not. I just thought for a minute we were being watched." Torin places a few items back in his sack. "Could be my imagination."

That comment doesn't ease the restlessness from Guv. He folds up the blanket and places it in his sack. *I'm not liking this at all.*

The path isn't long to cross. The houses are decayed as they pass a few. Torin shakes his head, not saying one word. The bridge up ahead looks good, yet as they cross it. Pebbles fall off into the stream making plopping noises with very little water in the stream.

Guv greatly frowns at the pub. The place looks old and not even well kept. The walls are brittle and no door resides there. *Maybe we should try somewhere else.*

"You're going to charge me five gold coins for this milk slop!" A man dressed in green armor grabs the woman and pulls her towards him.

"Yes I am. Got a problem with that?" She glares at him, then reaches up and snaps his wrists in two. Breaking them with

ease. The man clutches his wrist while kneeling to the floor, groaning in pain. "Sam, kick this bastard out. He can stay outside for the night."

Sam grabs the man by the back of the shirt and drags him outside. After tossing him, he glares at the two of them before heading back behind the counter.

The woman studies her nails while glancing at both of them. "Since we have two guests here. What do you want?"

Guv notices they are really watching him intently. *This might be a bad idea, but if we don't order. Things could go a lot worse.* "We are just passing by."

She seethes at them. "Don't care to eat or even introduce yourselves?"

Guv glances at Torin who offers no help. "I'm Monte. Could we have some bread and water at least?"

She walks over to the table and shoves everything to the floor. "Take a seat and I'll bring it to ya. That will be two gold coins."

They sit down, watching her behind the counter. In her hands is a crusty piece of bread that looks quite a few days old. The cups don't even look clean with the muddy water. Monte hands her the two gold coins. "Thank you."

She watches Guv intently, studying his attire. "What brings a vampire like you out to these parts?"

Guv tears off a part of the bread. "Just heading my way up north." He doesn't like how she stilled and walked away. He glances at Torin who tapped the table twice with his finger. He glances to the back, straining his ears.

Stomp. Stomp. Scrape. Stomp. Stomp. Scrape.

The sound of marching soldiers with heavy armor floods Guv's ears. He can hear their weapons pound the ground as they walk. He whispers, "Be prepared to move."

Torin nods.

The sounds get a bit closer.

Torin stands up casting his cape around the table. It envelopes both of them, shrouding them in darkness.

"Don't let them get away!" She yells. Two workers from the side step over and grab the cape, only to have nothing appear underneath. "Find them! They couldn't have gotten far!"

A knight with heavy armor steps up to her. His hand backhands her hard across her cheek, forcing her to the ground. Sam steps forward to halt as the knight glares at him. "You let him get away! It was a simple task. We needed that man of both worlds here!"



Guv's head snaps to the right upon hearing footsteps outside his room. They stop at the front door. Not liking this one bit, uses his sensing ability. It's a person wearing heavy armor.

Knock. Knock.

Not answering, Guv hides behind the curtains while making himself invisible. He uses his illusion ability instead. In the bed under the covers a small lump forms.

The soldier opens the door with the door slightly creaking. They peek inside the room and take a couple of steps inside.

They are wearing the same armor from the pub incident. I knew there was a connection here. The front plate has an emblem of two axes along with the words Versher underneath. Guv watches this person.

They cautiously approach the bed as they lift a hand, a slight wind blows moving the cover back. The soldier falls to the ground screaming. Showing underneath the covers is a thin arm with bits of pieces of their flesh looking burned. As if parts of his flesh are falling apart.

A young woman walks into the room and yells at him. She has a bunny outfit on. "Get out here! We told you many times you kind isn't welcome at this place!" She raises her hand to have two shards of ice point at him.

The knight rushes out of the room and down the hall.

The woman looks back at the bed, pulling the covers up. "Poor sod. Must have been born with that disease Falmentmine. From what I remember, every night your body weakens until one day it kills you. No known cure for it." She walks out the room, both closing and locking the door behind her.

Guv remains in the shadows watching outside the knight running up to the church and heading inside. *I wonder why they targeted me so easily. I need to get to the bottom of this.* He stays there all night observing them. The lights remain on in the church but no one leaves it.

The next morning it is very quiet. Downstairs past the main hall is the dining area, Breakfast is being served to different customers while carts hang in the back with different plates of food.

Guv picks up a plate and looks at the dishes. Boiled eggs. Steamed rice along with sauteed purple and blue shrooms. It doesn't look very appetizing, then spots another dish. Basinate Worms. He piles it on his plate eager to chow down. The basinate worms to him are delicacy. Very hard to come by. They skin the flesh off while roasting the meat nice and tender. Then drizzle it with a dark gravy. It makes his mouth water.

A few people grimace at him and look away.

Guv doesn't mind and enjoys the food. Much later, he strolls to the casino area past the lounge. After collecting his tokens, gazes around at the different machines.

There are many rows of slot machines. Each row is different. The first one is a quest to hunt different animals. A person is playing on while progressing quite a bit, but growling at their losses.

Guv shakes his head and ventures to another area. These groups of slot machines have a few people at them. Quite a few are grinning. One person spins the slot and gains three diamonds in a row. Up on the screen shows a dagger being thrown and hits the target winning them quite a few coins. *Good game, but not in the mood to be around a lot of people.*

The next area is two rows of slots. They are the simple ones with triple seven's winning the jackpot. One one side is the high rollers, while on the other is the low rollers. He walks down the aisle, then sits at one. No one is around. *Time to see if I can at least spend these.*

Time passes with another person sitting beside him. The slots have not been very nice, but at least fifty coins remain. Guv smirks at his own luck. It just hasn't gone well.

"I don't believe this! How dare that buffoon try and touch me!" A woman's voice yells.

Guv glances to the side, spotting two bunny girls marching up the aisle. They both seem very agitated.

One bunny girl glares at the other. "Mona. I've told you several times! Don't get cozy with the clients! To them we are just a pair of good looking legs!" She throws out her hands to express her frustration.

"Yes, Cynthia. I know you told me a hundred times," Mona sighs and lowers her head with her bunny ears drooping forward.

Whack!

"Yeoch!" Mona stops and rubs the back of her head. "What was that for?"

Cynthia places both hands on her hips while tapping one foot. Her glare is just as impressive. "Maybe if I do that one hundred times, it will actually stick!"

Guv averts his gaze and presses his lips together. The desire to laugh at them is strong.

"You don't have to be so mean," Mona grumbles, then sticks out her tongue.

Cynthia sighs. Creak. She looks up. "Mona!" She rushes towards Mona and wraps both arms around her, unable to get away as the large chandelier falls on them. Nothing happens.

"I think we are alright," Mona whispers with her face pressed tightly against her bosom.

Cynthia peers above, spotting Guv holding it above. His muscles flex displaying the strength he wields.

Guv glances down at them. "Neither one of you got hurt?"

Cynthia shakes her head, then loosens her hold on Mona who gazes up at him in amazement.

"That's good." Guv looks left, then right. "Where can I put this?"

A man in his prime with steely grey eyes walks over. His tail is cocked to one side with his ears drawn back. "That shouldn't have fallen, but I'm glad you were there to catch it. Follow me. I'll show you where we can put it." He turns around and walks to the clearing with a large opening into a backroom.

Guv follows, holding the item over his head. People watch him amazed that he can carry that with ease. After a gesture from the fellow, places it on the ground.

"You're quite the muscle man. Name's Max." He reaches out his hand towards Guv.

Guv clasps it. "Guv." He wipes his forehead. "If that is all you need of me, I'm off." He turns around and proceeds to walk out.

"Wait a minute."

Guv stops and looks back at Max.

"We actually do need a bit of help. Mind if we hire for temp work?" Max smiles at Guv's perplexed look. "I know what Madrian told ya. Truth is we need a bit of muscle around here. It can even include free weekly rooms along with food. Everything else is up in the air."

Guv replies, "That does sound like a good offer. What will I have to do?"

"We have a bit of farming that needs tilling. Haven't been able to touch it because of all the unloading cargo from wagons. Would greatly help us out there." Max slaps Guv on the back.

"Do I need to sign a contract?"

"Nah. I think we will keep this simple. I have a feeling you are not the staying around type." Max chuckles at Guv's perturbed expression. "It's not you. Those fellows from the church in town keep going heads to head with us. Causes quite a stir among the people in the town even threw we get a lot of business through here." He sighs. "Too bad we can't kick them out of this place. But by letting them inside once in a while, the town lets the boss do what needs to be done to run this place. But that's a story for another time. Are you in?"

"Sure. When do I start?" Guv walks back with him to the casino area, then stops by a poker table. "I forgot!"

Max regards him with both eyebrows raised.

"I have to be. . . hidden at night. I, uh, have a certain condition." Guv looks down with a frown. "I'm not sure what it is and I can stay in a barn if it makes a few people uncomfortable."

"Ah, you mean the Falmentmine Disease you were born with?"

Guv stares at him dumbfounded.

Max shakes his head. "Not sure why, but a knight sneaked in your room last night. Got caught by a bunny girl whom you just rescued earlier. Cynthia was her name. Informed me and Madrian of it. I've actually wanted to give you a different room because of that." He places his arm around Guv's shoulder. "We can talk some more about it while we walk to your job. I'll make sure to keep not on them so your not interrupted while you here."

The day progresses with a lot of work being done on the farm. Three large fields are connected together. The land is brittle which makes tilling it a struggle. But with Guv on the job, it is finished just before the sun starts to set. The workers are very happy, eager to start planting.

Guv heads inside and walks up to his room which is now on the fifth floor. After his form changes along with his attire, he walks over to the side door passing through two rooms.

In the third room, Torin sits at the desk with a penna in his hand writing down a few things. "I still find it damn impressive the way your form changes."

Guv scowls. "Nice diversion with the falling of the chandelier. Do I even want to know how you managed that one?"

Torin smirks in his direction. "You got the job, didn't you?"

Guv sits down on the bed and leans back. "Ya. I did. Heard a bit about the Knights of Versher being here, but not much more than that. Do you think it was a hoax?"

"Not sure. I do know they are hunting half-breeds. They seem to have it really rough up here. What I don't know is why." Torin taps the Penna on the document. "I did learn something else. That same knight at the pub is here. I didn't catch a good glimpse of them but I'm sure to recognize that voice if I heard it again. Lucky we got out when we did." He glances at Guv. "I think if we really want to attract their attention. Your vampire form is going to need to make an appearance."

"Mm." Guv purses his lips. "I do need to eat again. It sucks while I can eat food. I have to eat and drink both magical crystals and blood in different forms. I never understood that part."

"Me either. Could be connected to the demon magic you were born with. We need someone who catches their attention. I meet a person at the market today. Nice young lady who apparently was arguing with a few knights about payments. Name was Tammy Batsing. I'd like to know what else she is hiding." Torin puts down the penna.

"Do you think she is involved?"

"Not enough information. But this might help us to figure it out. I learned recently from a source about the church taking charge of trade up here. I don't know if it's forced on the town or how the influence spread." Torin regards Guv shrewdly. "You remember when Granger mentioned that one group in Neshmire?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"I heard another rumor while I was at the bar that they are the ones behind the tax fraud here. Another about how the church is involved with them. Also, the name Shin Beawolf is the leader who runs the place. What I found odd about that is he is the only

vampire while the soldiers are human." Torin crosses his arms with a frown.

"That is odd." Guv taps his fingers on the bed. "Hence the reason you want me to step out into the light. Where is Granger?"

"I've already sent a message to him." Torin stands up and walks to the window parting the curtains. "He is a bit upset, which is understandable. I told him something that made him a bit excited."

Guv twists his lips. "Bunny girls, right?"

Torin smirks.

"You do realize that will get us into a lot of trouble." Guv groans in dismay.

Torin chuckles. "True, but by then. We will already have our plan in motion. I also want you to look into Tammy's personal records. Might catch something there."

"Alright. Tomorrow night," Guv replies. They talk for a bit more for the night, then he returns to the room keeping watch through the window at the church. *Might need to do a bit of exploring the town tomorrow.*

Chapter 2



That morning, things go a bit differently for Guv. After breakfast, Max meets him out in the hall. "Hey. I heard you already finished trilling the fields. Damn impressive work."

"Thanks. I thought I would head back out and help with the planting," Guv replies.

Max twists his lips. "I want you to meet someone. Follow me." He turns around and heads into the lounge, then turns into the theater. Several people are placing items on the set while taking others off it. "Adam."

The man he caught a glimpse of, Mr. Baywright turns his head. "Yes?"

"Here is the new hire. Pretty amazing he did all that in one day." Max gestures to Guv.

Guv replies, "Hello."

Adam turns around and stares at him for a moment. "I heard you have a condition at night?"

"Yes." For some reason, this person makes him uncomfortable while at ease at the same time. It throws him off balance.

"I need help with heavy hauling in the back." Adam jerks his thumb behind. "We need the decorations out along with some props."

"Sure." Guv walks behind the stage to the prop room. A man directs him to the stuff that needs to be put on the stage for tonight's show. After bringing out quite a few pieces, he spots Adam throwing his hands up in frustration.

"Make sure those lights stay up this time!" Adam yells at workers hanging them up.

He really is eccentric about his work. Wonder why he feels familiar. He watches the lamps sweeping in a low ark. *From the look of it, it's going to be a full crowd tonight.* Sweat falls from his chin. He brushes his arm across his forehead, then picks up another pot. *Last one to go in the back.*

Two bunny girls watch him lift the pot over his massive shoulders. "He is just gorgeous," one of them sighs.

"I wish I had long red hair that glitters in the sun like that!" The other bunny girl whines. They sigh again with their bunny tails moving side to side while they watch Guv walk behind the stage.

"Cynthia! Mona!" A different bunny girl glares at them from behind, forcing them to stiffen. Her ears on top twitch, revealing just how mad she is.

Mona and Cynthia look back at her with a partial smile. "We. . . . uh," Mona glances at Cynthia.

"Were just looking. Yup. Now back to work." Cynthia grabs Mona's hand and pulls her towards the guests playing poker at a table.

"Give them a break, Adyl. It's been a while since we had a good lookin young man here."

Adyl crosses her arms. "Excuse me, dear husband. I don't remember you complaining the last time we had this discussion. In BED!"

"Shh!" Max presses his lips together. "Not everyone needs to know about that."

Adyl looks at Max with a straight face. "I'm in charge of those bunny girls. It's my responsibility. We also have that performance tonight and going to be short handed at the bar!" She rolls her eyes. "Always happens when Vera takes the stage." She walks past him, still grumbling to the slots area.

Max shakes his head. "No wonder Vera has an audience of both sexes." He snickers at the thought while heading back to the poker table. Four people are still here. One of them has either had bad luck or knows how to play the cards. "I still think you're a butler, Torin."

Torin gazes up at him with an innocent expression. "I told you, Max. Send me a winning hand and I'll let you know."

Max glares at him for a few moments. "I've been trying for the past hour. Are you sure you're not playing those numbers?"

The people at the table glance at him. One of them growls, "There is not way he can cheat and make all of us win to only have him lose."

Max raises both eyebrows, "Look at your winnings. Those should speak for themselves."

Meanwhile, Guv places the last item in the back room. *Finally, finished.* He looks around to see what else needs to be done.

"Guv."

Guv looks behind him spotting Adam gesturing to him. He walks over. "Yes?"

"Look. I know you're still new here. However, I have a supply I need for tonight. It's at the Market of Tash. A woman named Tammy runs the place." Adam hands over a letter. "Give her this. She will know what it's for. Bring back the cargo for tonight."

Guv glances down at the letter. It dawns on him that this was the place he needed to check out. Nice to fall in his lap like that but if the owner is trading with Tammy, does that mean she isn't involved with the church?

"I can do tha-

"No, Domar. You take forever drooling over that fine woman. She told you no and you still are late coming back. I need these tonight." Adam scowls at the younger man.

He looks human. Guv glances at him.

"But Pops!" The young man throws his hands up, pleading with Adam.

"Don't you but pops me. I already made my decision. Besides, I have another job for you to do." Adam grabs the boy's arms and drags him to the casino. You can tell by the way his ears twitch, he is clearly upset.

Guv twists his lips while heading out back to the wagons. One is ready to go, but the horse is slightly agitated moving his feet back and forth. After checking the harness, realizes it's a bit tight on the straps and loosens them just a bit to give the creature a breather. He pats their neck. "There we go. Steady." The horse whines at him and head butts him in the shoulder.

They proceed down the path and turn left down the lane. The church on the right stands out even in the daylight. A few shadows can be seen from a glance.

With a slight pressure on the reins, the wagon turns and heads past the theater. Guv frowns at the shops. *They are open, but not many people around. I wonder why?* Usually at a market you would see a few people heading in and out. Here, the shops are very quiet with the people inside glaring at him passing by.

Just up ahead is a large sign called the Market of Tash. The building is well built and sturdy. You can see with its brick structure, they took good care of it. The door is open.

Guv jumps off and stops at the door way.

"For the last time! I'm not paying you anything for protection!" A woman's voice yells.

Guv steps inside and waits by the side of the door. He spots a young woman with medium length brown hair. She jabs something at the other person who makes him frown. It's a knight from the church.

"I don't make the rules, I just follow them. You're due for a payment!" The knight backs up a few feet with his back hitting the wall.

"Don't feed me that bullshit! I know very well you work for that bastard! Get out!" Tammy aims her weapon at him and fires a green beam of light.

The knight darts to the left and looks back at the burn mark. He hisses at her, "You will regret this!" He walks out passing Guv with an annoyed glance.

Tammy spots Guv. "What are you doing here? Work for that bastard too?!" She raises her weapon at him.

Guv raises his eyebrows at this woman. Her freckles across her nose and cheeks give her an interesting look. With her vivid green eyes, it makes for quite the contrast. *What an interesting woman.* He pulls out the letter. "Adam sent me to collect the cargo for tonight."

Tammy purses her lips, giving him a full glance over. "Mm." Without another word, grabs the letter and reads it. "Alright, but don't get any funny business. This way." She walks outside and around the building to a shack in the back. It's very sturdy. After opening the door. "All the stuff on the left side is for tonight. Be sure to bring it to him. Don't break it!"

Guv watches her leave. *A lot of sass, that one. I might enjoy tonight a bit too much.* He picks up the first couple of crates with ease. After hauling a few rounds back and forth, notices that Tammy is watching him with interest. She catches his side glance and flushes while going back to her work. Very odd because for some reason, it makes him smile.

A bit of time passes, with almost all of it in the wagon. Just five more crates left. Crashing sounds from inside make him look through the window.

Tammy is being restrained by another knight, one who looks like a vampire with his ears twitching along with the pale skin. He has her hands bound behind her back with another hand forcing her to look up at him. "You will pay your fees. I run this town!"

"You never owned this town Shin!" Tammy seethes with anger, her eyes blazing.

"Sucks you just a damn half-breed draugar. If it wasn't for that, I might take you for myself." Shin twists his lips in disgust. "You need to remember your place, my dear." He moves his hand down her cheek. The nails cut through the skin causing a little bit of blood to smear down.

"Never!"

All of sudden, Shin is tossed back outside as if he was nothing more than a stack of pancakes. "What th-" He groans in

pain and bends over as his stomach is in full pain. Aware of someone really strong punching him.

"I suggest you leave." Guv stands between him and the entrance to the Market of Tash.

"You don't know who I am." Shin stands up with sweat coming down his side.

"Don't care. Leave." Guv crosses his arms. Fully aware he was supposed to draw their attention with his other form, and not this one.

"Don't worry, I'll be seeing you later." Shin glares at him while placing a hand on his sword. "I'll be paying you another visit later, Ms. Batsing." He heads back towards the church.

Guv looks behind at Tammy with a stunned expression. "Let me do something about that." He walks over and raises a hand to her cheek.

Tammy closes her eyes, trying not to flinch away. She opens them realizing her cheek feels better. "You can use magic?"

"Only a little. It's not much but I hope it helped. I'll finish the rest of the hauling." Guv heads back to the shack and picks up more. Still unsure of why he did that. Fully aware of the anger when that happened. *It's not like I feel anything for her.* Then why did that make him so mad? After the last crate is in the wagon, he vaults up and sits down at the front, picking the reins. Vividly aware of being watched by her the whole time.

Back at the theater, it doesn't take long to put everything inside. A few workers help bring in the cargo. The last package is brought in.

Guv wipes his forehead. *At least that is finished.* A hand slaps him on the back.

Adam shakes the hand because it is red. "You really are strong. Take the rest of the day off." He walks away to another person who has a clipboard in their hands.

Guv heads upstairs. His mind keeps going over his thoughts for night. *I know I have to do that tonight. Usually it doesn't bother me, but why now?* In his room, he watches the sun set. The stars shine outside as the moon begins to rise. Time for the setup. He casts a mirror image in the bed with his body looking hollow and sweat falling down. Just like last time. *Time to get my game on.*

Meanwhile, in the Market of Tash. Tammy puts away the cash book for the sales. Taxes have been awfully high. Documenting the new stuff and trying out new trade routes while dealing with the knights have taken their toll on her. Unsure of why her father even did this. With a sigh, turns off the lights and heads into her room.

The journal lies on the desk, untouched by today.

