



AN
ELI DRAGEN
NOVELETTE

BEAST IN THE DARKNESS

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BROWN

Beast in the Darkness

(An Elighan Dragen Novelette #2.5)

By

Stacey Marie Brown

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Darkness of Light
(Darkness Series #1)

Fire in the Darkness
(Darkness Series #2)

Dwellers of Darkness
(Darkness Series #3)

Blood Beyond Darkness
(Darkness Series #4)

Beast in the Darkness

An Elighan Dragen Novelette

Chapter One

The tree pressed hard into my back as I leaned into it. The solidness of it eased the pain that stabbed over every inch of my body. My fingers wrapped around the last wooden dagger which lay entrenched in my skin. I grunted as I tugged it out. Blood trickled out the dozens of holes where I had already removed the wooden spears. I had deserved each one and let them impale deep into my body without a fight. Lorcan had not felt the same. He yowled and fought every one of them that had burrowed in. He took off moments after Brycin had.

Nothing about my night had gone to plan. Good and bad.

Just an hour ago, my cock had been deep in her. Happy. It was the first time I had ever felt that way while fucking a woman. It was the truth when I told her I would follow her anywhere. I realized when she left the ranch a few months before I didn't like her not being around. Wanting and missing someone was completely alien to me. Fae, Nymph, Water Fairy, even human, I had always enjoyed their company, but not much thought went into them after we fucked. This one . . . this one had been different from the beginning. I had hated her at first for it, trying to continue to deny my feelings for the Dae. That was no longer possible.

Showing myself to her tonight hadn't been a premeditated plan to bed her. Actually it was one of the last things I thought she would do. Hit me, yell at me, throw me into a tree . . . well, all those things had happened, but I didn't expect my dick to be in her while she did them. Her slight innocence on what to do, but her strong desire to be free, inhibited, and unrelenting, completely undid me.

Then Lorcan changed everything. All the trust she had shown me earlier disappeared—transformed to hatred and a look of utter betrayal.

“Fuck!” I yelled up at the night sky. Everything was so screwed up now. Her revulsion of me was clear. Who could blame her? When you hear the guy you just slept with killed your mother, it kind of changes things. There was so much Brycin didn't know. So many lies were tangled and woven together. That's how the Fae were. Secrets were the law we lived by. Truth held great power in the Otherworld. We traded, negotiated, and dealt in secrets. We also kept them. We had been since the day the Seelie King took the Fae into hiding in the Otherworld.

I sat there till the sky began to lighten, recalling what had happened and what I could have said differently. It probably didn't matter; the outcome would have been the same. In the end she would have left. Truth would make sure of that. Forcing myself to stand, I wanted to see her once more, even if I only saw a glimpse of her through her window. It would be enough, it would have to be. The thought of seeing her roll around again with the Incubus had me growling. Not

that I had the right anymore. Hell, he was probably better for her than me. I needed to walk away from her. If she knew what had really happened . . . yeah, it was better if I left.

I hobbled towards the spot where I could see her room. She was near, my blood in her thumped like a GPS. I seemed to be able to feel her farther out than she could feel me. That helped me find her in Seattle and how I found her here.

I took a step and grunted. The punctures were healing, but still stung like a bitch. It would hurt to shift, but I'd heal faster in my Dark Dweller form. I was about to turn when a sharp ripping pain ran through my veins. My knees gave out and I crumbled to the ground. It was like knives slicing at me from the inside. Then it dissipated and everything went cold. Silent. I gasped for breath, feeling an emptiness I had never known before.

Ember.

When I first gave her my blood and I felt the humming of me running through her, it bothered me. It was intrusive and intimate. Then it became white noise in the background. I grew used to it. Now it was a part of me. How I knew I was alive. Because she was alive.

Now I felt nothing.

That only meant two things. She was suddenly out of my range, which would be strange since I felt her near just a minute ago.

Or she was dead. She had been out of my range before—it had never felt like this.

“BRYCIN!” I roared, my legs pushed me up and forward. She couldn't be dead; there was no way. Then the thoughts started rolling into my head. *What if Lorcan went to find her and something happened? Would he kill her? Or did she finally have enough?* No, Brycin would never kill herself no matter what happened. It was not who she was. She was too strong for that. She would try to kill me first.

I ran not knowing where I was going, but hoping with one more step, I would feel the blood dance inside me again.

Instinct kicked in as my adrenaline hit uncontrollable levels. My body responded and I let the call of the beast take over. My spine curved taking me down. My clothes shredded as the beast formed. Throughout my change I never stopped running. Hours went by, even when the sun grew high in the sky, I didn't stop. I trailed the outer rim of the Unseelie King's property, moving out in intervals.

It was only in extreme cases we stayed in our Dark Dweller form. It was too risky, but I didn't care. Her smell was easier to track in this shape. I could smell her scent out beyond Lars' border, but I couldn't tell how recent it was.

Hunger and fatigue did not stop me. The only thing which did was hearing the Demon and his minions leave the safety of his property to go looking for her also. My hopes she remained somehow safely back in her room in his compound vanished.

She was gone.