Tammy changes into her nightgown and sits at the table, writing in her journal. "Everything went normal today except for a man who is very strange. He came to haul the cargo. Very good looking even with his eyes. I'm always wary of men like him, but for some reason. Made me feel strange." She continues to write about the interaction with Shin.

After much time, blows out the candle in the lamp and sets her glasses on the nightstand. It's been a very long day. She gets into bed and pulls the covers up, drifting off to sleep.

A whistle softly taps the window. Time passes slowly as a jarring sound forces Tammy awake. No other sound is heard, but the hair on the back of her neck stands up.

The floor creaks.

Tammy looks at the dresser and freezes. Sitting on it is someone she has never seen before. A man with semi long black

hair. His black leather attire does very little to calm her nerves spotting his open chest. For a vampire, it's odd this one is muscular. She swallows hard and looks up to his vivid red eyes. "What are you doing here?" Her voice is weak and inwardly kicks herself for showing her fear.

He smiles with a malicious grin. "I've come to collect." He steps down.

Tammy quickly stands up and grabs the item nearby. "You stay away from me!" Her hand trembles along with her voice. It lights blue and sends a bolt of energy at him. It engulfs him, then fades away. "Now Begone!"

He chuckles with delight. "You think that works on me?" He takes a step towards her in a threatening manner. "My Dear Tammy. You have so much to learn."

Tammy shivers because his voice is silky and smooth. It makes her feel safe even with the danger lying ahead. "Get away from me!" She takes a step back only to realize the bed is behind her. The man moves slowly towards, causing her to both feel fear, panic and the odd desire to throw herself at him. It renders her speechless for a moment.

He lifts his upper lip revealing two fangs ready to dig in for a bite.

With the last strength Tammy is able to muster as he almost is upon her, throws her fist at him in a feeble attempt.

He catches her in his arms and her head falls on his shoulder. "My, you do smell good." His mouth nips at her neck, not quite biting down.

Tammy feels weak and helpless. Unsure why her arms and body will no longer respond as her mind screams. *Please. No.*

"This is a gift for not paying the church fees." His lips move down her neck to the collar bone. "My Dear Sweet Tammy.

You will pay a price for defying us." His fangs pierce her flesh, slowly sipping.

The church! Why? Tammy winces from the bite, then slowly goes limp in his arms. Her mind wanders into oblivion. Unsure of anything else that happened that night.

Guv raises his mouth and looks down at her. *I wish it had been someone else.* He places a kiss on her neck and heals the wound. He lifts her into his arms and puts her in bed then pulls up the covers. He caresses her cheek, aware of the guilt inside. But knows they need answers to why they are being targeted.

The journal gives a lot of information, even to her past. Detailing a lot of events her father did. Also, a lot of shipments the father made to the Shrine of Versher, but never directly to it.

After Guv finishes reading the cashbook, leaves it open on the dresser. He takes one last look at Tammy sound asleep, then teleports back to his room for the night. The traps setup haven't been disturbed. He disables them, aware of another shadow. "Figured you would wait for me."

"You took longer than usual. Was it that good this time?" Torin raises both eyebrows at Guv's scowl. "Never mind."

Guv sits down at the table. "You wanted a report, right?"

"Yes." Torin sits down. "I heard how the knights were pestering Tammy before the project. Gossip spreads like the wind in this town."

Guv crosses both arms, his frustration showing. "A few knights were on patrol, but I did get some information. Her father paid them for protection through trade and cash. The church but not to the Shrine up north. The church only showed up recently."

Torin presses his lips firmly together. "That still doesn't rule out the thought of them being tied to Neshmire. The real question is why station a church here and what are they really after?"

"Can't answer that. I did find a few documents stating they were not the only ones. Apparently, the rest of the town is also under their rule. The only one not is Adam who apparently can go toe to toe with them. This place was a tavern before the church came." Guv takes out a magical rock from his sack and sinks his teeth into it, draining the essence.

"You didn't drink from Tammy?" Torin questions.

Guv averts his eyes and doesn't answer.

"Never mind." Torin places a hand on his chin. "The owner here can defy them. If he did, why didn't the residence? Could it be a lot of them are half-breeds here?"

"We need more information. I don't think we will find it using Tammy." Guv places the rock on the table.

"You seem very protective of this Tammy. Did something happen between the two of you?" Torin's side glance perceives Guv's thoughts. "This one did get to you."

Guv scowls. "I don't know what you mean! Back to the matter at hand. What can we do about them?"

"Will have to wait and see what they do. In the meantime, I think we need Granger. Breaking into that church might give us a bit more answers than we have at the moment." Torin sighs. "Let's hope the church takes the bait we set."

"I hope so. If they do take it, we might have an interesting scene for tomorrow. I also got to meet that Shin character."

Torin stares at him in astonishment. "You did!"

"Yes. I found something very odd about that fellow. Even though he did look like a vampire. Something smelled off about him. He smelled like a tomato wrapped in a rotten corpse. I found that very odd about him." Guv taps his fingers on his arms.

"Mm. I've never heard of anyone smelling like that." Torin remarks dryly. "We will need a plan of when Granger arrives to

break into that church. I might have something in mind since I did hear an interesting rumor."

"Do I even want to know what is in that twisty mind of yours?" Guv replies sarcastically.

Torin smirks with delight. "Another time, my friend."

Chapter 3



Guv has a restless night, not getting much sleep. After changing his clothes, he heads downstairs to the breakfast area in hopes of this being a day to get more answers.

A lot of food is in the carts, but doesn't see the Basinate Worms from yesterday. Biscuits, boiled eggs, sauteed shrooms along with other items that don't catch his attention. He takes a couple of biscuits along with boiled eggs and sits down. At least with food being free right now, is a relief.

A few people stare at him while they enter. They shy away from him.

Guv glances to the kitchen, noticing the chefs aren't around either. *Looks like those interesting things are happening faster than I thought.* He finishes his meal and steps into the main hall standing very still. *What is she doing here?*

At the front counter, Tammy slams her hand down in frustration. "I need to see Adam!"

"Look. We already paid for the shipment last night." Madrian argues with her penna moving back and forth in her hand.

"It's not that! Please! I need to see him!" Tammy pleads.

Unable to hear anymore, Guv walks over to her, then looks to the entrance spotting a few knights entering.

"There she is! Grab her!" One knight orders orders with his staff pointing at her. Two knights rush forward.

No they don't! They were supposed to come after me, not her!

"Now hold on!" Madrian puts her Penna down while yelling at them.

Tammy turns around with a frightened look on her face.

At the same time, Guv grabs both knights by their necks, halting their approach. "That's enough out of you." He tosses them like sandpaper out the front door and glares at the other knight. "I don't know what you are aiming for, but you don't treat a lady that way." He silently kicks himself, aware that is just what he did last night. The guilt increases.

The other knight hisses at him with one hand pointing at him. "You stay out this, half-breed! Those eyes speak more than words. I'd wager you were the one responsible for this!"

Tammy rushes behind Guv, clutching his shirt. "It wasn't him!"

Yes it was. Guv remains standing tall between them. He is aware of the fear in a few peoples eyes. "I suggest you take your leave."

The other knights are already standing behind the first one with their swords drawn.

Not looking forward to a fight, but I'll do what I have to.

Guv frowns as he feels Tammy tremble against him. It makes his skin crawl with displeasure of the thought of her being frightened. The desire to protect rattles his insides but he still doesn't move.

"You hand-"

"I suggest you take your leave." Adam raises his hand towards them. "You know very well what I can do to you if you piss me off. You have no authority in this place." His presence forces the other knights to lower their weapons.

The knights glare angry, but they stand down. "We will take our leave. For now." They depart with one last glance towards Guv and Tammy.

Guv sighs and looks at Adam. "I'm glad you showed up. I was not looking forward to another fight with them."

Adam glances at them. "You are not the only ones. Lately, they have been hunting half-breeds like mad. Makes it very frustrating." He regards Madrian who looks a bit shaky. "You alright over there?"

"Yes, sir. Glad Guv showed up when he did," Madrian replies and lowers her head to the counter.

"Same," Tammy's small voice peers up at Guv. "If you hadn't stepped in when you did, I ..."

"But I did. They didn't hurt you before, did they?" Guv asks.

Tammy lets go of his shirt and steps back. "No. I managed to get away."

Why were they after her? I don't understand this.

"Guv. I want you to take a couple of days off to yourself." Adam regards Tammy. "You, Missy, are going to talk with me in my office." He along with Tammy walk behind the counter through the door. It closes.

Guv looks at Madrian, still a bit shaken along with a few others. He casts a quick side glance to where the knights were. *Do they know about my dual identity? If that is the case, why proceed slowly? Why go after Tammy?*

"Thank you," Madrian says.

It startles him. "You're welcome." Guv walks upstairs to his room. This plan didn't go the way it was meant to at all. He steps over the window and pulls back the curtains. At the church, you can see a few shadows making angry gestures to each other. With a sigh, he walks over to the chair and pulls it out, then sits down. Thrusting both hands through his hair in utter frustration over this mess.

Much time passes with no answers.

Tap. Tap.

Guv glances at the door. *No one should know I'm here except for the clerk, boss, and Max.* He decides not to answer right away.

Tap. Tap

Guv walks over and opens the door. "Tammy!" He stares at her in shock.

Tammy lowers her hand while looking nervously right and left. "I, . . . May I come in?"

Guv's thoughts are in complete disarray. Unsure of even why she should be here. "You do realize this is my room?" Her smile makes his pulse race. The scent of her shampoo in her hair floats up teasing him. *I'm. . . . attracted to her?*

"It's why I'm here." Tammy places her hand on his chest. "To thank you."

Guv looks down at her small hand. His heart feels like it's pounding in his ears, hoping she doesn't hear it. With his voice still firm, replies, "Your Welcome."

Tammy leans in closer. Her body fully pressed against his while pressing her cheek against his chest. "You're so warm."

Guv swallows, twice. His hand inches up towards her shoulders only to stop before touching them. *I can't do this to her!*

I'm the one that scared her! He takes a couple of steps back. "I .. think you should leave."

Tammy lowers her eyes for a few moments with a slight blush rising in her cheeks. "I. . . want to thank you, personally."

Personally?! Guv takes a couple more steps back, aware of the chair behind him. The room becomes smaller as he watches her move towards him. Her hips swaying catches his attention. He looks down into her eyes with her hands going around his neck, pressing her lips against his. The softness of them triggers more warning signs that for some reason at that moment doesn't reach him. His arms wrap around her, bringing her closer to him.

A soft gasp escapes her lips.

Dammit, I shouldn't be doing this! Guv raises his head and grabs her shoulders forcing her away from him. His breathing is ragged along with the hunger for her. "I have. . . . a condition at night. One that is not a good idea to be around." His voice doesn't sound as strong as before.

Tammy swipes her tongue across her lower lip.

Guv groans inwardly, very much aware of how he reacted to that.

"Your heart is beating as fast as mine." Tammy leans in closer with her lips on his neck. "I'm already aware. Madrian told me. I want this."

Guv places a finger under her chin forcing her to look up at him. The hunger in her eyes is visible along with a hint of shyness. *I'm going to be damned to hell for this!* Unable to ignore, he picks her up in his arms and carries her over the bed, placing her gently on it.

Tammy smiles up at him while placing both hands above her head, stretching out her body.

Guv turns and closes the door. He walks back to the bed while stripping his shirt off letting it drop to the floor.

Tammy reaches up for him.

Guv sinks into the bed on top of her and kisses her very passionately. She grabs his broad shoulders, kissing him back. It feels incredible. Her scent. Her shivers running up and down her body. And how smooth her skin feels under his touch. He feels very much alive for the first time in his life as the heat consumes them both.



Much time has passed. Guv glances at the window spotting the sunlight glinting on the side panels. *Must be past noon.* He glances down at Tammy fast asleep against him with her cheek pressed firmly on his chest. His arm tightens around her.

She sighs in her sleep.

What the hell have I done? Thinking back to past times, it wasn't unusual for him to have a one night stand with other women. It happened a lot. Usually the same approach. Why was this different?

Tammy snuggles closer into his warmth.

Guv places his chin on the top of her head. The only reason they were up here was to figure out if they were hunting for him since the incident at the broken down pub. He remembers it being odd that a lot of the houses they talked about were worn down. Almost as if someone had paid them to do it.

Then there was the time traveling north up here through the mountain pass. Spotted several scouts on the peaks looking out for someone. The main reason why Torin went ahead and he fell back. They would count on him arriving early if they were aware of his changing or magical abilities.

"Mm." Tammy murmurs, bringing her hand up his chest.

"Morning."

Guv looks down at the smile on her lips. Inside he cringes. *I can't have her know about my past.* Not realizing his body stilled.

She raises her head and looks up at him with sleepy eyes.

"Is something the matter?"

Guv forces himself to relax. "Morning. I just have a lot on my mind." He brushes a hand on her cheek. She smiles. "It's past noon."

Tammy sighs and rests her cheek back on his chest. "So it is. Can I stay here a bit longer?"

Guv stares up at the ceiling. "Sure." A few seconds pass by. "Mind if I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"What. . . Why was those knights after you?" Guv glances down at her for a moment.

Tammy stills then taps her finger on his chest. "They thought I was hiding someone they were searching for called Monte. Why would I know and how did they find out that I was . . . never mind."

"Hiding someone? You mean it wasn't about the item I overhead before?"

Tammy crosses her arms on his chest with her chin resting on her hands. "No. They seem to want this person badly. I don't know who they are." She gazes up at him with steady eyes.

All of a sudden, the desire to tell her truth hits him hard. Guv swallows it down, forcing himself to remain calm. "Are you staying over here for the night? You do realize I can't have you stay here."

Tammy smiles. "I know. Don't worry. Adam is letting me stay with him for a bit while I continue to work." She frowns as if a thought dawned on her.

"Something wrong?" Guv asks.

"No. . . just thought of something. I," Tammy looks at the door upon hearing footsteps. It passes them by heading down the hall. "I think I should leave as much as I want to stay." She slides across him off the bed displaying her lovely body.

Guv lowers his eyes, hiding his emotions. They are conflicted inside.

"Maybe I can see you another time." Tammy leans over and kisses him. She smiles then walks out of the room.

Guv throws his arm across his face. *What the hell. If she ever finds out I was the one responsible for putting her in this mess. She will hate me for the rest of my life!* He stiffens and sits up in bed. "Why the hell should I worry over that? It was just a one night stand." He stands up and picks up his clothes. The smell still lingers.

After using a gem to clean the room, Guv takes out a side pair of clothes he has for occasions like this.

"Someone had a great time."

Guv scowls at Torin while placing both hands on his hips. "You helped in the matter, didn't you?" He puts the clothes on.

Torin lips turn upwards with a twinkle in his eyes. "Maybe I did. You seem to be in quite the disarray. Not your normal thing."

Guv swears while thrusting a hand through his hair. "What did you manage to find out?"

"The church was started one hundred years ago. Eighteen years later, it switched authorities." Torin sits down on the chair then crosses his legs.

"So, Shin Beawolf was not the original leader." Guv sits in the other chair.

"No. Can't even be certain that he is from the Shrine up north. Rumors that he isn't but nothing is verified."

Guv sighs. "So we learned a bit, but not enough. Are they even connected to the group in Neshmire?"

"I still can't verify that. Question worth a million gold coins." Torin taps a hand on the table. "Granger will be here tomorrow. With these events in motion. I think we can set up the next part."

"Just, don't tell him about this, okay?" Guv regards him with a sarcastic glance. "I know you too well. You will use this against him and get me in trouble."

Torin smiles mischievously. "I'll do my best, My Dear Sir. I make no promises." He walks to the side door and leaves him there.

Guv groans while placing his head in both of his hands. *Granger will kill me. And Tammy. . .* His thoughts stop. Why is he constantly worrying about her? He needs to focus on the next set of events.

That night progresses smoothly. No interruptions or even movements from the church. The next day is another story. A lot of knights travel up and down the path. Their weapons are drawn, making it very uncomfortable.

Guv watches them, noticing Shin has yet to appear. He spots a few people from the casino handing out fliers to people. *Did something happen?*

Knock. Knock.

Guv replies. "Yes?"

"It's me, Adam. We need to talk."

Guv unlocks and opens the door. "What is it?"

"I know I told you to take a couple of days off. Problem is I'm a bit short of staff at the moment. I have a huge play going off tonight and I need some muscle to set it up. If you don't mind, that is." Adam regards him shrewdly.

Guv presses his lips together. "Honestly it sounds much better than staying up here."

Adam laughs. "I hear ya. Come on down."

They leave to head down to the theater. Several people are trying to move props around. Guv works his muscles by moving the heavy stuff first.

Apparently, their lead bunny girl and actress called Vera is making an entrance. She has before but this time, it will be huge. The director called Magus along with his assistant Locks who are delegating who will be there.

Guv places the last item on the stage. He looks at the props manager. "Will there be anything else?"

"You there!"

Guv stiffens, then stares at Magus approaching them.

"You have a great voice!"

Guv regards the manager with questionable eyes, then switches it back to Magus. "Sorry, but I'm hired for manual labor." He turns around and stops with Locks standing in front of him. "Look, my answer is no."

"Come now. I'm sure I can make it worth it. What would you like, money? or perhaps a permanent position?" Magus taps a penna on the clipboard.

"Lay off, both of ya!" The props manager grumbles at them. "Boss already has an agreement since he has an ailment at night."

Magus frowns. "It was just an offer."

Guv sighs with relief and leaves the theater. Out of the corner of his eye, he spots the owner, Adam waving his hand at him. "Yes, Boss?"

"I know a few are a bit afraid of those eyes of yours since they have a glow. But my son, Domar, hasn't returned from the market with the goods for tonight. I hate to ask since the sun has begun to set, but could you at least get those goods and then inform me of what he is doing?" Adam places both hands together, as if in a prayer.

Guv presses his lips together. He will be seeing Tammy again. It excites him while at the same time fills him with dread. He spots a glint in Adam's eyes. *Just how many people know?* "Fine. I'll go."

Adam smiles in delight.

Guv turns around and walks out of the theater with his boots not making a single noise. People both inside and out glance at him as he strides with a casual aura about him.

A few people are outside the house. One is dusting the front porch. They spot him and usher the others inside then slam the door and windows closed.

Wonder what that is about. Guv glances at them, noticing a few more acting very skittish. *Guess I did make a statement.*

Up ahead is a wagon with several boxes lying on the ground. Not one is put inside or anyone standing around. Guv peers around the side of the wagon.

On the fence rails is a young man resting their elbows on it with a dreamy look on their face gazing inside.

Guv glances inside and spots Tammy. She is stocking items on the shelves. A pair of glasses that look a bit worn are resting on her nose and fall down slightly. *Sucks she is adorable even with*

those glasses. He shakes himself inwardly and loads the cargo in the wagon.

The young man sighs.

Guv scowls at Domar. *Boy is completely useless.* He turns around and loads the rest of the crates into the wagon. As he walks down the path to the shack, a side glance of Tammy dusting off a shelf makes him pause. He quickly regains himself and moves the rest of the cargo from the back.

After, he walks around the wagon and stops.

Domar is waving his hand at her with a silly grin on his face.

With a scowl Guv walks up behind him with his hands on his hips, glaring at the boy.

Tammy looks at Domar then behind him with a smile.

Whack!

Domar stumbles over the rail, staring at Guv in astonishment. "What was that for?"

Guv crosses his arms. "The cargo is loaded and you're late. The fact I had to come out here to your job is pathetic. Get back to your pops before I tell him about this."

Domar flushes as he gets up. "Fine." He seethes at Guv. "I still own her!"

Guv grabs the boy's arm and shoves him hard against the wagon. With a startled look on Domar's face, "Look here, boy. No one owns Tammy. Get those goods back before I give you a whipping." His voice is low, vibrating with anger. He releases him and steps back.

Domar nervously gets up in the wagon without even glancing back at the shop. He turns it around and leaves.

Guv sighs. *Hellfire*. Without gazing back, strides back to the theater. Inside, you can see quite the crowd starting for the night. He steps up to the counter. "Is Adam around?"

Madrian glances at him. "Nope. Been busy with all the darn requirements for tonight's group." She leans over and lowers her voice. "Ya didn't hear this from me, but a few of the knights are going to be out patrolling. Rumor is they are searching for a certain half-breed that appeared recently." She glances to the side. "Some say that this person is very good looking for a vampire."

"Really?"

"Mhm." Madrian leans back with a wistful expression. "It'd be so nice if I had someone drop in on me and sweep me out of this place. Not my luck, ya know." She chuckles.

Guv shakes his head. "Maybe you just need the right man to sweep you up a chimney!" He teases.

"Bah!" Madrian bats her eyes at him. "Off with ya. I'll let Adam know ya were here."

Guv smirks, then heads upstairs without getting supper from the dining room. It's awfully crowded tonight and doesn't want a commotion before tonight. At least it was good to learn they are hunting for him. Just doesn't like how it all went down.

Up the stairs a few people stare at him. Guv ignores it. Usually, it doesn't bother him since it happens all the time. Why should it bother him now? By the time he enters his room, the sun has mostly set with the last rays of orange and red glinting in the distance. He waits for night to descend.

The night comes out. The stars are high with no moon around.

Guv sighs looking down at the people gathering for the night. A lot are. He spots a group of knights making arguments with a few people. Max stops them and gets them inside. "Mm."

A scraping sound comes from above.

"About time you showed up, Torin," Guv replies dryly.

Torin in a cat position with his hands and feet on the ceiling while his tail is curled replies, "Always nice to know you have lost your touch." He somersaults off it and lands gracefully on the floor. He wipes a bit of dust off his vest.

"Nice to know you're still as graceful as ever," Guv sighs.

"Something wrong?" Torin peers over his shoulder down below. "Ah. quite the crowd. We might need a strategy for tonight."

"Granger is here?"

Torin steps back. "Yes. Knowing him, he is probably hitting on a few bunny girls before getting up here. You know him. Always has to do it his way." He places a hand on his hip with his foot tapping the floor.

"Maybe I need to put a leash on both of you. At least then, I could put you in a room so you can dish it out with him." Guv smirks with a side glance.

Torin twists his lips at him in frustration. "I'll have you know, I don't float that way!"

Guv steps away. "Could have fooled me, the way you two act. Come on. We can wait for him in the next room. I'll leave a trap in here in case anyone shows up. I don't think they will just yet, but we will see."

"Let's hope so." Torin perks his forward and stops at the side door. "I think Shin Beawolf will be here tonight. Might try and go after that young woman again." He notices Guv scowl. "I'm sure with Adam here, won't be a problem. Why does it bother you so much?"

"How the hell should I know?" Guv opens the door fast, nearly slamming it in Torin's face and continues walking down.

Torin glances back at the window then down the room.
"Yup. Probably won't admit it since it is his first time. But he is hooked. Finally got caught. I'm going to have to talk to Granger about helping him with this." He sighs, not really liking this but wants him to find a bit of happiness. Even with everything going on. He goes down the hall shutting the door behind him.

Chapter 4



Granger steps into the room, scowling. Fully aware he is late. He looks left, then right. "Both of you come down from up there. Honestly, I had a good reason this time for being late." He walks over to the bed and plops himself down.

"What is it this time?" Guv detaches his feet from the beam and lowers himself to stand on the floor. Torin follows.

"You know those knights. We need to be careful about this." Granger puts his finger to his nose. "A few of those guards are vampires. One of the high knights called Shin Beawolf actually put quite a few of them on patrol. If we are to get past them. We need a distraction."

"Mm. I have an idea, but Torin you're going to have to stay out of it and keep watch with me on the roof." Guv pulls a chair to him and sits down.

Torin scowls at him. "It's a bar incident isn't it? Why is it always a bar incident!!" He plops in the chair beside him while crossing his arms. His ears are twitching.

"Looks like I'm up." Granger turns the chair around and sits down with his arms resting on top. "Mind filling me up on what's been going on?"

Torin walks over to the window, while telling him of the recent events.

Granger whistles at the end of this story. "Got someone after ya. Church is new. And somehow Neshmire is connected. Don't that beat all." He raises a hand up. "Guess that is why I'm needed, eh?"

Torin growls. "Sure. You took your time!"

"Enough, both of you. We need to get into that church. Tonight might be the only night. The performance is supposed to last all night." Guv crosses his ankles and arms. "Granger, do you think you could pull off a little side job? We need something to happen in the bar area."

Torin snorts. "Don't spoil all the liquor? I know what you did last time, you nard!"

Granger broadly smiles. "I think I can do that. I can't make any promises, but I'll see what I can save ya." He winks at Torin.

"Come on. We have to wait up top to proceed. I'm aware you can't pull off this next part." Guv grabs Torin's arms and teleports them to the rooftop. "I know you love your wine, just let it slide this time."

Torin swears. "I hate this idea!"

Meanwhile, downstairs at the bar area, several people are sitting around the tables. It's mostly quiet. Granger saunters over to the bartender. "You look frustrated." He glances over to a few tables that have quite a few knights sitting there with adventurers. The adventures on one side, while the knights on the other.

The bartender tries to smile, but sighs. "I hate it when they come over. I mean business is good, but I wish they would leave

owning areas outside. It really defeats the purpose of me being a bartender."

"Mm." Granger looks around, noticing that several knights have the same drink in their hand. "Is that Red Marlow they have?"

"It is. Nice catch." The bartender reaches down and brings up a glass. "What do you want?"

Granger ponders for a few moments. People behind him look inside the bar area, but immediately leave when they catch sight of the knights. He lowers his voice, "Just for safety purposes, is this the reason why people are afraid to come in? Because they will do them harm?"

The bartender picks up a glass and pours Shire Wine. "Not my place to say." He places the drink in front of him with a note underneath.

Granger picks up the drink, reading it. *They will use violence to ensure they are the correct ones. Quite infuriating. They also own the trade up here, but don't own the theater which is why they cause a ruckus whenever Vera is around.* This might actually work to their advantage. He makes two taps on the bar counter, while sipping his drink.

The bartender takes the napkin and tosses it in the trash bin. The magical item on it glows, burning it. He brings out a fresh bottle of Red Marlow from the back and places it below the counter for the next round of drinks.

One of the knights stands up and walks over. "Give me that dam bottle."

The bartender scowls. "You still haven't paid your tab!"

"You get paid! Out of your taxes that is!" The knight sneers, then grabs the bottle moving back to the table.

Granger watches them laugh and giggle. *That tactic might work.* "I'll have what they are having."

The bartender raises their eyebrows. They walk to the back room and bring out a fresh bottle of Red Marlow. He greatly frowns as he pours the drink, then hands it over to him. Fully aware the knights are glaring at them.

Granger hands over the coins for it. "Thank ya." He takes the bottle and places it beside the drink.

A knight stands up and walks over to him. He unsheathes the blade and places it on the counter with a threatening smile.

The bartender pales while observing both of them.

"You can't drink stuff like that. Not for someone as cheap as you." The knight grabs the bottle.

Granger takes a sniff, aware of the foul smell. "You might be right. I wonder why this smells nice? Question is, does it taste as good as it smells?"

The bartender sends a pleading look towards him, aware of what will happen.

"You think you are qualified to taste this?" The knight hisses at him and plops the bottle on the table. "Let's make a bet. If you can drink this, then I'll just take the bottle." The other knights snicker with this comment.

Granger unphased replies, "And if you can't, then I will prove my point." He places the drink to his lips and slowly sips, allowing the flavor to fill his mouth. Then right after, gags on it, throwing the drink down. "Was this watered down? The smell is fine, but the flavor tastes of salted dried fruit."

Silence descends on the bar as everyone turns to look at them. The knight pops off the cork and takes a swig. He immediately spits out the drink while slamming the bottle on the table. "What the hell is this?"

A few knights sip their drink, then spit it out. "What happened to our drink?"

The adventurers also have this happen to them.

"Bartender, explain this!" The knight beside Granger demands.

The bartender slowly picks up the glass and sniffs it. "It doesn't smell bad." He sips it, then makes an awful face. "Someone put Dried Squid in this? How many bottles are contaminated?" He tosses it down the drain. "Damn, now I have to check all of these."

Granger steps back as the knights along with other vampires rush over to give back their drinks.

They keep getting their drinks checked and it seems each one has the same thing. "I do apologize, but this will take a bit to fix. If you will head somewhere else. The bar is closed." The bartender glances at Granger.

Granger leaves the bar with his lips pursed. *That went better than planned. Now, time to head off to my next assignment.* The main area has fights ensuing because no drinks are being served.

A lot of people are upset by this. The only things they can serve now without being contaminated are teas, water, and anything non-alcoholic.

He leaves the theater to walk out in the cold air. *At least they will be entertained for a while. And I did get to drink Shire before it all went to waste.* He looks in the sack, spotting two fresh bottles. One for him and one for Torin. *Glad I got to snag it before it went to waste.*

At the church, Torin sits on the roof, watching the fight outside the bar. He raises a thumb up. In the next moment, Guv appears beside him.

"Do we have a way inside?" Guv asks.

"Nope. They put a seal barrier on the front door. The back one has a trap that lowers you to the basement where there is

poisonous gas. The windows are out since they have sensors."
Torin sighs. "Why put up so many?"

Guv looks over the side, not spotting any guards. "Wish I knew why I was getting a bad vibe."

"Probably because this whole building is a trap. Quite clever. Shall we go through the front door?" Granger replies from behind, then walks up to the top tower and jumps over the side. He disappears.

Torin scowls. "Sometimes, I really want to deck him."

Guv smirks while following behind. After descending down the narrow chimney, he stops in the air just above Granger.

Granger places his hand on the wall. A symbol appears with several lines overlapping each other. With a movement of his hands, works to move them from one side to the other. He carefully moves them without any of them touching.

"Always amazing how you can do that." Guv smirks.

Granger smiles. "Well. I do love opening my locks. Not the one in the theater mind you." The symbol turns it to the side. Another passage opens into a hallway.

"You first." Guv offers a hand.

Granger snorts. "Only because you're the muscled head and can pull up the rear!"

Guv chuckles.

Granger enters the hallway. It looks like any other. They walk down the stairs to the lower floor. "Looks like a normal church, except for that awful smell coming from that window." He points to it.

"A passage down or something else?" Guv steps over and examines it. "What is this?"

Granger frowns. "Neat little trick. Overlaying the traps like that. Only Dermhimer can pull something like that off. But he died a while back if memory serves me right."

"Pretty sure he didn't have an apprentice." Guv studies the room. For a church, it has your podium. Benches for people to sit at. Along with several donations. But why the setup like this if only knights are staying here and not maidens. "I haven't noticed one maiden since we have been here."

"For a church that is odd. But we are dealing with very eccentric people." Granger studies the device. "This was done recently."

Guv stiffens. "That would mean someone else knows this skill?"

"So it would seem. I do find that odd." Granger studies the other windows and spots similarities. "What did you hear about his death?"

"Several rumors." Guv kneels at the podium studying the floor. "I heard when he died in that tower. The screams could be heard across the ocean. The odd thing about that one is his tower lies in a desert. Not near any oceans."

"True. Another one I heard was he had recent visitors. Some say they tortured him to gain information. Highly doubt that since he was incredibly skilled." Granger frowns at the painting. "Why would they put a person here with wings? The blue dress is awful on her."

Guv stands up and stares at the painting. "Don't ask me to date someone like that."

Granger chuckles, then spots something below it. "Well. What do we have here?" He kneels below the painting and examines a light green gem.

Guv regards him working on the lock. "A secret passage?"

Granger grins. "Let me work my magic." His fingers dance across the gem as if playing music. Click. The gem moves inside the wall. The floor trembles, revealing a passage downstairs. "Shall we explore?" He heads downstairs.

Guv follows behind. The path upstairs closes, leaving no trace it was ever opened. Downstairs are windows with curtains over them. "Why windows down here?" He parts one and stiffens.

Granger looks over and stills.

"I've never seen anything like this." Guv remarks dryly. Through the window lies a figure. Its tentacles curl around the small human body while pressing its suction cups on it. The eyes on top are yellow and don't move a muscle. "Is it alive?"

Granger steps forward. The eye blinks. "Oh, hell no!" He takes a few steps back and stops at another window. Turning around, he pulls the curtain back. "What the hell is this?"

At the other window lies another creature. Only this one has spikes for arms and legs. while the body resembles a feather.

The door in the middle makes a sound which causes both of them to stiffen. Guv darts over and pulls Granger behind the curtain forcing them both to remain invisible behind it. The creature behind them moves and he puts a hand over both of their mouths.

Through the curtain the door opens. A nauseating smell floats their way. Tick. . . ., Tap. . . ., Tick. . . . The sound stops as a metal shoe stops near them. It taps the floor sending out vibrations.

Just great. I was sure no one was here. Guv peeks around the curtain, careful not to disturb it. He raises both eyebrows. A creature with a human face but with scales of that of a dragon. His horns are black with prominent features. You can tell with his aura, this person is not someone to double cross.

Granger pulls him back inside as the steps stop in front of the curtains. The creature behind them wiggles which doesn't ease their discomfort at all.

The footsteps turn and walk up the stairs. You can hear the heavy steps echoing down here. After a few moments, they come down here and walk through the door. The door magically reappears.

Granger tugs his arm and they make a quick exit back up to the rooftops. Both of them are heaving.

Torin crosses his arms. "You look like you have seen a ghost. What is the matter?"

Granger raises a hand. "Never. . . thought. . . I'd . . . live to . . . see that."

Guv glances at him, not even the slightest amused by this. "How the hell did a Dragonar wind up here? And what were those awful things?!"

"Dragonar?!" Torin stares at him completely stunned. "What awful things?"

"Ya, Damn." Granger looks over the ledge spotting a shadow. "We need to get back to the room ASAP."

Guv raises a hand teleporting them to the room. Hopefully no one noticed their presence while trying to get inside.

Back in the room, Torin grumbles. "Alright. Both of you tell me what happened down there."

Granger plops on the floor. "A nightmare. Never saw anything like that."

"You think Dermhimer might actually be alive?" Guv thrusts a hand through his hair.

"Tell me what happened." Torin places both hands on his hips.

"Well. We found his traps set up on the windows. One that only he could pull off. Remember that other rumor. Something about how he didn't die?" Granger stands up and places a sack on the table. He pulls out a mug along with a bottle of Shire.

"Yes. I remember. None was proven." Torin taps on foot on the floor.

"Ya well. I'm beginning to think that person might be alive. Just don't know where." Granger sips the drink, then turns around bracing himself against the table. "We also found a passage downstairs."

Guv shakes his head. "How do they even do that? There was part human and something else behind those windows. A door too and we almost got caught by the Dragonar."

Torin crosses his arms and paces back and forth. "A Dragonar. Something else is going on in that church. Dermhimer traps. Something about a half-breed. And to top off that is Neshmire playing some dirty handed trick." He stops and looks at his hand. "Now what do we do?"

"We need a lot more information on that church. Question is how to get it?" Guv sits on the bed. "Even with me staying on the side, there is very little intel gathering I can do. I've already attracted a lot of unwanted attention because I'm not seen at night."

Torin smiles while his eyes gleam mischievously.

"I have a bad feeling about this idea you just thought of." Guv places his head in his hand.

Granger purses his lips while averting his eyes. "No comment."

"It would work. but we need a certain outfit to pull this off. And you, my dear playboy will need to steal an identity." Torin walks to the desk and pulls out a piece of paper. Writing down a

few things on it, he hands it over to Granger. "Think you can pull it off?"

Granger looks down at the note and swears. "I knew you were up to no good."

The next day, Guv is pulled to the side by Max. "Orders from Boss. You are to stay by my side for today. I get to teach you how to be a poker dealer."

Guv scowls while setting down the crate. "I'm not a showy person. I don't do well in that area."

"Don't I know it." Max glances to the side and lowers his voice. "Shin and his men have been hounding for answers about where you are. Tammy won't settle down unless Adam has you stay somewhere where they can't really look for you or cause a lot of trouble. If ya know what I mean."

Guv sighs. "Alright." Not really like this very much spends the whole day with Max. Learning how to deal cards, play hands among other things. Which apparently is quite good at it.

Meanwhile, a few people found out Granger was a doctor. Not a healer either, but one that relieves stress and fatigue with his patients.

Magus summons him to his side at the theater entrance.

Granger stops just short, giving him a shrewd look over glance. "Mm. You want something?"

"I've heard you are good at what you do. I need advice to help a certain person of interest." Magus glances down at his hand for a moment, then looks at Granger.

"I have a strict policy, I only talk with my patients. I'm aware of others wanting to help. But if you were to tell me something in confidence and they found out, it would be bad business for you and me." Granger crosses his arms with a frown.

"Alright." Magus looks down at his papers. "The new bunny girl who is supposed to be on stage tonight needs someone to give her a bit of encouragement. I need you to talk to her about how important this job is. Her sister is throwing a tantrum."

"Ah. Show is about to start in an hour?"

"Yup. Her room is down the hall. B36." Magus jabs the penna in that direction.

Granger nods his head and heads that way. *That went better than I thought.* He stops at the door.

Knock. Knock.

No answer.

"For the last time!" A woman yells. "This is not a party! I need you to get your act together, Nat!"

"I can't do it, Sis!" An item hits the wall. "Go away!"

The door opens and a woman wearing a purple bunny outfit stands before Granger. "You're in my way, loser." She seethes.

Granger steps aside and watches her stomp down the hall. *Love her sassiness but that demand could go down a notch.* He looks back inside.

At the mirror, Nat rests her head in both hands. Her shoulders are stiff. "Why does she do this every time?"

Granger closes the door, walks up to her, and places a hand on her shoulder. "Every time?"

Nat stiffens, then peers up at him. "Who are you?"

"I'm here to listen. Now tell me what has been going on." Granger replies in a soothing voice while rubbing his hand up and down her back.

Nat sighs. "I just get a bit frozen on the floor quite a few times. It throws me off my game. There was only one time I had actually didn't, but had some Lagray Tea."

Granger raises both eyebrows. *I wonder if she knows what that even is.* He continues to listen.

"I couldn't find it afterward. Someone said I must be lying." Nat folds her arms on the dresser and places her head on it.

Granger steps away and pours a cup of hot water in the mug. *Not quite a tea cup, but it works.* He takes out a small vial and pours a couple of drops. After taking a glance at Nat in her distressed state, puts a couple of more drops. The water turns red with a sweet aroma filling the room.

Nat lifts her head and looks at him bringing over a drink. "What is that?"

"Oh, just some tea I had on me. It's not quite the same thing, but close enough." Granger hands it over. "I hope this helps you out."

Nat sips the drink.

Granger kisses her cheek. "I have faith you will succeed tonight." He leaves the room and heads downstairs, passing her sister along the way.

At the theater, the crowd is a bit smaller tonight. Six bunny girls take to the stage. They throw up their legs high. Nat's cheeks carry a flush.

Granger crosses his arms. *Nat has some really fine legs.*

"I don't know what you did." Magus comments beside him. "I knew she was good but didn't have that much confidence in herself."

"She is lovely to look at." Granger admires her turn and the cute way her bunny tail wiggles.

"You get a small bonus for this," He replies, then walks away.

The crowd keeps cheering them on. After the performance, the applause deafens the room. Nat rushes over to Granger and

throws her arms around his neck, kissing him on the cheek. "You were wonderful!" She rushes back to the other girls, giggling while heading backstage.

Later that night, or almost morning. Granger steps into the room.

Nat is lying on the bed, sound asleep.

Granger walks over and brushes his hand on her cheek. "I shouldn't try that again. She doesn't even know the full context of this item." He walks inside the closet and grabs an outfit along with a wig. "I should take a bit of makeup too."

Afterwards, heads back to his room and places the items on the bed.

Knock.

Granger swears and throws the items under the blanket. It makes a large lump beneath it. He opens the door and raises both eyebrows.

"Hiya, fella." Nat's sister raises a hand up on the door frame and leans in a very seductive manner. "Thought I'd come by and give you a thank ya."

Why of all times does this happen now? Granger inwardly groans. He brings her hand to his lips. "I would love to take you up on this offer, my dear. However..." He looks to the bed.

She pouts. "Pity. Here, I thought you had good taste." The door closes.

It leaves a bad taste in Granger's mouth.

Torin laughs.

"I knew you were there!" Granger scowls, then turns around spotting him at the curtains. "It's not funny!"

Torin laughs harder. "You had an amazing offer and had to turn it down. I'm going to remember this one for quite some time."

Granger stomps over to the bed. "Come on you old fart. Time to get me ready for my game today." *Don't know why he has such a smirk. It's not the first time this happened.*

Torin walks over and prepares his setup. "Be prepared. Shin Baewolf will meet the owner today. Rumor has it it's about the break in a couple of days ago. I know you will be in this disguise for a while." He picks up the brush and dabs a bit of makeup on it. "We need as much info as we can."

"I'll play my part." Granger grumbles. "I don't know why I'm always the one who has to dress up like a woman."

Torin smiles while continuing his work. It takes quite a bit of work but it's complete. Granger puts on the bunny outfit looking quite good in it. He heads downstairs to start work.

Chapter 5



That morning, Adam Baywright sits in the main hall with a drink on the table. He sips his drink while staring down at his paperwork for the day. By his facial expression, you can tell he is not happy with this meeting.

Shin Beawolf enters the room. The people working at the front desk still for a brief moment, then return to their daily duties. He walks over and stands before Adam. "We need somewhere private."

"We can talk here, or you can have a fight on your hands." Adam snaps his glass onto the table. "What brings you here?"

Shin Beawolf sits down and crosses his legs. "You got my request. Bring that person here."

Adam Baywright slowly picks up his penna and writes on the document. Several people pause as the high tension between these two rises.

"You better answer to me." Shin slams a fist on the table.

Adam slowly raises his eyes to him and raises a finger. A binding wraps around Shin, forcing him into a freezing state. "You will remember your place. I'm also a vampire and even though not as high a rank as you, I can still kick your ass."

"You are aware the town will suffer for this." Shin grins evilly.

"You may own the town, but not here. I assure you I will make it known through all my trades just how awful Neshmire is and force them loose more than what it's worth." Adam growls.

Shin frowns. "Fine. I'll play nice. . . for now."

Adam releases him and picks up his penna. "Why are you here?"

Shin sits down then crosses his legs. "I had a visitor a couple of nights ago. I'd like to speak with a person called Guv. Something tells me he was over there." He looks to the side spotting a drink. The bunny girl stiffens and hides behind the counter, refusing to go over. "I'd like a drink."

Adam motions another bunny girl to step in.

A bunny girl sighs then walks over the counter and picks up the drink. In a small feminine voice she grumbles, "You do realize I get extra for this?" She walks over to the table and places the drink in front of him. With a swish of her tail, marches back to the counter.

Shin Beawolf notices this particular bunny. "New person?"

"Fill in. Last night went off pretty good." Adam Baywright gestures to a crew worker. "Find Guv. I think he is in the storage area moving some stuff around. Let him know I need him." He puts the penna down.

"Yes, Sir." They leave.

Adam Baywright purses his lips. "You had better have a good reason for accusing a worker of mine. I do not tolerate anyone messing in where they shouldn't."

Shin keeps watching the bunny girl. "Of course I do." He switches his gaze back to him. "He is the only one that meets the criteria."

"Proof?" Adam asks.

"Perhaps you should ask him what he does at night." Shin places both elbows on the table and taps his fingers together. "I mean do you honestly trust that bunny girl who saw him?"

Adam seethes. "I trust all of my employees here." He glances up spotting Guv standing beside him. "Sit down."

Guv sits down in a chair and winces hearing the creak below him. "I think I should stand." He stands back up and places both hands behind his back. "Is something the matter?"

Shin continues to watch his physique. "How do you shrink your size?"

"I beg your pardon?" Guv looks down at himself, then stares at him somewhat dumbfounded.

Adam snickers. "If there is a person that can do that, I know several women would be signing up." He sips his drink, clearly amused.

Shin frowns and looks down at his drink. "I need a refill." He motions to the same bunny girl standing at the counter.

The bunny girl spots him and picks up a decanter, bringing over another drink. "Refill?"

Shin raises his glass, admiring her greatly. "Yes." While pouring the drink, he grins at her legs.

The bunny girl turns around and stops looking down at the hand Shin grabbed. "I have work to do."

"Come now. I can pay quite well." Shin smiles and brings her hand to his lips.

Guv quickly looks away, with the bunny girl scowling at him. He coughs.

"Enough. Let Amy go." Adam watches her walk away to the counter.

Amy snaps the decanter on the counter, then leaves the room to the casino area.

"Amy, huh? You said they were new?" Shin asks.

"Back to the matter at hand. Why do you think he was the one that entered?" Adam picks up a penna and writes on the documents. "You can't get me an answer, I will have the knights of Veshar barred from ever stepping in here along with anyone from Neshmire."

"You do realize how much bloodshed that will cost?" Shin scoffs.

"Won't be the first time. I'm thinking of picking up a few arrangements with the Draugars. At least they have better manners than you." Adam doesn't look up but the atmosphere shifts.

Shin stands up. "I still say he did it. But, I will take my leave. For now." He marches right out of the theater and slams the door.

"That went well. Were you even at the place, Guv?" Adam turns his gaze to meet Guv's straight on.

Guv replies calmly, "No, sir. I was in my room all night."

"Very well." Adam looks over to the counter where a few people are laughing their ass off. "Enough over there." He yells. "I wonder if I should give that bunny girl a raise."

Guv presses his lips together not saying one word. Later that evening, he walks up to his room. A fresh plate of food lies there. "Torin is always good at cooking for me." He picks up a few

fresh crystals that have a lot of magic inside. He bites down and drains the essence through his teeth. The taste fills his mouth and sedates this hunger of his.

Torin steps in through the window. "I figured you hadn't eaten for a while."

"I know. Can't help it." Guv smirks.

I think Granger played his part too well. Adam is offering him a full service of becoming a permanent bunny girl."

Guv glares at him, while removing his teeth from the rocks. "Mm." *Dammit. I almost choked on that.*

"I mean, he did a wonderful job with that fellow Shin."

Guv swallows the food down. Aware part of it almost got stuck. "Are you sure you're not the one in love with him?"

"Me?" Torin gazes at him in shock for a moment, then frowns. "I don't swing that way." He walks over to the desk and hops on the edge with both legs dangling. "I did learn something. That Dragonar was the same person at the resting spot."

"We need to do something about that person, getting them into the light. Which means, we might actually need to steal a church. How to pull that off." Guv puts the fork down. "Do you think you can worm Granger in staying as a bunny girl?"

Torin crosses his arms. "I do believe I know where you are heading with this. A double blind, eh? Haven't pulled one of those off in a while."

"Do you think he will go for it?" Guv questions.

"Not on your life!" Granger shuts the door and tosses his wig on the bed.

"You haven't even heard what we want." Guv stands up with a profound gaze at him. He looks at Torin who shrugs.

Granger takes off the bunny ears and jabs at Guv. "I know what you're planning. I ain't no buffoon! But I refuse to seduce that

bastard!" He tosses the ears on the bed, then strips his clothes. "I'm taking a Bath! You can figure something else out!"

"Wait!" Torin raises both hands. "Hear me out. I just need you to play bunny girl for at least one more day. We need information on anything concerning the trade here."

Granger glares at him. "Do you even realize the trouble I had today? I had some asshole grab my ass, then another offer a one night stand. I kept getting teased about how great I am at my job!"

"Please!" Torin places both hands together. "I know you do not like it, but just one more day!"

"Fine!" Granger swears while storming into the bathroom.

Guv sighs. "Well, that turned out well. What now?"

Torin glances out the window and raises a finger to his lips. Quietly, he tip toes over the window gazing down. Several soldiers are heading to the church. Most of them do not have weapons on them. "We might have a problem."

Guv spots Shin stepping inside and shutting the doors.

"You think they will try and pull a fast one?"

"I wouldn't be surprised since you did catch their attention. I still have no idea why being a half vampire is so important?"

Torin frowns. "I feel we are missing something of great importance to this trade. I'm hoping with Granger acting as a bunny girl, my next trick will go off quite well."

"Alright. I'll have Granger help me set up this next part in a couple of days." Guv walks away from the window. "We are going to need another plan for that night."

Torin smiles. "I have just the person in mind. However, I think it might cost us a bit. Care to use that one ability of yours?"

Guv turns around and crosses his arms. "Mm. As you wish."



Later that morning, Granger puts on his bunny ears and looks in the mirror. "Just one more day."

Down the stairs past the hall in the casino, a bunny girl passes drinks to everyone at the craps table. A guy with sappy clothes admires her. "Come now, I'm sure someone like you can earn a bit of extra cash." He winks. "At night."

A woman sitting near him waves her hand. "You could always join me for the night. I do like undressing bunny girls."

Amy frowns. "I'm here to serve ya drinks. Not fool around with ya." She takes the silver platter and walks away from the table to the bar. "You'd figure I have a sign on me arse that says, Come and get me!" She grumbles.

The bartender chuckles. "Sometimes they are like that. Sucks you have a great figure and a nice pair of legs even for someone as tall as you."

"Hmph." Amy places the platter on the counter. "That is the fifth offer since this morning. I told Adam that I ain't staying another night. Only took this temporarily."

"Pity. Even our director wants you on stage."

Amy snorts. "I know. I told him yesterday it ain't happening." She spots another order coming in. "Time for me to take out more drinks. Where to this time?"

The bartender makes a few drinks, then places them on the platter. "Looks like this round is at the poker tables. Be careful. Only warning because of that one guy from yesterday is there."

"Thanks for the warning." Amy takes the drinks on the platter with her out onto the floor. Passing a few lookers that notice the way her hips sway. *Torin better pay me real good for this.*

At the poker table quite a few people stare at the new bunny girl placing their drinks on the table. Max coughs, forcing one guy to stay still.

Amy places the last drink on the table, then walks away to a different poker table.

"Amy?" Adyl gestures.

Amy walks over to her. "Yes, Ma'am?"

"You have done a fine job. I need you to head to the dressing room in the back. Mona forgot to hand me the reports of yesterday." Adyl points the far side.

Amy sighs. "Fine." She walks to the back of the room and enters. "Uh,"

Quite a few bunny girls have their outfits off while fixing their makeup on their legs, feet, and some even use it on places that shouldn't be named. Mona picks up a brush and waves it at another bunny girl. "Please! You figure with us working here, we don't know that Shin is up to no good."

"Again?" A different bunny girl rubbing her thighs laughs.

"Well, duh Trish." Quite a few giggles spread throughout the room.

Trish spots Amy. "Well, lookie here. We have the one with great legs."

Amy scowls. "Don't even start. I'm just here for the rest of today."

"Mm. . . . You did catch Shin's attention. He might pay ya good." Trish smirks with a twinkle in her eye.

Cynthia groans. "Lay off. None of us want to lay with that bastard." She tosses a bottle of clear gel at her. "Besides, I remember the last time he tried to go after you. Before Vera showed up."

"Hmph. Told him off too. Why did Ganny leave? I mean, all was great before Shin came." Trish removes the gel, placing a few tabs on her thighs, then rubs them down. "Wasn't that about the time the market went down?"

Amy listens while walking over to stand a bit behind Mona.

A different bunny girl replies, "I heard that Ganny was killed. My grandfather mentioned how only half-breeds have been down here. But since that time we have been hunted like dogs! I mean what is so great about it?"

"I know. Sucks being a half-breed." Mona looks behind her. "Need something?"

"A report." Amy replies.

"Ah, it's over there." Mona points to the cabinet. "Guess I forgot."

Amy looks in the cabinet and takes out the report. "What do you mean by hunting half-breeds like dogs?" She spots the curious glances. "I'm only asking because after I leave here, I have to travel through the gate down south. Since. . . I'm part Lycerium. I wondered if there was something I needed to be wary of?"

Trish ponders that. "You might be onto something."

"They have only hunted men in the last twenty years. Unless you have a sex change problem, they won't pay you much attention." Mona dabs the brush on her face.

"Why only men?" Cynthia whines. "Oh that reminds me. They really are going after that cutie. Guv, I think they call him?"

"Oh, don't I know it. Hot that one and." Mona frowns.

"Wonder why? I mean they are literally going after him quite brutally."

"Only reason he is safe for the moment is because of Adam. Wonder why boss is so protective of him. I mean I told him

what I saw that one night." Cynthia daps a bit of lipstick while staring at herself in the mirror. "You know what he told me?"

"What?" Mona asks.

"Don't worry about him. Wondered when he would be returning home. I hope she doesn't hear about this. I mean he grumbled under his breath like he already knew Guv. What was that about?" Cynthia places her lipstick after fixing a smudge down on the counter.

Amy, as if hearing too much, leaves the room. The rest of the day goes a bit better. With the occasional being hit on. At least for the time, was not slapped on the arse.

The next day, things go smoothly. Guv takes his work seriously and winds up lifting a lot of heavy cargo. He moves it from one room to another. The first wave of crates to unload from the five wagons takes half the day. Not even taking a break as sweat trickles down his neck. His muscles are bulging as if they are getting tons of exercise.

"Yo, Guv. You look a bit pale. Why don't you take a break and drink water?" A worker replies with concern in their voice.

"I'm alright."

"I insist!" Adam Baywright scowls. He jabs his finger to the chair. "Get a drink and sit down!" He works with the other crew to carry the last few crates into the other room.

Guv picks up a bottle of water from the table and sits in the chair. His breathing ragged. After drinking the first bottle, wipes his arm across his forehead. More sweat trickles down.

"Magus! Get more people down here. We need help unloading these." Adam orders.

Magus steps over and taps his board on his side. He spots Guv. "My Word! Guv, you look awful!" He walks over and places a hand on his forehead. "Damn you're burning up!"

"I'm fine. Just a bit tired." Guv drops his head to his hand.

"Locks! I need you!" Magus takes a step back.

Guv stands up, then falls to the side. His body thuds on the floor.

"Guv!" Magus kneels and shakes his shoulders. "Guv! Guv!"

At the same time, Adam orders a few bunny girls along with Magus and locks. "Take him up to his room. Wait. This way." He proceeds down the hall past the theater by the backstage and heads upstairs. "We will take him up here. It's quicker."

The others follow behind, very much aware of how heavy Guv is.

Torin in the shadows, smiles as this plan went better than planned. The fact Guv can drain essence, even his own, to make himself sick comes in quite handy. Now to set up the next part.

That night, Guv rests in bed. His body in his vampire form. A wet cloth is placed over his head.

In the hallway, several Knights of Versher press themselves up against the wall. They wait eagerly for orders to strike. Shin Beawolf sits in the theater watching the cheap performance on stage while sipping his drink. Afterwards, he gives his approval as the audience clap their hands.

The knights charge the door knocking it down.

"AAAH!" Female screams erupt from the back of the theater. Adam rushes towards the back and up the stairs. The knights are inside the room, completely shocked by what they see. Several women are not dressed with their clothes in front of them, hiding their nakedness.

One woman stands up with her dread locks shimmering down her back. "You get out of here you bastards!" Vera yells at them.

Adam escorts them down the hall on the stage, then jabs his finger at Shin. "Get the hell out of my theater! You are not welcome here! How dare you insult my girls!"

Shin stands up shocked. "Now wait a-"

"Now! You had no right to barge in Vera's Room!" Adam seethes with his anger. His shoulders tremble revealing just how angry he is.

"Get out!"

"You hurt Vera? Shameful!"

"Garbage!"

The yelling falls on them. Shin realizes they went into the wrong room. He was sure his resources had been correct. With a scowl, he takes his crew out of the theater back to the church. Aware he just made several enemies.

"Damn. I'm sorry, It seems the show tonight will be cancelled. Vera and the other girls with her were very upset." Adam remarks with disdain. "Don't worry, you will get a full refund." He sighs as the people leave for the night. "Why did this have to happen now?"

Magus walks up to Adam. "Do you think they were after Guv? I mean we did take him there for a moment till we could move him somewhere else."

"Probably. I'm not liking this at all. Tell me about your recent hires and troubles." Adam spots Locks. "How is he?"

Locks replies, "The doctor says it will take a few days. Apparently his illness took a toll on him. His vitals are quite low. He looked so deathly pale." She frowns.

Magus walks over and places a hand on her arm. "I'm sure Guv will be alright. Wonder what made him sick?" He looks at Adam. "You don't think it was the bad wine from earlier?"

"I am sure he doesn't touch that stuff. Until they leave the people alone. I think I will have them temporarily banned until a person from Neshmire or the Shrine comes to clear this up. Horse shit, my ass." Adam walks away.

Torin standing in the shadows gains a view of how to obtain even more information. *This is going to be good. Now to play my next card.* He smiles mischievously as if the idea fits perfectly into his plan.

That night, Guv sits in bed while draining a lot of magical rocks to regain his strength. "Something is bothering you, Granger."

"I haven't told you yet, but it seems you as Guv or the dark shadow is being hunted. Adam knows you're from here originally." Granger notices him stiffening. "I don't know how or why, but he also said I hope she doesn't notice. You never talk about your parents."

Guv places the empty rock on the bed. "Never had any. Stayed at an orphanage for quite some time down at the Port of Styxx. One night I transformed into this and one of the workers thought I was a demon." He shrugs.

"Been on your own since then. So you have no idea who or even want you are."

"Not really. Never bothered me, especially when I can use it to create a dual identity." Guv sighs. "Now I'm curious as to who I am. Why is it so important?"

"No idea. But it will have to wait till Torin's plan goes through. If we can restructure the market area here. We might gain a lot more answers." Granger stands and pulls Guv to his feet. "Let's get you a bath. I'm already aware of how frustrated you are. So am I."

That night, things proceed smoothly. Yet with Guv resting in bed sleeping for the night. Granger keeps watch on the church. The windows are not lit with no sound coming through. "Don't like this at all."

The next day, the town is in a full uproar over the heated debate. Several people constantly argue with each other. Quite a few pounds on the church's walls, only to have no one respond.

Meanwhile, in the theater. Several people have appeared for work. Not even minding the fact that Guv works here.

Adam sits at the front desk in the main hall. He looks up from the paperwork spotting Guv striding over to him. "Your finally up."

"Sorry about that. It took me a bit to actually get better." Makes a mental note to be extra careful about taking too much from himself. "I'm ready to get back to work."

Adam frowns. "I actually want you to take it easy for a few days." He catches the scowl and shakes his head. "Only because right now we have a few problems going on. The trade has been hurt a lot by this." He looks out the window. "And many riots are occurring at the church. They have not been seen since last night. No one even knew they left."

Guv sighs. "Feel like this is my fault."

Adam stands up and places a hand on his shoulder. "This has been going on for quite a while." He drops his hand and places it on the counter. "Mind if I ask you a personal question?"

"Sure."

"Why are they so interested in you?" Adam gazes at him interestingly. "I'm aware they have been on the prowl for a male half-breed for the past twenty years. You don't look like one except for those eyes of yours."

Guv purses his lips. "I . . . have a problem. Would you mind coming to my room tonight?" He looks down as if this greatly disturbs him.

"Of course. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to." He spots Max and gestures to him. "Max, could you take Guv to the poker tables. I think I'll have him watch security for the moment."

"Sure, boss." Max walks to the casino with Guv.

Adam sighs and looks down at the paperwork. Trading for him has increased while for others, not going very well. "I wish there was something I could do about this."

Madrian at the counter greatly frowns. "So do I."

Meanwhile at the outskirts of town near the farming fields. A man walks through the open gate. Twin windmills are on each side. He has an interesting cap over his head. It is a bit tall and an interesting shade of jade green trimmed with gold lining. The robe falls down with a long dark ponytail reaching to the ground.

A couple of girls stare at him with interest. "Who is that?" One of them whispers.

The man glances at them, causing a blush to bloom on their cheeks. He continues down the lane passing the church and theater.

A shop with trinkets of rings and accessories is right beside the meat market. A few people are arguing and they pause, noticing him.

He enters the herb shop beside the meat market.

Tammy is at the desk with her glasses falling off her nose. "Oh!" She grabs them and slams them on the counter. "I swear I hate these things."

"Perhaps you should fix them." A man's voice replies. The dark and sultry tones cause her to stiffen.

Tammy lifts her gaze and stares at him. "Who are you?"

He smiles and takes out a gem from his sack. Then places it over her glasses, instantly repairing them. "Perhaps you should put them back on first."

Tammy frowns. "It will just keep falling." She picks up her glass and puts them on. Seconds pass by. "They. . . How did you do that?" She stares at him amazed. The vision is much clearer.

"Dryain, merchant from Faldorea." Dryain bows.

Tammy purses her lips. "I've heard they are cruel. They force their products on others and demand a high price."

"Surely if I did that, I couldn't buy products here? With you being a merchant, you do realize the cost of that?" Dryain replies with disdain in his voice.

"Yes. I am aware." Tammy studies him. "What do you want?"

"I was interested in some materials you have. From my entrance, It seems things are not going well." Dryain shakes his head at Tammy's scowl. "Just being an observer. As a merchant you need to be aware of prices rising higher then demands to protect yourself from people taking over your trade."

"How would you take care of that if someone did?"

"Simple. I would find another outlet of trade that was more suitable to the my demands. If someone else is gaining trade, then I would quickly make an agree with another that was not with them. Ensuring success is a key to staying in demand." Dryain smiles. "But I'm talking too much as sometimes I do. I'd like some jars of lily extract along with a few parchments." He takes out a few coins from his sack.

"Here you go." Tammy places them on the counter. "I have one more question."

Dryain places the items in his sack. "Afraid I'm on a tight schedule. I have a meeting later this evening. Afterward, I will be free. Oh. I heard there is an Inn nearby?"

"That got taken down a while ago. There is a theater and casino built in its place. You can also stay the night there." Tammy catches quite a few people listening to their conversation.

"Mm. I do hate large crowds. Can't get any work done." Dryain sighs. "Thank you." He turns to leave.

"Wait a minute!" Tammy glances around, while Dryain looks back at her with a questionable gaze. "I can give you a referral. It's not pretty, but the weapons owner has a place you might be able to stay at. I mean. . . I can ask you more questions. Of course."

"I think that would be fine. Much appreciated, Miss?"

"Tammy. No miss please." Tammy hands him a note that was quickly written.

"Tammy." Dryain looks down at it. "Thank you." He leaves the place, fully aware they were watched the whole time. Down the path it turns right. He stops in front of a large blacksmith building with two shopping areas on the side. One for armor while the other is weapons. The smell of burning coal reaches his nose.

"For the last time, Make sure you place the hammer to the side!"

"I know Father!" A young woman's voice snarls.

Dryain raises both eyebrows, then knocks on the door.

A tall person with jagged teeth opens it, glaring at him.

"What do you want?"

Dryain hands over the note. "I was referred here by Tammy for a quiet place to rest. Name is Dryain."

The tall person gazes down at the note. "Make sure ya don't be nosy. That will get ya killed." He walks inside and points to the

back room. "It's gonna be smelly, but at least ya will have some silence."

The woman standing at the forge is roughly the same height. With a glance, you could even tell they have been working very hard.

Dryain takes out a gem and places it on the counter beside the forge.

"I ain't paying for it!" The father scowls.

Dryain smiles. "You have already helped by giving me shelter. As a merchant, it's my obligation to return the favor." He touches the top of it. It glows and sends a magical sweep across the room, cleaning up the grim and remaining dust. "I shall retire for the night."

They stare in amazement as the jewel stops glowing. The daughter walks over and growls at him. "You think he wants something?"

"If he does, it's not from us. Wonder what this fellow is up to?"

"Think I'll spy on this conversation tonight." The daughter walks back to the forge and continues her work.

Later that evening, Dryain takes out an orb and places it on the table. The room is finally clean along with his hat on the door rack. He regards the pile of items on the floor. "Let's see. I have all the materials for that. There is the Ingross Statues, Tear Drops of Mazy." He raises an eyebrow. "Oh. almost forgot." Take out a small red vial. "I managed to get a shipment in."

The orb flickers and lights up. A man in his prime gazes at him. "Hello Dryain. Out looking for more trade routes?"

"You know me well, Master Denzil. I have the items you requested. They are ready for instant transport."

Master Denzil smiles. "You are always so good at your work. You should stop by sometime."

Dryain puts an item on the floor. It encases the items on the floor with a protective barrier. After putting the vial inside it. He presses a switch, then looks back at Master Denzil. "There we go. Transfer complete. Now if only people would actually believe we can teleport a lot of items long distance."

Master Denzil laughs. "That actually might put some relief. You would think they might believe that only items made of pure elements along with every raw material could be transported."

"I am aware." Dryain sits down. "I also have another question. It's about the place I'm at."

"Oh?"

"I managed to make it to Samuel. But it seems people here are very cautious. I heard a rumor along the way that Neshmire was playing dirty hands up here. I just assumed it was just that, idle gossip, since our trade with them is still good." Dryain blanks stare speaks more than words.

Master Denzil replies sourly. "The trade market with Neshmire is strong. Don't tell anyone I said this. Right now, in the kingdom there is a hunt ongoing for the people trying to spread false rumors about them. Their King is furious."

"Wait a minute? They don't have trade up here?" Dryain stares at him in astonishment. "Then who is it?"

"That we can't confirm. Any information pertaining to that has been somehow silenced."

Dryain stares down at his documents. "I really was hoping to put in some trade up here. I even offered to help a young woman named Tammy on getting out of her contract. But if you can't confirm it, how would you do that?"

"Mm." Master Denzil looks as if he is gazing down at something. "Only way would be to secure a route that isn't tied to the hidden culprit or even Neshmire. Since both of us have trade, we can't help there."

"Well. That sucks."

"How long are you going to be there?"

Dryain sighs, "Only a couple of days. The inn they had is no longer here and it's just a casino along with a theater. I'll make sure to pick up the things I need."

"Understood. Good luck Dryain." Master Denzil signs out on his side.

Dryain scowls with frustration. "I really did want to do some trade. Now I have to tell Tammy what I heard. Right. Keep that part out." He stands up and takes off his robe. The meeting later will be long.

Meanwhile, outside the daughter of the blacksmith sneaks away and heads inside the forge. She tells her father what she overheard. The father stiffens. Quietly, they unlock the door and head into another room.

Tammy appears and heads to the back room. They converse through the night arguing about the debates. She leaves frustrated.

Dryain sighs while retiring for the night. He hopes to at least gather a few things before he sets off again.

Simultaneously that same night, Guv paces back and forth. *I don't like this at all. But I need answers. I told Granger to stay in the next room and not join in. In case this goes really bad. Aware he needs to protect them both.*

Knock. Knock.

"Enter."

Adam opens the door and steps inside. He closes the door. The darkness surrounds him. but the ability to see doesn't fade. "Who are you?"

"I'm aware my voice sounds different and I look different. I assure you, I'm Guv." He looks at him. His piercing eyes reflect the night. "You don't seem surprised."

"Overheard, eh? Why don't you tell your friend to step inside?" Adam looks to the side door.

Granger opens the door while swearing at the same time. "Found me out?"

"That you were Amy, the bunny girl? Yes. But I knew you were protecting him. What I don't understand is why this is happening and why you are here?" Adam sits down in the chair and gestures to the other two. "Have a seat."

Guv glances at Granger who shrugs and sits down. He sits on the window bench. "I knew I was half-vampire. It never really bothered me. I have a question for you. Why are you so bent on protecting me?"

Adam places a hand on the table and taps a few fingers. "Because, boy. I was called by both your mother and father after you were born. They ordered me to take you away from here."

Guv and Granger stare at him in astonishment.

Adam sighs. "I was a dark elf servant to the house of De Valunte in the Realms of Valpire. They were a noble family some time ago. Perhaps you should read this. I was told to give it to you if you ever came back up here." He takes out a small parchment. It looks old and worn.

Guv gently unwraps it.

To my Son,

You have brought so much joy into my life. I wish I could have told you the truth about your birth and why we hid you. Circumstances being what they were. If you are reading this, it means Adam has given you the letter upon your arrival as was requested. Let me explain how this all began.

Many moons ago, the Draugars and Vampires lives in their territories peacefully. One day, the Draugar king suddenly placed a foul smell below the ground. This was to spread a false rumor ensuring that anyone from the surrounding areas would suffer if they got near it. Many other false rumors spread to protect both our kind.

It was two thousand years after this one of the day walkers left and traveled west across the sea. They were only gone for a few years when the Knights of Versher appeared led by her, calling her their goddess. Our great king even went heads with her, but something was different about her. Killed kings on both sides with great ease.

Both kingdoms were thrown into chaos. What made matters worse is the fact they placed a barrier above the domain of the Draugars. None knew how to stop this. The Dark elves, which are the higher ranks of vampires, argued about who should become the new King to lead the people. The De Valunte family even orchestrated how bad this would go. No one listened.

Little was anyone aware, that the heir to De Valunte, Lady Valin was already in love with me, your father. A well renowned soldier of the Draugars. I summoned Valin's retainer Adam to the east past the mountains in small cave. I held you in my arms. Your

mom was inside, very weak from giving birth. I begged Adam to take you away. If anyone found out you were half-draugar and half-vampire, they would hunt you to the ends of the world to ensure their plain would come to bare. I dare not even speak of them. Even if one word was written down, Adam and everyone else would be in dire straights.

I took this secret with me to my grave. Only your mother knows where I was buried. To protect her, I slit my throat after Adam took you away. Your name was changed to Guv to make it simple. Your true name, dear boy, is Grosvenor De Valunte. Be rest assured, both parents loved you greatly. Please stay safe. I wish I could have spared you from this fate. Forever Always, Your Father.

Adam frowns. "I didn't know your father took this secret to the grave. Why?"

Guv ponders about the letter. "I wonder how much of it is true."

Granger crosses both arms. "That's what we don't know. You're a Draugar and a Vampire. Would explain your untold strength." He regards Adam. "If you were a dark elf back then, how did you grow to be a day walker?"

"You do realize that all creatures can evolve?" Adam gazes at him with a twist of his lips.

"Not all of em." Granger grumbles.

"Do either kingdoms associate down here? Or does the shrine have something to do with that?" Guv places the parchment carefully on the table.

"Bah." Adam waves his hand in front of him. "I used to talk to them all the time when I owned that inn. One day though that changed when the Shrine placed their church down here. That was

at least eighty years ago. When Ganny disappeared. Used to be our watch from Graviner. Capital of Draugars." He sighs. "On my off days, I used to go down their to their capital and talk with some old friends. It's been a while and I'm sure they hate me now."

"This doesn't make any sense." Guv rests both hands on the side of his face.

"No dollars, either." Adam laughs at Guv's scowl. "Couldn't help myself. I wish there was a way to remove them. Better for the town. Honestly don't know why Neshmire butted their business anyway. What person did you see?"

Guv averts his eyes. "One I never thought I would." The silence drags on for a few moments. "A Dragonar."

Adam stiffens, lowering his eyes. "There would only be one reason a Dragonar is here. I knew that damn fellow was up to no good." He stands up. "I think for now, you will keep to your objective. You leave that damn fellow to me. I know how to draw that bastard out." He leaves the room with Guv staring at him completely confused by that.

Granger walks to the side door. "I've got a lot to report to Torin. You keep your head down for the next couple of days." He leaves the room.

Guv stands up and walks over to the bed, plopping down. "I'm half vampire and a demon called Draugars?" He ponders about this. "Why is it important?" It plagues him all night, not allowing his mind to rest. *Was there even any truth to that letter? It mentioned barriers being placed but Adam said he went up there.*

Chapter 6



The next morning isn't busy at all. Guv finishes his breakfast, eager to go back to work. On his way out into the main hall spots Tammy at the counter. He frowns while turning away. *I need to stay focused on the task. Just a one night stand.*

In the back, two wagons are present. The man coordinating them spots him. "Yo. Do you think you can handle this one?" He shrugs while extending his hands out exasperated. "Geez, what am I saying?"

Guv smirks, then works unloading the first wagon. It takes roughly about an hour. Afterward, some weeding of the farm needs to happen. Grateful for the work, his mind drifts again to Tammy. *Why the hell am I thinking about her?*

"Guv!" Adam waves his hand.

Guv walks over to him, grateful for the distraction.

"Are you alright?"

Guv raises both eyebrows. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"Nothing. Perhaps, it's just me. I have another load I need from the Market of Tash along with a shipment started at the forgery. You think you can handle that?"

"Sure." Guv walks back doing his best to keep a straight face. The thought of coming face to face with Tammy for some reason puts him on edge. *Oh for crying out loud. She doesn't even know about your dual identity?* He vaults onto the wagon picking up the reins.

The road winds up. The sun is high along with the dusty path with the clouds painting pretty colors of shades along the grass.

Guv stops at the market and nervously looks around. He sighs and heads to the back grabbing a few items. It takes an hour to haul everything. Tammy isn't around. He puts the back up, closing the hinges and gazes at the church.

It has been quiet for a while. They haven't made one move since the events of that night. With that thought, worries about anyone else getting involved, especially Tammy.

Guv scowls and jumps in the wagon picking up the reins. *Focus on your damn job!* The next area is quiet. He spots Dryain leaving the building, then knocks on the front door.

A woman glares at him who stands quite tall.

Tammy is right behind her. "Guv!"

Guv stiffens and forces himself to relax.

"You know this jerk?"

"Yda, Guv isn't a jerk. Be nice. I take it you're here for delivery?" Tammy smiles at him.

It makes his pulse quicken. Guv gives a jerky nod, not quite daring to speak.

"I'll take him to the back." Tammy steps outside and heads around the building.

Guv glances at Yda, then follows while keeping his hands behind him. *Stay on task.* He stops at a shack.

Tammy opens the door. "There are several crates of ore shipment. I could help." She turns around and steps close to him.

Guv swallows hard and steps around her picking up a crate. "I'll manage. Thank you." He glances back at Tammy's smirk, feeling several emotions all at once. Desire. Protection. Irritation. Frustration. Anxiety. He swallows all of it down and heads to the wagon.

Tammy talks to Yda for a bit before leaving.

Guv sighs in relief, then finishes his work. By afternoon, he makes it back to report at the front desk. Madrian is swarmed with customers. "Perhaps I should wait?"

"You'd be waitin' a while." A woman's voice growls. "We all here waiting for appointments."

Guv raises both eyebrows. "I see. Thank you." He walks away. *I wonder what that is all about.* He spends the rest of the day playing guard at the poker tables.

Max keeps teasing him about how the ladies are fawning over him.

Later, Guv heads up to his room. The day is very long. Upon entering, he spots a note on the table. The top reads, "To Guv, from Tammy." He burrows his frow, not liking this.

Granger enters the room spotting him. "You look like you saw a ghost." His teasing doesn't even gain a response. He steps up behind Guv and glances down at the letter. "Ah."

Guv looks at Granger startled. "I didn't hear you."

"I'm aware. Go talk to her."

"Excuse me?" Guv questions.

"Ah, hell. I know you had a one night with her. I'm also aware since it happened, you have been on edge. Like a lot. Go talk to her." Granger slaps a hand on Guv's back.

"About?"

Granger throws his hands up in the air. "About you and her. You like her don't ya?"

Guv grabs the letter while scowling and pauses with his hand above the trash can.

"Look, I found out because bunny girls love to gossip. Especially concerning a hot guy that got laid by a girl who isn't them. Catch my drift?" Granger sits on the bed while shaking his head. "Alright, what makes this one so different?"

Guv looks at him puzzled. "It was just a one night stand. Like the others."

"Then like the others, why is it she is causing you a lot of trouble. You're not even keeping your head in the game. I've seen you moping about your work. Honestly didn't know what caused it but something must have. Do you want me to tell Torin?"

Guv scowls and walks to the table, placing the letter down. "I know what he would say. Lookie here, you got yourself a girl finally." He snorts and sits in the chair. "It's like that."

"Then what is it?" Granger leans back, placing both hands behind him. "What about her makes this different?"

"I," Guv glances at the letter. "I don't want her hurt by any of this. I'm also. . . .afraid."

"Afraid? You?" Granger presses his lips together, biting back a few words. "I've never seen you afraid of anyone. Not even in that vampire form that you can use quite well. Why now?"

Guv sighs and thrusts a hand through his hair. He looks outside to the setting of the sun. "Once she knows who I am and

what I am. It will be like all the rest. She will be afraid of me. I . . .
. don't think I could handle that."

Granger regards him for the longest time. Not saying one word. The sun disappears with the night coming out.

Guv stands up with his clothes falling off. "In this form, she would see me as nothing but a monster." He picks up the clothes and walks over the dresser. "What would I do if she did?"

Granger shakes his head. "You have it bad. Honestly, if it were me and I felt that way. I would take risks. Better knowing than living in constant fear. In a way it's similar to what we are dealing with."

"What if she gets hurt even if she accepts me?" Guv finishes putting his pants on. "I couldn't guarantee that I could protect her."

Granger studies Guv which makes him fidget. "You're a dolt. A Huge One."

Guv glares at him. "So what if I am?"

"Tell her the truth! You might be surprised. A lot of women are actually quite strong. Have some faith to figure it out. I don't want to tell Torin I had to guide you through this step by step do I? You know what he would do." Granger smirks.

Guv scowls. "He would hold it over my head for quite some time." He looks out the window to the church. "We still haven't heard anything from them."

Granger steps beside him and places a hand on his shoulder. "You leave the keeping watch to me. You go talk to her."

Guv takes one last glance at him, then teleports out of the room.

Granger regards the quiet church with a crowd coming in and out. "Wonder what they have been up to all day. Looks really busy down there." He stays up here and keeps watch.

Meanwhile, Guv stays hidden by the window watching Tammy turn everything in for the night. Her every movement, the way her hair falls over her shoulders. Even the glasses she is wearing just wants to make him smile and cringe at the same time. Dreading this moment, but aware he needs to know if she will hate him. He glances down at the letter, wondering if it needs to be read.

The wind blows, spreading his hair out into the night. A partial moon rises up. Guv looks through the window.

Tammy inside finishes documenting the sales and new contract in progress. It makes her smile. She puts it in the drawer and walks to the bedroom. The day is finally done. A sound makes her turn around spotting the person from before at the window. She grabs the knife and picks it up, only to stiffen.

Guv raises the letter, still closed. No smile resides on his face. "Came to talk." He places the letter on the dresser.

"Guv?" Tammy's lips tremble while she turns around clenching the knife. "It was you?!"

"I . . . Yes," Guv replies.

Tammy turns around and glares at him. the knife still in her hand. "Why? Because I was an easy target!"

"No!" Guv scowls and thrusts a hand through his hair. "It was to draw the church out."

"So I was just bait! Glad to know I was a one time service!" Tammy hisses at him.

"You didn't need to be in my room in the first place!" Guv yells at her.

"Maybe I didn't have to!" Tammy walks up to him and points the knife at his throat. "Go ahead! I'm just good for easy entertainment aren't I?" Her eyes fill up with tears and anger.

Through them she stiffens. Instead of seeing anger or frustration in his eyes is just intense sadness.

Guv replies calmly. "Do what you want me. I probably deserve it. Before you do, can we talk or at least listen to what I have to say. Then you can tell the monster to leave." His voice causes her hand to tremble.

Tammy's lips tremble but takes the knife away sitting on the edge of the bed.

"I hadn't planned on coming up here at all. Me and a couple of people I travel with were actually heading to Neshmire to pull off a heist. Sort of a trade we do. Pick off people that we think might be hiding dark secrets or have some interesting items." Guv looks down at his hand. "All my life I've been called a monster in this form. So I can't blame you for it."

Tammy closes her eyes while placing the knife on the bed and continues to listen to his tale. How he was hunted. Just learned recently that the main reason for it was because he is half-vampire and half-draugar. She opens her eyes and stares at him in astonishment. "Half-Draugar? It's not possible!"

"I know. Apparently, Adam knew who I was when I arrived. The main reason why he protected me." Guv crosses his arms with a frown. "I still have a hard time believing it but what other explanation is there? I have untold strength in my other form. But in this form, it goes away and my magic ability increases greatly."

"It doesn't stay with you?" Tammy questions.

"No. I never understood that part. I can't control the shape changing." Guv looks up at her, noticing her expression. Her eyes are lowered. *Probably can't stand the sight of me. Can't blame her.* He turns around and walks to the window. "I . . . just thought you should know."

"Why?"

"Why?" Guv looks at her perplexed.

Tammy stands up and spreads out her arms. "Yes. Why?"

As if the question confuses him, Guv swallows. "I . . ."

Tammy steps closer to him. Guv backs away and finds himself pressed against the window. "I want to know why. You had a one night stand with me, so why is it important to tell me?"

"I . . .," Guv averts his gaze for a moment, then looks back at her determined expression. "Because it wasn't just a one night stand. I thought it was. I'm still not sure of the whole reason why, but. . ." He reaches his hand out and cups her cheek. "Even if you hate me, I just want you to protect yourself. I don't want to see you hurt." He waits as it feels like an eternity passes.

Tammy lowers her eyes, hiding her expression. Her lips twitch ever so slightly and her hand reaches up to his on her cheek. "That wasn't so hard was it?"

"Huh?" Guv watches her lift her gaze with tears in them. "Did I do something wrong?"

Tammy smiles. "No. I think we both did." Her hand squeezes his.

"But I'm the on-"

Tammy places a finger on his lips. "I'm not frightened anymore. Not of you and not in this form."

Guv swallows. His heart pounds a bit faster. "I don't understand."

Tammy looks up at him and intertwines her arms around his neck. "Perhaps I should show you in this form. I'm not running away."

Her lips press against his. Guv places his hands on her shoulders feeling the softness against him. *This isn't making any sense. One minute we are arguing and now. . . .* Traces of his last

thought begin to disappear as the only thing left to remember is her and how she doesn't hate him. Even in this form. It makes him weak to her will. Thinking back to the last thought, Granger was right. Women can be a lot stronger.



A long time later, Guv places a hand behind his head and looks down at Tammy. Her head is on his chest sound asleep. He reaches up and strokes her cheek. It still confuses him, these feelings inside. It's nice to know she accepted him, even with all the lies. But would she come with him? It still doesn't sit with him very well.

As if his thoughts stirred her from her slumber, she gazes up at him with a smile. "Morning."

Guv rests his chin on her forehead. "Morning."

"Something is troubling you. What is it?" Tammy brushes her hand across his chest.

"Why. . . are you accepting this? I mean. . ." Guv's voice trails off.

Tammy brings up her hand slightly. "I know what it's like to be ridiculed. People tell me all the time that I'm not half-draugar. Because I don't have the strength they do."

Guv tightens his hand on her waist. "You were bullied?"

"Bullied is a mild-term. My family wouldn't accept me. My real father abandoned me who was a human. My mother couldn't even stand to look at me. Thought I was a curse upon them."

"All because you have no strength?"

"It's the way it is up here. Vampires are incredibly powerful with magic while Draugars have untold strength. Even here, no one really likes me. The only one who accepted me was Adam and my

adopted father who died a few years back. Been taking care of myself since." Tammy replies in a small voice.

Guv reaches down his other hand and places it on hers. "I had no idea. No wonder you're so strong."

"I'm not strong. What will you do?"

"I still need to investigate the church. But I think they disappeared. If that is the case, we are heading up north." Guv sighs. "I can't ask you to abandon the place you built."

Tammy shakes her head while lifting herself partially up gazing at him. "No. My father did. It was his work. He would want me to follow in my own path."

"You would follow me? Even with the danger I told you about?"

Tammy smiles. "Yes."

"Why?"

"Because. It felt right. Nothing in my life ever felt right. But when you came, it was like you swept me off my feet."

Tammy shakes her head and chuckles. "At first I thought you were someone with high charisma or something like that." She places a kiss on his chin. "But after that one day, when you saved me, I knew it was something different. I want to take that risk with you."

"I won't always be able to protect you. The danger will be very real." Guv places a hand on her cheek.

"Well, then. I'll just need to make sure to protect the both of us." Tammy smirks at him, then looks out the window. "As much as I want you to stay, dawn is approaching. I'll find a way to join you."

Guv steps out of the bed, completely naked. He doesn't want to leave, but knows Tammy is right. "Tonight?"

"I'll be there."

Guv picks up his clothing and teleports out of the room. He arrives back in his room with the sun rising. After bathing, then dressing himself, finds another note on the table.

"If you're reading this, it means you have been busy with Tammy. Hope things went well. I kept watch on the church all night. Still no sound or anything from it. If you're free, meet me at the rooftops by this afternoon.

Don't expect Torin to appear. Seems he is having a meeting with Adam and quite a few people here. Something to do with trade, me thinks. Wouldn't say much. So we have the day to ourselves.

Just another note. I think you and Tammy would make a pretty darn good couple. Lucky Dog."

Guv sighs. "Of course he would say that." He looks out the window towards the church. The windows remain closed. It shows no signs anyone has been there, but for some reason. That thought there greatly disturbs him.

After eating his breakfast downstairs, Guv spots several people heading into the theater. The sign above says private. Upon this observation decides to head back upstairs to the rooftop.

Granger sits with both legs stretched out. "Wondered when you show up."

Guv sits beside him. "It's. . . been a long night."

"Anything good?"

"I told her everything. Not in the way I planned or how it went." Guv sighs. "Are women always so stubborn?"

Granger chuckles. "Not all, but the strong ones are. And I don't mean strength wise. They are the ones who can pretty much stand up to a lot of bad things happening and still move forward. Gotta admire that about them."

"True."

"Did she accept?"

Guv smirks with a side glance. "Odd. I thought once she knew, I would get kicked out for being a hideous monster. Instead . . . we . . . well, ya know."

"Ah." Granger stretches both hands up. "Will she be joining us?"

"I think so. She has certain matters to take care of. Will meet us tonight. What is up with Torin?" Guv yawns.

"Torin may have given more than one way out for the town. Apparently he is going to be the coordinator to set up different trade routes while Adam is going to be the Mayor and keeper of this town." Granger gazes up at the sun. "Are you sure you don't need a nap?"

Guv snorts. "I'm fine. Just a bit hungry."

"Well looks like the meeting started. Let us go find out what is happening in that church." Granger takes out a stone and teleports to the rooftop.

Guv stands up and follows. The rooftops have no sound to them. Up ahead Granger is peering over the chimney inside but not jumping in. He walks over. "Something wrong?"

"Do you sense anything magical here?" Granger regards Guv shrewdly.

Guv frowns. "No, but in this form it's a bit hard for me to tell. I don't smell anything wrong."

"I'd like you to go first. The door is already open."

"Open?" Guv peers over the side. Sure enough, the large opening they made is wide open. "Do you think someone else has been here?"

"No idea. You do have a keen sense of smell in that form." Granger scowls. "I don't like this."

"Do you think we should wait?" Guv glances at him, spotting the shaking of his head. "Alright, but be prepared to run if you have to." He jumps over and uses his strength to climb down. At the entrance, he stills while noticing a smell. It's vulgar as if someone sprayed the area with acid and rust. "Be careful."

"Understood."

Guv enters, carefully checking the stairs and walls for any markings. None can be seen. Not even a speck of dust can be seen. *What happened here?* The hair on the back of his neck stands up. He creeps down the staircase, then peers into the room.

It is quiet with no aura surrounding anything. The windows are closed. The benches look as if no one has sat in them. Guv creeps forward and stills spotting the stairs at the wall leading down to another area open.

Granger touches his back.

"Aah!" Guv jumps out of his skin. He glares at Granger. "Don't do that!"

"Sorry!" Granger smirks with a gasp escaping his lips.

"It's not funny." Guv shakes his head, then spots the window that one trap was at. He walks over to it. "Uh, wasn't there a trap here last time?"

Granger frowns. "Ya, there was. Those can't be removed unless you set it off. Even then the magic they give off is pretty potent."

"So either someone has a way of disarming it, or we just got in over our heads." Guv looks at the stairs. "Risk it?"

Granger sighs. "Ya. I don't like leaving a stone unturned."
They proceed to the entrance. Guv quickly looks behind
him.

"Quit being so jumpy. You're making me nervous." Granger
grumbles.

"Can't help it. Something feels off about this place." Guv
slowly walks down the path, peeking around the corner. He
stiffens.

"What is it?"

"It's gone!" Guv walks into the room.

Granger follows and stills. "How in the world did they
remove the windows!" He walks over to the window and lifts his
hand to it. "It's not possible!"

"The door isn't here either. What is going on?"

Granger scowls and pulls out a small magnifying lens.

"Give me a second. Let me check if anything doesn't add up." He
places it in his eye and looks through it. The walls are clear where
the windows are. But the door catches his attention. It displays
several different threads, rotating counter clockwise. "Well, now.
You are something special. What do we have here?"

"Illusion perhaps?" Guv questions.

"No idea. Haven't seen something like this before. I'd
remember if I did. Let me see what I can do." Granger sits down
working his hands on the item. Moving a few threads this way
forces it to stop while combining it forces it to move faster. "This
might take me a bit."

Guv sighs and sits on the floor. "How do they even make
things disappear like this?" Without having an answer. Time ticks
by slowly.

Click.

Granger quickly stands up and steps back. The door opens with a hideous smell floating their way. "Gad!" He raises his hand to cover his mouth.

Guv grabs a cloth out of this sack and hands it to Granger, then puts one over his mouth. "Is this the smell of fresh blood? It smells rotten."

Granger takes off the lens and places it in his sack. "I'd wager more than that. I think we found out what happened to the knights at least." He takes out a gem and lights it up. The room is small with several corpses both old and new scattered across. Blood drips on the floor.

"Do you think that Shin or the Dragonar was responsible?" Guv questions.

"No idea. Pretty sure if we went in here, whoever built this would use it as an excuse to cause some massive harm to the village. I think we should hint to Adam to have this permanently destroyed. One way or another for a new building or something like that." Granger takes a couple of steps back. "We need to seal it off."

"Agreed. This way?"

Granger shakes his head. "I'll seal the stairs. It's easier and won't leave a trace. If I shut this, I can't leave the impression that a wind or explosion caused this to happen." He regards Guv. "Go back. I need you in your room in case someone shows up. I'll meet you there."

"I don't like leaving you alone." Guv places both hands on his hips.

"I'll be fine. Not the first time I've had to do something like this." Granger walks up the stairs and watches Guv leave. "Alright. Time to seal you off." He works the threads into the wall, sealing it shut tight.

Meanwhile, Guv paces his room as the night descends. Granger still hasn't returned.

Knock. Knock.

Guv uses his sensing ability. *Tammy?* He opens the door. Granger is standing behind her. "You're late Granger." He opens it.

Tammy glances back at Granger with a smirk. "He, uh, helped me finish up closing the register." She steps inside.

Granger smirks. "I did no such thing." He winks at her and closes the door behind him. "I did talk to Adam. He is going to organize the destruction of that place. Reason why I'm late is I found this." He places a book on the table. "Someone was setting us up."

Guv regards him startled, then opens the pages. "Mm."

Tammy peers over his arm. "It has your real name. Not your given name."

"Probably why someone wanted that found. It's hinting that your family, the De Valunte's are responsible for this uprising. I found that part very strange." Granger walks over the dresser and pulls out a bottle of shire along with a mug. "Want a drink?"

"I'll pass." Guv continues to skim the pages. "Just how much of this is true and how much is fabricated? It doesn't mention anything on the Draugar side."

"I know. That also caught my attention. Tammy?" Granger picks up the mug. "You want a drink?"

"No, I'll pass." Tammy frowns. "Who sent it?"

"Well, here is the other odd thing. That Dragonar we saw. Can't say for certain but the only one Adam knows about is from the De Valunte family." Granger saunters over while sipping his drink. "I do find that odd."

"It is odd. I think perhaps we should check them out." Guv glances at Tammy's confused look. "The city of Graviner."

"Why. . . you want to see what is really going on. Along with the Shrine of Versher since it's a long way." Tammy picks up the book and skims a few more pages. "I can say this, whoever did this knew a lot about the trade going on. None of you qualify for that."

"Mm." Granger sits down. "Guess we head to Graviner in a couple of days. You think you can make your way up with us by then, Tammy?"

"I'm trying." Tammy places the book. She brushes her arms up and down.

Guv stands behind her and wraps his arms around her, placing his chin on the top of her head. "It will be alright."

"Oh! Both of you look cozy." Granger teases, then stands up waving a hand in front. "Now, now. I don't need the two of you glaring at me. I'm going to rest for the night. Both ya should do the same." He leaves the room through the side door.

"You have interesting friends." Tammy sighs.

"That I do. I hope in time, you will find them your friends. I trust them." Guv smiles down at her.

"I hope so. Guess I should head back." Tammy frowns.

"Well. I mean we could just rest for the night." Guv slightly blushes. "I wouldn't mind cuddling. I could teleport you back in the morning."

"I'd like that." Tammy smiles up at him.

They snuggle together in bed, fully clothed. Guv wraps his arms tighter around her, listening to her soft breathing as she sleeps. His mind drifts to everything that has happened so far. It feels as if someone orchestrated all this. If they did, Why wait till now? Nothing about this makes any sense. He feels as if they are being used and pulled towards something else.

Tammy sighs in her sleep and snuggles closer.

I'll make sure to keep you safe. My love. Guv closes his eyes, aware he won't get any sleep. But also knows that he will keep those last words to himself.

Chapter 7



That morning, a knock sounds on the door. Guv opens it. "Madrian. What brings you up here?"

Madrian hands him a note. "From the boss. He needs a meeting with you this afternoon. Wouldn't tell me what it was but I think this town has a horse up their arse!"

Guv presses his lips on that comment. "Thanks."

"Also, there is no more work for ya. Ya need to read that." Madrian shuts the door and heads back down. Her footsteps barely make a sound on the floor.

Guv reads the note.

"I hope things find you well. I wish I could have done more for you, since you are still part of the family. I won't be able to talk to you anymore about your past due to certain things happening. But I thought this might help you in your quest."

Below is a relic that allows entrance to Valpire. You will find their entrance to the east of the shrine. The entrance to Graviner is another matter. They are constantly changing it. Your fathers bloodline had the ability to see the entrance at the side of the mountains to the west of the shrine.

Be warned, they are not friendly to anyone who isn't a pure blood. I don't know why this is. It's why I've stayed here in this town for so long. To protect them, even though most don't know it. I found the mole in our ranks and was paid to gain power for information. They are being dealt with. The dragonar on the other hand slipped through the cracks. I can't even be sure they are from De Valunte family since they didn't take the bait. Keep your guard up.

Y

ours,
Adam.
"

Guv places the note on the table. *It will be my last day. I won't be able to see Tammy again.* He sends a note to Guv and Torin using that mail service they have. It's convenient because it arrives in their magical sack no matter what they are up to. Somehow you become aware it's there. He packs a few things down. It doesn't take long and looks out the window.

The church is still silent. What they saw doesn't ease anything. *Perhaps it's better if Tammy doesn't come along.* He frowns and remembers Shin grabbing her by the hand. The thought of her being beat up or threatened again makes his blood boil. *Calm down. You might get to see her again.*

Guv heads downstairs. Quite a few people are being shown around to their work areas. It looks very busy. Madrian, at the counter, is conversing with a few clients while jotting down notes.

Cynthia spots him and waves her hand.

Guv walks behind the counter.

"Boss is in the back." Cynthia grabs a decanter and leaves to the casino area.

Guv opens the back door and enters. He spots Adam sitting at the desk writing a few things down.

Adam glances at him. "Have a seat."

Guv sits down in the chair. "Something happened."

"Well, yes. Not quite sure how it happened. But it seems Neshmire wasn't part of this grand scheme. Just used. With the new trade in progress, I have been deemed the keeper of trades while being nominated for the Mayor." Adam sighs and puts down the penna. "Problem is that came at a cost. Word spread about how I protected you and knew you."

"Ah." Guv taps a finger on the armchair. "So that's it. I need to leave town quietly."

Adam frowns. "Yes. Mind you there were people that didn't like this. Tammy was one of them." He spots Guv's scowl. "She is very protective of you as well. But that is another matter. I have another matter I need to finish before you take your leave."

"What is it?"

Adam takes out a sack of coins. "Payment for your services since I now need to keep a documented record of everything. And for your signature here." He pushes the document and penna to the other side of the desk.

Guv stands up and signs his name. "At least this town will be free of them. For now." He picks up the sack of coins.

Adam stands up. "You remember. Even with me being the mayor here, you need my help. Don't hesitate to call me. I'll come running." He extends his arm.

Guv grasps it, aware of another friend that was made. "Thanks. Let us know our next path will meet with better hopes for the future." He leaves.

Adam inside sits down while plopping his face in his hands. "I wish I could have told him the truth."

Guv checks his sack as it feels a bit different. An extra note is there. It's from Torin. *We are waiting in the bar. Figured it would be one last talk for a while. Come join us.* He walks past the lounge and stops at the theater. Inside are more workers trying out for several different roles. Magus looks busy while arguing with his assistant Locks. It makes him smile.

Just past them on the other side is the casino. You can see several new bunny girls working the floors. The slots are slow today, but quite a few people are out on the floor a bit happy. Max is teaching a couple of new workers how to do the poker tables.

Guv continues past them and enters the bar. No one is around, but spots them in the corner with two bottles of wine. He sits down. "Pass me a drink. Don't care which one."

His sigh makes Torin stare at him perplexed. "Alright." He pours him a drink and passes it over.

Guv chugs it down and slams the drink on the table. "Needed that."

Torin shakes his head. "You are head over heels about her. It's about leaving Tammy behind, isn't it?"

Guv scoffs while waving a hand in front of him. "I didn't get made, you nard." He jabs his finger in his direction. "Don't you even dare tell me that this was your doing!"

Granger sips his drink, casting an amused glance at Torin.

Torin's smile deepens. "Oh, I wish that I could, my friend. I did learn something valuable you might be interested in."

"What is it?" Guv asks.

Torin pours another drink in Guv's mug, then sips his own.

"Don't keep me in suspense." Guv growls, then drinks his wine.

"Alright. You remember that rumor about the Eye of Balid that got started in Neshmire?" Torin leans in and lowers his voice. "Don't know the names, but one of the factions up north has that item. The other two also hold a sacred relic. Also," He glances right and left, "The group is using Neshmire to spread gossip encouraging the brawl between them. They really want this item. Badly." He leans back.

"Mm." Granger places a hand on his chin, rubbing it. "How did you figure this out?"

"You remember the meeting I was at yesterday? One of my friends over there confirmed it. The individuals that are doing this are actually not from Neshmire but Persnia."

Granger whistles. "Persnia? That does liven things up a bit."

Guv glances at them. "Why is that important?"

"Persnia has been in a land war in their country for quite some time. Some say peace goes on there, but a lot of that is lies." Torin shrugs.

"Ya, and they are known for slitting your throat at night if things don't go well." Granger shakes his head.

"Well, with this bit of trade feud going on. I'm hoping it will lead us to getting a few answers while we head north. Might hear something on the trail up there if someone was using them like they are here." Torin sips his drink.

"If someone was, they would have to be awfully good at their work to copy Dermhimer. Then make it disappear with ease. "

"Yes. Which is why I don't think it's anyone from either side. But that is just a hunch." Torin finished the rest of his drink. "Do we have someone else to pick up?"

Guv looks down. Remembering how Tammy said she would join them, but has things to do in order for it to happen. "I'll leave a note for her. Least I can do."

"You should talk to her." Torin scoffs while standing up. "Not going to leave her behind."

Guv shakes his head, then stands. "She has to sell her place before she can leave. It was done by her adopted father. Told me she was working on it." He saunters off with his shoulders hunched.

Torin regards Guv as he leaves, then looks back at Granger. "He's hopeless isn't he?"

"I reckon they are in love. Don't think either one will admit it. Yet." Granger stands up. "Let's wait for him at the edge of town up north. He will know."

Outside the theater, people are passing up and down the lane. It's quite crowded with a few wagons journeying back and forth.

Guv sighs, walking down the lane. The town wanting him out was nothing new for him. Pretty much used to it. Yet this time. He stops at and looks at the Market of Tash. Tammy's shop. The windows are closed, but the smell of her still lingers in the area. He raises his hand to the door. *Should I?*

The door opens with Tammy standing there. She smiles only to pause noticing his despondent attitude. "Come in. Something the matter?"

"I don't think it's wise for me to come inside," Guv replies sourly.

"You heard. You're leaving now?" Tammy looks down.

"I have to." Guv clenches his fist, aware of the pull of wanting to draw her into his arms. "Adam told me this afternoon."

Tammy looks up at him in surprise. "You were to have two days to rest before you got kicked out! It's not fair!" She marches around him.

Guv grabs her arm.

"Don't stop me!" Tammy yells and tugs on her arm. His grip is very powerful.

"Tammy." Guv pleads and pulls her back.

"It's not right!" Tammy seethes at him.

"You don't think I know this? It's the way people are. You know this better than I do!" Guv releases her and thrusts a hand through his hair. He turns around with his posture sullen.

Tammy doesn't know what to say.

Guv sighs. "I'll be up north in the mountains. The trail up there is very rough and dangerous. You don't need to be up there to find me." He made the final decision for her. She wasn't coming.

Tammy stiffens. "You don't want me to come with you?"

Guv turns around and glares at her with cold eyes. "No. You will just be in my way. Probably die before you reach me."

Tammy places her hand to her chest. "This can't be you. Guv." She reaches her hand out to him.

Guv steps back. "It was a mistake. You're better here." He turns and leaves her standing there with a stricken look. *It needed to be done. I can't have her come along.* His steps out of town feel sullen with each step. As if the world had become incredibly heavy on his shoulders.

Up the road is Torin and Granger. They wave at him.

Guv smiles only to have it fall.

"Tammy not joining us?" Torin asks.

"Let's go." Guv strides up the path towards the mountains.

By nightfall, they should reach the entrance. It will be dark.

Granger glances at Torin who shrugs. The walk remains silent. He whispers, "Do you think he did the stupid idea?"

Torin nods.

Granger sighs. "Dumb ass fool."

"Ya know, Guv," Torin skips ahead and turns around, walking backward. "It's going to take a while to get past here. At least a few weeks at most." He jokes, hoping to bring out a smile.

"Oh? Perhaps the rain will give your tail a frizz," Guv replies sarcastically.

"My tail doesn't fuzz up that bad!" Torin's tail swishes side to side.

Granger snickers, stepping up beside Guv. "It did when I told you about you know who."

"I did not!"

"He did. Completely frizzed up all the way and then passed out on the floor. Thought I was making this up." Granger jokes while pointing a thumb in Torin's direction.

Guv chuckles. Aware they are trying to cheer him up. Both of them notice even though he laughed, his eyes told a different story. One that greatly bothered him.

Much time passes as the sun begins to set. They manage to get over the first hill. Guv stops and gazes up. This feeling of leaving something behind bothers him. He inwardly shakes it off. She will be protected.

They set up camp. Guv turns in for the night leaving them both outside.

Torin pokes the fire with a stick. "Now I feel like I just brought him into something worse. Wish Tammy was here."

"So do I. I mean we have been in horrible scraps before. What makes this one so different?" Granger sighs.

"Don't know." Torin gazes up at the stars. "Don't know, my friend. I wish I did."



It takes them two days to get up the first mountain trail. The sun is high. Its rugged terrain isn't easy to follow. Granger heaves and bends over grasping his knees. "Finally. . . . Got . . . Up. . . Past. . . . That. . . . area."

Torin snickers.

Guv shakes his head, then looks around. They are up quite high. "Don't look ahead."

Granger and Torin both look ahead. "What the-" They say at the same time.

The path ahead is a wall of rocks with no way up or around. Shrubs can be seen all over.

Torin sighs. "Great. Look for something. Might be a path we need to follow." He heads to the side, looking behind some bushes.

Granger stretches his arms out, interlocking his hands at the same time. Snap. Crackle. Pop. "Let's see if there is an entrance." He walks over the wall, moving his hands over it.

Guv scowls while looking back. *Place feels odd. Why do I get the opinion we passed something?* He walks back and looks down. The rocks seem normal. All of them blend in together. He stiffens.

Except for a black spot on the path down near the turn.

"I'll be right back, going to check something." Guv walks down and examines the wall. "Over here! Looks like an entrance that is hidden by the shadows."

Torin and Granger race down.

"Shouldn't there be an easier path?" Guv questions while crossing both arms.

"You honestly think someone is going to make it easy?" Torin asks sarcastically. "Come on." He walks inside with Granger.

Guv shakes his head. "Right. Stupid Question." He walks inside. The room is dark. Up ahead is Torin with a light gem out beside him. He is kneeling down before a statue. It's bronze with a lot of rust on it. He steps closer and stiffens.

The statue looks real. A man with both hands up screaming as if afraid of something falling down on him. His eyes portray fear as it's very real. One long shaped ear is cut off. The legs look as if someone wrapped them in chains sinking into the flesh. It gives off an odor of the dead.

Guv raises his hand over his nose. "Is that even real?"

Torin sighs. "Yes. Poor sap. Can't even say how long it's been here." He stands up and shakes his head. "I can't even determine how they died or how old it was. This is brutal."

Granger nods. "Ya. Let's be careful not to set off any traps in here. My senses are telling me there is a lot." He looks past the statue. "Mm. Looks like a narrow path around. Tons of pebbles." He walks into the hallway.

The other two follow. Guv spots a pile of flat wood chips on one side. He kneels by it feeling the rough texture. "Was someone here recently?"

Torin gazes to the other side. "Probably. Looks like a lot of old parchments were burned over here." He moves the ash aside,

not spotting anything underneath. "Nothing here." He stands up. "Where is Granger?"

"Over here, but watch your step." Granger replies.

They go past the hallway and make a quick turn left, then right. They both stand still.

"Don't let this fool ya." Granger jabs his thumb to the spikes slowly hitting up. "They have a lightning current running through them." Up ahead are three different rows of spikes. In the first row is a set of four spikes laid back five times. There is a safe spot to the next row of spikes. The rows in the back aren't moving.

"Why do I get the feeling this won't be easy? Can we disarm them?" Guv tilts his head to the side. The lightning currents run from the top of the spikes as they slowly enter the floor. Tick. . . Tick. . . Tick. . . Tick. . . They shoot up again. "Only four seconds to pass that?"

"Yup. It's a doozy. Something tells me this isn't a simple feat." Granger crosses his arms.

Torin stretches his arms side to side. "Looks like I'm up." He steps forward and places both arms to the side while waiting for the next set of spikes to lower. A few seconds pass. The spikes shoot down. He darts across and stops just in time for the next one. "Dam. Gotta be quick to stop. The next row of spikes length is a bit deceiving."

"Thought as much. Shall we?" Granger says. He and Guv wait and dart at the same time to other spot.

Guv manages to pull him back before the spikes shoot up at him. He looks at Torin ahead. "Be Careful. That one looks different."

"Ya. I'm aware. Sucks, we can't use our teleportation here. But with us not knowing much about this place, we can't take a

chance of teleporting inside a wall." Torin waits for the other two to join him.

Granger glares at him. "I'll make sure you go into a wall."

"Mm. This is one the same thing, but something is odd about it." Guv studies the spikes. Their shape is different along with the color of the lightning coming forth. It's not white or yellow. But a soft blue with a hint of purple.

"Well." Granger grabs Guv's hand. "We do this together?"

Torin grabs his hand. "I'm down."

Guv glances at both of them. The spikes shoot down and he tosses the forward into the room.

Torin spawls out on all fours with his tail fuzzed.

Granger rolls across the floor a few times. "For the love of..."

Guv looks down at the spikes. "At least you got across." He kneels and studies the floor. "Had you gone across with your feet, these little spikes down here would shoot up like arrows. Can't see them. Now are you glad you got tossed?"

Granger grumbles, "Sure. Make me feel like a tossed salad."

Torin snickers while straightening out his tail. "Can you make it over?"

Guv at that moment turns and presses his back against the side wall. He runs forward and jumps up running across the wall as the spikes shoot down, landing on the other side. "Yup. Not a problem."

"Mm." Granger sours his look. "I'm beginning to think you're learning a lot lately."

Guv raises both eyebrows at him with an innocent look. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Torin chuckles.

"Fine!" Granger throws both hands up. "Can we go through our next room up ahead? I have a feeling it's going to be another trap." He walks ahead while shaking his head.

Torin smirks at Guv, then both of them follow.

The room up ahead turns left displaying a small pond in the middle of the room. In the pond is a small grassy area with a rock in the middle.

Guv frowns at it. "Why do I get the opinion this one isn't a trap?"

"Look, over there!" Torin heads in another room spotting two different ways to go. He goes to the door that is the closest on the right. "Dam. won't open."

"So that contraption is a key to opening the door. Which one though?" Granger asks.

"Care to step on it, Torin?" Guv regards him disdainfully.

Torin places his ears back. "With that water? NO WAY!"

Granger laughs.

"It's not funny! I'll look completely awful!"

Guv shakes his head. "Fine. I'll go. chickens." He grumbles leaving them shaking their heads. The water isn't that deep. He stops before the stone and takes a deep breath.

"Don't keep us waiting, Honey." Torin teases.

"I'll show you who the Honey is once I'm out of here!" Guv steps on it. Nothing happens.

Torin and Granger glance at each other.

The stone shifts and sinks under his feet. Guv jumps back across the water. Click. He waits a moment, glancing at the other two but nothing happens. "Torin, since you don't like water. You go check."

"Me? Why not Granger?"

Granger snickers.

"Your the one who wanted a fuzz tail, furball!" Guv hisses at him.

Torin shrugs. "Fine! Not like I have much of a choice." He saunters over into the room and checks the doors. "Um, guys?"

Guv looks at Granger, then they both move to the other room.

"Both doors are unlocked. I have no idea which way we should go?"

Guv looks both left and back at the other door. "Let me see if my sense of smell can tell us where to go." He walks up the first door. It smells of old tarnished rust along with saw dust. Wooden crates, maybe. A whiff of rotted flesh floats this way. He walks to the other door. It smells of regular caves, but there is another scent that catches his attention. "Mm. I think we should head through the door to the north."

"Why that way?" Torin taps his foot.

"The other way has a creature's smell. I'm pretty sure that it's their den. I also smelled bits and pieces of flesh the other way. But the air smells fresher that way." Guv regards him shrewdly.

"Pretty much, it doesn't matter which way we go. We are still going to run into it." Granger walks past Guv and opens the door. "Come on, Torin."

In the windy corridor it turns right and left a lot. Not really giving a good sense of direction. They pass a lot of broken crates. A few have an arm with no hand or fingers laying out. Cobwebs lay across the next room with a deep pond in the middle.

Torin kneels and feels the water. "Wow. It's cold!" He draws his back.

"Ocean water?" Granger scoops up a handful and drinks. "Yup. Can't drink it. Means there is an exit. Probably can't breathe that long enough though."

Guv walks around and enters another path. It's narrow but opens up into a large room. The cavern displays many lights reflecting off the stones above.

"Ain't that a sight?" Granger looks at them. "This would be great for making a bit of cash on those."

"True." Torin spots a chest up ahead. He whistles. "Well. Now that is a sight for sore eyes. Probably been looted."

They walk past the shrubs. Guv stops, noticing one of them shivered. "Um. I think something else is in here?"

Torin kneels at the chest. "What do you mean? Should be a big creature if you smelled it."

Guv frowns, then walks over to them. "Just a feeling."

Granger peers over his shoulder. "No lock on this?" He crosses his arms with a pout. "For shame."

Torin smiles. The bushes near them shiver. Everyone stills.

Out of the bush comes a little blue ball of fur. Its small horns on top are curved backward with a ripple design. Its big black bottomless eyes stare at them while their fairy wings flutter behind. It stops at Guv, sniffing his hand.

Guv lays out its hand. It softly lands on him and tilts its head at him. "Hi there, little one. What is someone like you doing way up here?"

"My a dheuth dhe vos. Ty a well bos goedh!" It whines.

"I see," Guv replies.

"Wait a minute!" Granger hisses at him. "You understood that?"

"Yes. It said I need to eat. You smell good. Ah, I guess you can't understand their language." Guv remarks with a smile.

"I only understood part of it. It's Vampilinare. Vampire's tongue." Torin gazes at the little creature. "What is a Death sprite doing way up here?"

Guv transfers a bit of his own essence to the creature.

"There you go. Hope that makes you feel better."

"Briwisghy Da! Rag yma genev bos fleghes an erell!" It flies off into the back of the cavern.

"Anything in that crate?" Guv looks at Torin's sour face.

"Guess not. Let's go. There is an exit up ahead." He walks out of the cavern and sets up camp. The stars are just coming out to play.

Inside, Torin and Granger gaze at each other. They both know this is going to be a long trip. They head outside and help prepare the meal.

Chapter 8



Guv opens his eyes, then sits up in bed. He looks around. *Wait a minute. What am I doing back in Samuel?* He stands up and walks to the window. The morning is upon them.

Bells at the church are going off.

Have they returned?! Guv doesn't even look down to see he is fully clothed while rushing out of the building to the church. Many people are in dresses and tuxes for an event. He looks around, not spotting anyone familiar.

The doors open. Tammy in a beautiful wedding dress walks down the steps on Domar's arm.

Adam is behind them grinning ear to ear. "I wish you both happiness!" He pops the bottle open.

You let her slip through your fingers. A voice taunts him.

"It was for the best!" Guv panics, aware of the pain coursing through him. "She needs happiness."

Happiness? or Chains?

Suddenly, Tammy's body is plastered against a tall frame. Chains surround her with Adam holding a dagger to her throat. "Now you're ours to play with!"

Max tosses a vial of oil below her. "You did this!" He glares at Guv.

Guv shakes his head. "It's just a dream. . . . only a dream." He looks up.

Adam thrusts the dagger into her chest.

"Tammy! No!" Guv rushes forward to have the image disappear with only darkness remaining. "Tammy! Tammy! TAMMY!"

Suddenly, something soft presses up against him. The smell feels familiar and calms him down. "Tammy. . . don't leave me."

A soft voice whispers to him. "I'm here. I'll be here when you wake up."

Guv drifts off to sleep with the nightmare bothering him no more.



Tammy draws Guv close to her. His head resting against her breast. She strokes his hair back. "You're a fool, but then so am I."

Torin sits on the floor crossing his legs. "I'm glad you showed up. I'm aware he can be. . . . a dolt. Especially when it comes to . . . well. you know. "

"I know. I should have expected him to do that." Tammy sighs. "I wasn't. Do you think he will be angry with me?"

"I expect him to be livid. I'm not helping out there." Torin grimaces.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Go for it."

Tammy looks down at him. "What was he like, before all this hit?"

"That is a long story. But the night is young. Alright. We met five years ago. It was at the Festival of Magnus held yearly at the Port of Styxx. It was night and me and Granger were scouting the area for the next big hit." Torin chuckles.

Tammy asks. "What's so funny?"

"I remember we had a lot of people demand to show our registration cards to prove we were not in league with this character known as Monte. His Vampire form at night. Man, what an entrance he made. Standing on the tower with the Lost Relic of Albana." Torin shakes his hand. "Even stated in front of everyone how it was fake and destroyed it in front them with a smile."

"He did that?"

"Yup. His specialty. Proving any items they claim to be genuine is false." Torin smiles. "He always stood out that way. The next morning I met him in the tavern in his human form. Knew right away it was him even with the different form and smell. Something about the way he carried himself."

Tammy smiles. "There is that. I didn't know about that side of him until he scared me. Does he always do that?"

"Yes. It's why I got confused when he came back pissed off. I knew something happened. Weren't you scared of him when he showed up again?" Torin asks.

"I thought I was." Tammy rests her chin on top of Guv's head. "I mean I couldn't figure it out. Monte as you called him frightened me. At the same time I felt helpless, weak, afraid, along with being safe. At the same time I was excited about it."

"You felt safe by him?"

"Yes. I couldn't explain it. I thought I went mad for a moment." Tammy rubs her hand down his back. Guv sighs and

snuggles closer. "Even after Guv saved me again and. . . well." She feels a blush rise to her cheeks.

"Guv wasn't. . . your first?" Torin raises both eyebrows. After her nod, he whistles. "Dam. Was not expecting that. Mind if I ask why?"

"I." Tammy lowers her eyes. "At first I wasn't sure, but I kept hearing the bunny complain that even though he was good looking, his eyes always creeped them out. I wanted to show him that he didn't bother me in the slightest. After it happened. I wondered why Guv made me feel the same way Monte did." She sighs. "I know now. It was because they are both the same person. No matter what form he is in. He will always be himself."

"True. You do know he lies a lot. Hides things too. Are you prepared for that?"

Tammy squeezes her arms gently around him. "Yes. I'm sure we will get into a lot of fights. I've made up my mind. I'm not leaving him. I made that decision when I overheard Adam talking to someone. It was in the shadows so I couldn't see them but their conversation bugged me."

"Bugged you?" Torin sits up straighter with his back stiff. "What was it?"

"He was talking with a woman. She sounded angry. Yelling at him about how dare Adam let him even think about coming up north. Something about a bounty on his head. Both sides want him dead or alive." Tammy squeezes her eyes shut. "Why would Adam do that? Did he trick them?"

"I don't think so. How did you make it past the trap area? I mean we are quite a way in the mountains." Torin replies.

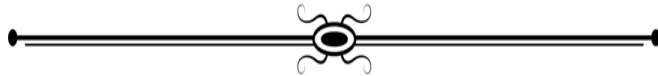
"That was easy. Didn't you put the stone in the wall and teleport through?"

Torin groans. "That's why Adam didn't tell us."

"Why?"

"To stop us from heading straight into their trap. The woman and Adam were apparently trying to keep him away. I'm guessing that it was his mother. From the De Valunte family." Torin shakes his head laughing. "I'll leave you with him. Morning is almost here. I have a lot to tell Granger and I'm sure you are going to be having one hell of a conversation. Just. Don't give up on him, ok?" He stands up and walks to the front of the tent parting it. "Just remember, Follow your heart. Even with an idiot like him around."

Tammy listens to Torin leave the tent. Guv's breathing is still even. *I'm going to get yelled at. I just know it.* She raises her head a little bit, careful not to disturb him, and gazes down at him. "I'll do what I can to protect you. I won't leave your side. Ever. Even if you hate me."



Guv slowly awakens. His eyelids feel heaving resting against something very soft. The smell is familiar. *Tammy.* He snuggles closer then stiffens. The small arms around him stills. Very carefully, He lifts his head and gazes down at her, completely stunned. *Dream or not a Dream?*

"Morning." Tammy smiles with a hint of nervousness in her voice and eyes.

Not a dream. She is here! As if the nightmare was still fresh in his mind, Guv wraps arms around her tightly.

Tammy presses her face against his chest. In a small voice replies. "Don't be angry with me. I know I shouldn't have come but. . ."

"Don't leave me!" Guv squeezes his arms around her.
"Don't you dare leave me again!"

"I . . ." Tammy breathes in his scent. Not quite expecting this response from him. "I won't leave you."

"Promise me! No matter what I say or do, Don't leave me!"
Guv squeezes his eyes shut, trying very hard to still his thoughts.

Tammy moves her arms and wraps them around his neck, pressing her lips against his throat. "I'm not going anywhere, Mister. Hell or high water, I'm staying here."

Guv raises his face and stares deep into her eyes. His need for her grows and not just a physical one either. The desire to claim her for himself intensifies. "I need you!" He leans in and kisses her passionately.

Tammy at first is unsure, then realizes he is afraid. She tightens her arms around him letting him know she won't let him go.

Guv raises his head, his breathing ragged. "I'm sorry. I don't know what got into me." He moves away only to have Tammy's arms hold him to her. "I...."

"It's ok. Hate me all you want. Be angry with me. Lie to me. I'll still be here." Tammy presses her lips against his cheek.

Guv drops his face to the pillow facing her. "What are you even doing here? Didn't Adam try to force you to stay?"

"He actually didn't. I was sure he would. By the time I stepped in his office, Adam already had all the paperwork lined up for me to leave." Tammy frowns and places a hand on his chest. "I was shocked considering I overheard him conversing with a woman in the shadows. Torin already knows."

"Torin does." Guv sweeps a finger down her cheek gently.
"What did you overhear?"

"The woman was complaining about letting you go up the mountain, even with there being a bounty on your head." Tammy felt no response from Guv. "Torin says it was probably your mom because they are trying to protect you by not telling you the direct route."

"Which you went."

Tammy squints her eyes at him, confused. "Why aren't you angry at me."

Guv lowers his eyes. "I'm livid. At the same time, I'm relieved your here. I . . . can't explain it very well." He sighs and turns on his back staring up. "I'm hopeless in that regard. I don't let people get close to me. And you did."

Tammy smiles and leans in closer. "You did the same thing to me."

"Surely, you had a few friends in Samuel? I mean even with the problems you had." Guv glances down at her.

"Nope. Not one. Told you, because I was different I was shunned. Even with me becoming the daughter of Tash, I was never fully welcomed. Just got teased a lot." Tammy's posture stills against him.

Guv squeezes his arm around her. "I'm a liar. I know that. Sometimes I'm honest but when it comes to myself. I tend to hide almost everything that I can."

"I know." Tammy raises her face to him and smiles. "I'm still here aren't I?"

"Yes." Guv threads a hand through her hair. "You are." He brings her closer for another swift kiss, then pulls her close to his chest. They rest for the time being content to snuggle each other.

Meanwhile, Torin and Granger are scouting the area ahead. "That is a lot of information to tell." Granger places both hands

behind him. "Does make sense though. I did think that letter was odd. You think both his parents are alive?"

"Yes. Protecting him from a dire fate. Question is, what is it?" Torin hides behind a large boulder and gestures to Granger who follows behind.

"What do we have here?" Granger asks.

Up ahead is a fenced area. There is a trail to the other side, however bounty hunters walk up and down the road. A small shack lies inside the fence with a fire partially being seen. Not much else can.

Torin scowls. "Great. Just great. How do we even manage to get past them?"

Granger peers around his shoulder. "Well now." He points above at the overhanging ledge. "I can't get up there, but you can. Be careful. I'll wait back at camp incase they decide to show up."

Torin moves back and climbs up the wall to the ledge above. Its landing is a bit rough, but doesn't bother him. He watches Granger move secretly back through the shadows towards the camp. "Now to figure out what this is all about." He walks across the ledge to the edge, gazing down at the camp. It's quite visible now.

The layout by the fence is a bit crowded. Near the wall by him are two large tents with several boxes and crates. Just past that is a wheelbarrow. One the other side is a well with more crates.

wheelbarrow? Why would they need that? Torin raises his eyebrows. A few hunters below gather near the campfire.

"We got word that things are clearly upset by the trade we started. Go figure. Get hired by that one person to collect someone's head and we can run a trade up here. Then shit hits the fan when that Shin fellow won't even return our letters." The woman standing very tall slams her hammer on the ground. Her fur

legs and paws stomp. "Bah on them. We will ensure that the trade still goes. How is the excavation of that ore?"

"Slow. We can't even get those darn creatures we found to move faster. Dumb the lot of em." A creature with a wolf-like face growls wearing a thin plant of armor.

An Artonis and a Half-Fenrir? Torin peeks over the ledge a bit more.

"Put more people in there. I want that ore finished by morning!" She leaves them standing there shaking their heads.

"Back to work." The Half-Fenrir growls. "Friggen Darnel thinks she runs this place." He walks beside another worker who grabs the wheelbarrow and heads to the other path.

Darnel. Never heard of that bounty hunter before. Torin looks back to the other side. A cave entrance with a small stream is near. Might be a way to enter inside. He crawls across the top and stops.

A man with a saber in his hands lights it up. The smell of fire tingles his senses. Torin frowns. *We are going to need another way inside.* He looks back and stills. *Of course. Why didn't I think of that?* It takes him an hour to sneak away without being seen. Hugging tightly to the cliffs.

Back at the campsite, it's no longer there. Torin scowls.

"Over here!" Granger whispers.

Torin walks over to the dark cave entrance and steps inside. "Had to move?"

"Ya. Had a few almost made it on us. Made it out without being seen, but how did they get past you?" Granger questions.

"That is easy. I couldn't get closer but I think they have two more entrances there. One by water and another by teleportation. What is this place?" Torin gazes around. The hallway is narrow and dark with light up ahead.

"Come on." Granger moves down the path to a large cavern. Jagged spikes shoot up on the side. Some are hanging down, looking as if they would fall off any moment. "We need to go to the next area. Figured it would be safer and give us a bit more cover." He steps around a few spikes tilting upward and proceeds down another path.

Torin follows with his ears perked forward. The scent of this place throws his senses off. "Is it me or does this cavern smell sweet? Like hard candy?"

"You're not wrong. I'll show you up ahead." Granger steps out in the room and points up. "You will see why."

Torin stiffens staring up. Water drips from the jagged peaks creating a sparkling color. A few of them fall to the floor and lay there, still shining. He walks over and swipes his finger. "This is. . . wait a minute. Astrial Sugar?"

"Yup. The cavern is riddled with it. Makes for great stuff. Hard to find too." Granger walks over to the campfire light and sits down beside Guv who has his arms wrapped around Tammy.

"You do realize that in this powdered form is impossible to find. They go for the stone and even. . . I wonder." Torin sits down and licks his finger. "Fine quality. Could be what those bounty hunters are after."

"They aren't after Guv?" Granger pokes the fire with a stick.

"Nah. At first I thought they were. They complained about not receiving letters from Shin. Which means neither side hired them. Or at least that is a theory." Torin leans forward resting his elbows in his knees. "I think they were the ones who started the trade dispute."

"What else did you find out?"

"Might be a couple of ways to get inside. Possibly this way and the other because of that deep pond we found. They are forcing some creatures to do the mining along with workers. Have any of you ever heard of someone called Darnel?" Torin asks.

Guv stiffens.

Tammy looks up at him. "You have heard of her."

"I have. In my travels while stealing, I had a certain bounty hunter constantly aiming for me. Her name was Darnel. Very good at her job." Guv sighs. "This was twenty years ago, before I met any of you. Can you describe her?"

"Artonis. She has fur legs and paws with human arms, body and face. Her clothing I noticed was unique. Wore a simple lion cloth along with a plate of armor. Had a hammer too." Torin glances at him. "You have met her?"

"I have. Our last meeting was the coronation of the new princess in Persnia. I manage to steal the crown while causing quite a ruckus with her betrothed." Guv spots a hint of jealousy in Tammy's eyes. "I wasn't interested. It was the part that actually allowed me to escape. Her throwing fits at Darnel about the destruction they caused. Did you see a wolf-like man with her?"

"I did. They work together?"

"No. Sometimes they take the same job. Don't think they get along too well as she overpowers him somehow." Guv looks down. "Why would she still be hunting me?"

"That is a good question. One I think we need to find a way in and cause a scene. Probably finding out who those slaves are." Granger glances at Torin. "Think you can pull it off?"

Torin scowls. "I hate dressing up like them. They smell awful!"

Guv chuckles. "Here I thought you were up to the task."

Torin stands up with both hands on his hips. "Ooo! If it weren't happy you at least have Tammy in your arms. I would be ringing my arms around that neck of yours! And not in a good way either!" He storms off down the hall.

Granger snickers. "Now we wait. I'm sure this will be interesting."

Chapter 9



Goran slashes his whip down. "Keep working you darn, lazy Trolls!"

The few trolls with a pick axe cringe, then slowly raise it and continue to work.

"You'd figure I have a pile of dung on my doorstep with how slow they are!" Goran growls at Obar. "Why does she want them now?"

"Didn't say." Obar replies, then spots a hunter coming with a wheelbarrow. "You there, Go in the back and make sure to haul as much as you can." He watches the worker move to the back. "Mm."

"Something the matter?"

"No. Just thought I smelled something familiar." Obar turns around with two other hunters taking a break. He bares his fangs at them, snarling, "Do I need to take my anger out on you for not doing your Dang Job!"

"No Sir!" They both stand and take a wheelbarrow to the next fresh pile of ores. "Darnel needs it for the next phase." He glances at Goran.

"It's already time? Did we seal off that one entrance?" Goran glances around at the trolls.

"The bigger one, yes. The smaller one I doubt anyone would be able to get in there. Not too worried about it." Obar replies, and spots the worker coming back. "I need to get back. Have to set up for tonight."

"Ah, the ritual. Good luck." Goran waves at him, then turns back to the workers.

Torin glances in their direction while taking the ores up the path through the first fence, then across the bridge to the other side.

"Leave those here. Make sure to get your copy of the manuscript for tonight's ritual. And take a damn bath. You smell awful." A hunter scowls at him.

Well, Duh. I smell like you Moron. "Yes, sir." Torin walks away inside the large building nestled inside the cave. The first hall reaches up high with three pillars on each side. He can tell this has been here for quite some time.

A couple of hunters pass him by. After the hall is an entrance to the side along with a huge door in front. The markings on it resemble a circle. With writing in a language not familiar to him.

Torin walks down the hallway. A room is to the left. A side glance tells him it's a storage area. Crates of different proportions are here. *Those crates can't hold anything heavy like ore. Do they draw it out here or ship it elsewhere?*

Just past that he stops at a room with an altar on one side. You can see a statue clad in hardened clay. Below is the name,

Wingfreed. Benches are on one side that look old and worn. As if this place hasn't been touched.

A hunter slaps him on the back. "If you're lost and drunk, just go down that way!" They joke while laughing and disappearing behind the statue.

Torin smirks with a distasteful glance. *I'd like to go that way, but I have this feeling I'm being watched.* He walks through the altar into another hallway. The lights here do not shine as bright. *I knew it. I'm being followed.*

In the next room further down the lights flicker. Torin makes a quick decision. His clothes dangle in the air for a brief moment, then fall to the floor.

Obar rushes over. "Dammit! He got away again! Search the halls! I know this smell, dam cat. You will not escape me this time!"

Torin up high behind one of the pillars peers around. *Wait a minute. I don't remember you but I do remember one General calling me a Dam Cat. It can't be.* He narrows his eyes at him. *You have the ability to change your form. Dammit all to hell. This was a trap!* He waits up high moving quietly from one part of the ceiling to another, leaving different scents behind. *This is going to take a while to get out here.*



Guv paces back and forth. It's already night time.

Tammy takes a cup of Daring Tea and brings it over to Guv. "I think you need this."

Guv pauses, aware of the words resting on his lips. "Thanks." He takes the drink from her. "Why is he so late?"

"Probably ran into something or someone. We have also had our fair share of them. Us being thieves and all. Torin has a higher bounty on his head than I do." Granger grumbles.

Tammy sits down at the fire. "Higher than you? But you're the lock pick master."

"Ah, but Torin can become anyone he wants to be. Also steals anything from people as well. How do you think we manage to pull off the trade heist?"

Tammy stills. "No way. Dryain was Torin? But they don't look alike!"

Granger laughs. "Yup. Been in his share of squabbles. One in particular whom I hope we never have to face again. Nightmare getting out of that mess."

Guv sighs, then saunters over by the fire. "It's been hours and we have hunters patrolling up and down like mad. Surely they would have found this place by now?"

"It's the scent of this place. A lot of bounty hunters are not well refined in this sense of smell. Even those that are wouldn't recognize this. To them this smell could be a trap so they stay away. But to a trader, that is a different story."

"What do you mean? Surely if they grounded it themselves or even shipped it out for cash which bounty hunters like, then this smell would be the same right?" Tammy glances at Granger, then looks at Guv who sits down beside her.

"Pre-made grounding like this cave makes it in its natural environment. You won't find it in any markets." Guv sips his drink. "Stuff like this can't be made in any shop. Any crafter who knows their trade would know this. I've met several across the world that said things were original for them to not be. Look up." He points up.

Tammy looks up. "What is it?"

"You see those colors? Why is it doing that if there is no light in here to begin with?" Guv looks at her. "Now take out a bottle you collected and smell it."

Tammy glances at him, confused, but takes out the bottle and swipes her finger inside. "Mm. It's. . . not sweet."

"Taste it."

Granger smiles at the interaction between them. Fully enjoying himself.

Tammy licks her finger. "This is. . . It tastes like Aya Syrup but richer." She closes the bottle. "I better not eat anymore."

Guv throws his head back and laughs.

Granger chuckles, tucking his head down.

Tammy scowls. "Alright. I didn't know." She punches Guv in the shoulder. It causes him to laugh harder. "It's not that funny!"

Guv stops laughing and looks at her with an intense yet gentle gaze. "You are adorable."

Tammy flushes. "And you can be a jerk!"

Guv wraps his arm around her, bringing her close. "True. Quite the jerk."

Torin jumps down from the ceiling landing a bit from them.

"You're late!" Guv scowls, tightening his hold on Tammy.

Tammy scowls at him, then hits on the back of the head.

"Ow!" He releases her and rubs where she hit. "That hurt."

Granger glances at Torin who shakes his head. "I've hit you several times and you never once said it hurt."

Tammy crosses her arms while tapping her foot.

Guv glances at her, then regards Granger with a shrewd stare. "You're not Tammy."

Tammy flushes while both Granger and Torin chuckle.

Torin sits by the fire with his shoulders hunched. "As much as I want to continue this talk. We need to find a way to either get around them or go back and take the sea up. Not sure which."

Granger hands him a fresh cup of tea from the pile near the fire. "Alright. I take it something really bad happened."

"You remember General Arsin? The one from Neshmire that you love to tease so much?" Torin waits till Granger nods. "Obar the bounty hunter is that same person. Half-breed Fenrir with the ability to change his form at will."

"At will?" Guv questions.

Granger swears. "I remember the last run we had with him. He was no longer a part of Neshmire because he was expelled for high treason. Didn't he go to the Temple of Tomulia then get passed on to the Temple of Dierie?"

"Yes. Where I almost got caught. Damn bastard. Could sniff me out." Torin clenches the cup a bit tighter.

"How did you know it was him?" Guv questions. Tammy keeps glancing at them.

"Called me a Dam Cat. Only person ever did that and the way I got trailed. Quite good at his job." Torin sighs. "Walked into a friggin rats hole. Do you think we were set up this whole time?"

Granger frowns.

Guv doesn't reply.

Tammy asks, "What do you mean?" She gazes back and forth between them. "In Samuel?"

"No. This whole heist from the beginning. The one we were supposed to do at Neshmire." Torin sips his drink. "If they did, could they have known who was coming up here?"

"How could they?" Granger demands. "The only ones that might be able to know are people up north which we can't verify anything about. Tammy."

"Yes?"

"You lived up there for a bit? How long ago was that and what was it like?" Granger pours himself a refill from the pot.

Tammy looks down at the fire.

"You don't have to tell us if you don't want to." Guv warns, ignoring the scathing look from Granger.

"No. It's important." Tammy sighs. "About two hundred years ago I was born in the city of Graviner. My mother was a trainer for Grabblers that dig the tunnels. Incredibly strong. But when I was born, They almost killed me, but a man stepped forward. He had dark hair with bright red eyes. I noticed his pointy ears along with his troll-like skin. They called him Fad'heir. Odd name but they respected his request for me to go to my human father." She rubs her hands up and down.

Guv stands up and sits behind her, wrapping his arms around. "What happened next?"

"Got dropped off at the Port of Ushrea. I. . . . Got sold for work in that area for a time. Till Adam found me a while later."

Tammy looks down.

"I'm sorry. You don't know anything about up there." Guv squeezes his arms tighter.

"No. Afraid I can't help."

"Ah, but you did." Torin sips his drink. "They didn't want any half-breeds up there. Even two hundred years ago. Why?"

"Good question. I-" A slight sound causes them to still. It scratches across the rocks. "Dammit you were followed!" Granger puts out the fire with a gem.

"Is there another way out of here?" Torin crams the items in his sack. Guv and Tammy are doing the same thing.

"Don't know, but we ain't got much of a choice. We either fight them or try to find another way out. Both options not in favor

right now considering the cave we are in." Granger runs down the path south.

Torin swears while following behind Tammy and Guv. "How did they even manage to follow us. It's not possible. I didn't leave a trace behind."

They travel down the path into another room. More footsteps sound off the floor.

Granger looks left and right.

"Which way do we go?" Torin squints his eyes in the darkness.

"I can fight them!" Guv growls.

"Not without Tammy getting hurt," Torin replies.

"Dammit. Can't see a thing." Granger grumbles.

Tammy grabs Guv's hand. "Follow me, I can see a path to the left!" She runs down the hall pulling his hand. Torin's and Grangers' footsteps follow. In the next room lights up a little revealing a small lake in the center with a waterfall from above.

"Think we can jump up?" Guv growls.

Torin runs to the side climbing up and peers out the small gap. "Too small. Where to now?" He jumps down.

Granger scours the walls with his hands looking for any signs of an exit. "I'm not seeing any here."

Guv lets go of Tammy's hand and walks to the lake. An eerie feeling overcomes him. "I don't think we should be in here." He steps back.

Tammy replies beside him. "What is it?"

Granger remarks. "Got no choice, we might have to fight." He turns around.

Suddenly, a water vortex swirls in the middle of the lake. It reaches the very peaks above. The wind pulls at them, drawing them inside.

Guv grabs Tammy only to be drawn in. "Tammy!"

"Guv! Tammy!" Torin hangs on the side of the wall.

"Granger! Give me your hand!" He reaches out.

Granger grabs him only to have the winds pull harder.

"Don't you dare let me go!"

Torin grips Granger harder, feeling the rocks fall off.

"Watch out!" They get sucked into the vortex and pulled down into the depths.

A stranger in the shadows steps out. "Better than I planned. Now for the next phase to begin." They sneak back into the shadows, disappearing without a trace.



Guv opens his eyes and looks around, startled. The area in front of him has bubbles floating upwards even from the ground. One pops in front of his nose spraying a misty miasma. He coughs. "Dam that smells bad." He stands up.

In front of him is a river that is flowing backward. Instead of the bubbles rising out of it, they float in the opposite direction. As if the tide is repelling it instead of flowing together.

"Where am I?" Guv looks around. "Tammy? Granger! Torin! Where are you!" He looks above. The clouds are purple with a bright green sky. The sun shines through casting a glow on the swampy terrain. He hears hooves pound the ground.

Coming up the stream is a clear horse-like creature with light blue for its mane and tail. Wisps of wind float from its hooves. It throws their head back and neighs at him running up to the clouds.

"That was . . . an Enbarr?" Guv squints his eyes, then stiffens. "Torin! Torin!" He yells at them. Up above in the clouds is Torin along with Tammy. Neither one looks in his direction.

"Dammit. Will my magic work here?" He tries to teleport only to reappear where he stands.

They walk away disappearing from sight.

"Alright calm down. There must be rules to wherever we are at." Guv gazes at the water spotting an upside down clock moving up. It has no wings or even a dial on it. It does however have two small eyes on top that are squinting at him. "What in the world? It's as if this place has no meaning."

To the left another sound passes him by. A large spider heads his way. Its fangs bear poison while the hide is hard. It grows smaller as it inches closer. Passing by his nose, is no bigger than an eye, but grows larger again moving downstream.

"This place is going to drive me nuts. A Nyx Spider?" Guv places his hand on his hip. "Wait a minute. I remember. Stories about a place where time didn't make sense. People got lost in here. Never came out." He frowns. "Why am I not affected?"

"Guv!"

He looks behind him, then above as a shadow waves over him. "Tammy!"

"Wait there, I'll jump down!" Tammy bends her knees.

"Don't jump!" Guv shouts up at her.

Torin grabs her hand and pulls her back. "Why not?"

"You remember those stories about a place where time didn't make sense? I think we are in that place. I'm not affected for some reason." Guv yells up at them.

"That would make sense. We have been going around in circles." Torin glances around. "What do you suggest?"

"Can you use magic?" Tammy peers over the side.

"Nope. Magic for some reason is halted here." Guv frowns, remembering that one sight he saw earlier. "Alright. I'm going to

try something, but stay up there. I might disappear from your sight for a minute." He waits for their approval.

After a moment's hesitation, they both nod.

Guv takes a step back while breathing in deeply. The bubbles around him float but don't touch him. He steps forward as if walking on air.

"Hellfire. I wouldn't have believed it if I didn't see it!"

Torin steps back.

Tammy stares at him in shock.

Guv is walking up to them as if climbing stairs in the air. Nothing is touching his feet. He steps into the clouds. "There."

Both of them glance at each other, unsure of what happened.

Guv tugs both their hands to him and embraces them.

"Wait a minute. Are you sure this is Guv I'm talking to!"

Torin grumbles, his face pressed against his chest.

"Mhm. I know his smell anywhere." Tammy smiles and snuggles closer.

"I'm glad both of you are ok. I thought I lost you." Guv raises his head.

Torin breaks free from his embrace. "Alright." He hisses while smoothing down his tail with his ears back. "Don't you dare do that again!"

Tammy laughs. "I'm ok. But if you're not affected, how does that help us out?" She stands back.

"Mm." Guv looks at the clouds. "I have an idea, but you might not like it."

Torin scowls. "As long as it doesn't involve hugging, cuddling, kissing, or biting. I'm fine." His ears go back even further. "Oh no. No! You had to bite me once and NO Thank You!"

"It was the only way to transfer my essence to you." Guv crosses his arms with a sour look. "You don't want to stay here forever do you? There is also Granger to find."

"Come on, Torin. Just a bit. What is the harm in it?"

Tammy questions.

Torin flushes. "I'm not going to admit anything! Can't you transfer another way?"

"Sure. If I was in my other form. In this the fangs are the only way to do it." Guv sighs.

Tammy glances at Torin questionably. "Why are you so resistant about having him. . . . Oh," a blush blooms on her cheeks.

"Don't you dare say it!" Torin hisses at her with his tail a complete fuzz. Both hands clench at his sides emphasizing his anger. "I wasn't excited! It wasn't like that!"

Tammy's lips twitch.

"It's not funny!"

Tammy chuckles.

Torin stomps his foot, then stills as Guv's teeth sink into his neck. "Dammit!" His tail stands up with his ears moving back and forth. A flush forms on his cheeks.

Guv releases him, aware he gave a bit of himself to him. "There. Not as much as last time. This should help you out." He walks over to Tammy and pulls her into his arms. "Now, your turn little miss giggles." His fangs pierce her flesh.

Tammy sighs, grasping his shoulders. "If you need to drink, go ahead."

It has been a while. A small feasting shouldn't hurt. He drinks part of her blood along with her essence. The smell of her feels good in his mouth.

Tammy gasps, leaning her head back.

Guv stops, then gives her parts of his essence. He feels her hands tighten on his shoulders. *Not too much. I don't need her getting drunk like Torin did.* He lifts his face. "There. Feel fine?"

Tammy breathes in deep. "I think I'm fine."

Torin growls. "Not fair, you're fine."

Tammy smiles. "Perhaps I have a slight resistance. Not much but it helps. Next time, mister." She places a finger on Guv's lips. "You make sure I feel that all the way."

Guv blushes at that thought and averts his gaze.

"You're embarrassed!" Torin stares at him in shock.

"Shut Up!" Guv walks up the clouds a little bit then stops. "Where do we look for Granger?"

"Mm. I couldn't tell." Torin stands beside him with his ears back.

Tammy steps in-between them and hooks her arm through theirs. "We will find them. Let's Go." She pulls them forward. The clouds continue then lower to the ground. The river forms at a small lake. You can see large bubbles popping in the water. However these don't spread a miasma. Just make an awful noise.

"Ok. Do I need to say it?" Torin places both hands on his hips.

"You smelt it, You delt it." Guv smirks at him.

"I did not!" Torin hisses.

"Over here! Dumb Morons! Over here!" A tiny voice yells at them.

"You hear that?" Guv looks down, then over the lake. There are different lily pads on it.

"Oh for the love of. Move that shiner of yours!"

"Granger?" Torin looks around, then spots a tiny figure on the lily pad in the middle of the lake. He keeps jumping up and down. "Oh my. . . ." He places a hand over his mouth.

"Don't you dare laugh you moron! Get me out of here!"
Granger yells while still hopping up and down.

Guv walks over while Torin doubles over laughing his ass off. He kneels and lowers his hand.

Granger steps on it, quite angry.

"Ya know, in this form I can transfer some of my essence to you. Very easily without biting." Guv walks back to them.

"Alright, Torin. Stop laughing. I'm aware of how funny this is."

Granger, no more than the size of Guv's thumb, has both arms crossed while seething with rage. "I'm so gonna get him. Fix me up why don't ya!"

Guv does his best to keep a straight face while his hand glows. When the creature is small, transferring tiny amounts is easy. But as they grow bigger, the fangs are the only way to transfer in this form. It's done. His hand stops glowing and lowers Granger to the floor.

He steps out. "Now what is supposed to happen?" His form grows to his original state. "Torin!" He darts after him, they race up and down the grass. "Get back here!"

Torin turns around and sticks his tongue out at him. "No thank you!"

Tammy gazes at them for a moment. "They do make you smile, don't they?"

"Yes." Guv glances down at her. "They are pretty good at that."

"How are we going to get out of here?" Tammy looks around. "Does this place even have an exit?"

"No idea." Guv gazes at Torin and Granger tackling each other. "I'm sure we will figure it out." He grabs her hand and pulls her towards them. "Enough you two."

Granger releases the grip hold he had on Torin. "Fine. I'm done, for now."

Torin smirks while wiping his forehead. "Where to now?"

"Mm." Guv spots a glow in the distance ahead. "Does that look like an exit?" He points to where the glow is coming from.

"Uh." Torin looks around. "I don't see anything."

"Me neither." Granger grumbles. "Are you sure you're ok?"

Tammy gazes up at Guv. "I don't see anything either."

"Maybe only I can?" Guv glances at all their perplexed faces. "Look. I'll be careful. We just need a way out." He steps ahead with the others following behind. The glow looks brighter.

They pass a field of grass with small hopping toads all in a line. From the smallest to the largest.

Torin shakes his head. "Maybe we should be going in that direction. The creatures here aren't going this way."

"I'm with Torin on this one. Something doesn't feel right." Granger rubs his arms.

Tammy frowns, not spotting a response from Guv. He looks as if he is being drawn to something. "Guv?" She spots a glimmer up ahead. As if realizing something, she shoves him hard to the ground.

"Tammy!" Torin and Granger shout in unison.

Guv shakes his head as if freed from whatever gripped him to see Tammy floating in mid-air above. "Tammy!" He reaches for her only to miss.

Tammy smiles while being pulled inside a large clear dome. The pattern looks like broken glass reflecting her image.

Guv rushes to the dome and slams against it. It knocks him back quite away. "Tammy! Tammy!" He rushes again.

Torin grabs his arms. "Guv! Let's focus here!"

Granger is examining the dome while they are arguing and stops at Guv's comment.

"You don't get it! They planned this! Instead of me because I can enter, My father, My mother, both sides orchestrated her demise!" Guv falls to his knees. "I should have seen it! Why didn't I?"

Torin grabs his shoulders. "What do you mean? Guv! Talk to me!"

Guv's bleak gaze looks at him. "Cynthia. I should have figured it out when she stepped in the room unafraid by what she saw. Also by the fact she knew of a disease I knew nothing about. Adam never questioned her once. I didn't see it."

"What about Cynthia?" Torin asks.

"Cynthia was in disguise as my mother. Which means Adam has been in contact with them. They knew of this demise by the person called Shin. Probably kept me away. But when I appeared, they changed their plans when Tammy and I . . . " Guv slams his fists on the ground. "I should have seen it! Why didn't I?!"

Granger places a hand on his shoulder. "What do you want to do?"

Guv looks up with his eyes burning with rage. Nothing feels right anymore. "Just as they sacrificed my love. I will bring a curse down on them. They shall suffer for this. Both Realms."

"You know you have our help. I don't like revenge, but I can't stand what they did. Let's use this area as base since no one else can enter. We will ensure they will both feel your wrath my friend." Torin stands up and gazes at Granger who nods.

The fuel that started on the beginning of this journey will see them through to the next. The Revenge on both Realms. What awaits the people of Gravier, the Draugars and the people of the

Valpire, the Vampires. Will Guv extract his revenge and free his love? Only Time will tell.

Until Next Time!