A roar so deep within me thundered against the mountains, shaking the surface below.

Chapter Two

Three years later

The fumes of cheap whiskey burnt up through my nose as I took another swing. My reflection in the cracked mirror taunted me. A week ago I was the one who had thrown someone into it, causing the crack. I guess I should be thankful Mike had let me back in tonight. The other guy had been an asshole, and deserved what he got. Now a huge guy in the fractured mirror stared back at me. His shaved head, scarred face, hard expression, and extremely taut shoulders looked like he would snap your neck like a toothpick if you even looked his way. My Dark Dweller nature loved this. I was back to who I was supposed to be—a killer—something to be feared. That fucker, Drauk, was right. I had become a pussy. I had gotten soft living here on Earth. *She* had turned me weak, making me all human-like, with feelings.

Just thinking of her now had me reaching for my triple shot of whiskey. I slammed the rest of it down my throat.

“Ahhh, yeah that’s the stuff.” I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. I could feel the killer in me building again which put me in a fighting mood. “Another one, Mike.” I tapped at my glass.

He frowned and grabbed the bourbon bottle. He was never one to cut anyone off. If the money kept coming, he kept pouring. Last week he had cut me off. I guess I couldn’t blame him I trashed his bar. Someone called the police and once again, for the seventh time this month, I had been arrested. When I escaped Weiss’ feeble cuffs and ran off, he had put a warrant out for my arrest. I knew tonight’s crowd. No one would call.

“I don’t want no fights in here,” Mike grumbled as he poured the dark liquid in my glass.

I grabbed the glass and held it up. “I promise not to start any fights,” I replied back. *With anyone that doesn’t deserve it*, I thought to myself.

Mike huffed, shaking his head.

That hadn’t always been the case lately—deserved or not, if you got in my way or irritated me, my fist found a way to your face. Gulping down another burning swallow, my adrenaline picked up. Oh yeah, the Dark Dweller was pawing at the surface, ready and willing, for someone to come up and start something.

“How’d I know I’d find you here?”

I looked up into the broken mirror, a warped image of Cooper stood behind me.

“Because you’re just brilliant like that,” I retorted.

Cooper’s hand pounded down on my shoulder. “Yeah, that must be it.” He sat on the stool next to me and held up two fingers. “A beer, Mike.”

I scoffed as I tilted my glass back.

“Hey, one of us has to be clear-headed enough to get you out of whatever mess you’re gonna get yourself into.” Cooper took a swing of the beer Mike had placed in front of him. “Our Second sure as hell won’t be sober, so I guess that means it has to be me.”

A growl only Cooper could hear came from my chest. It wasn’t the first time I heard

comments about me falling down on my job. There was a time I cared about my role as Second. I had wanted it then. No longer did I feel that way. I just wanted to be left alone. It still bugged me, though, because I hated being reminded I failed. Again, it all stemmed back to her.

“You better be careful. Weiss has a hard-on for you. Take it easy tonight.”

My glass clinked on the wood as I slammed it down. “You think I should be afraid of that asshole? He’s a measly human. What the fuck do I care? And when hasn’t he had it out for me?”

Cooper’s eyes darted around. My outburst had his panties all in a twist. He was still a little apprehensive because, on a few occasions, usually in the middle of a fight, I had started to shift in front of the humans. Most of the time I got so drunk I hadn’t remembered it the next day. But really, so what? They saw my eyes and claws turn, but they had been drinking, too. They wouldn’t actually believe it happened.

I gave up on caring awhile back.

“We have a run tomorrow. Cole would like you sober enough to do the drop, if that’s at *all* possible.” Cooper no longer hid his annoyance with me. Cooper and Gabby were the only ones who would still say what they felt to my face. Cole had tried. We had even got into a huge physical altercation a year ago. We both beat the shit out of each other and walked away even madder than we were before. He mostly ignored me now. His focus was trying to get Jared back from the Otherworld—if the kid was even alive anymore.

I took the last gulp in my glass, letting it burn down my chest. If only it would take away all my failures, starting with what happened to my parents. Then it would need to move on to how I let Jared get past me. I should have stopped him, protected him. Sadly, I needed to shield him from his own uncle. Another mistake had been not killing Lorcan. Because I didn’t have the strength or will power to kill my own brother, I had lost two of my family.

We had stopped feeling West over three years ago and assumed he was dead. There was little doubt Lorcan had killed him. West should never have left with them. He hadn’t known how far Lorcan would really go in his pursuit to get back into the Otherworld. None of us really did. Now West was gone.

Because of Lorcan, we had lost Jared, too. Jared was part human so he didn’t have as strong an internal connection to the Dark Dweller as the rest of us did. *She* had been my only connection to Jared. Through the dreamscapes, which she brought me in on, I would learn she would see him and her friends in her dreamwalk. The night she disappeared she had told me Jared was all right. That was three years ago. We didn’t know if he was all right or not anymore.

All these things piled on top of my biggest regret. I didn’t know if it was for letting her in or letting her slip through my fingers. It didn’t matter anymore. For two years I had searched for her. There wasn’t a place I hadn’t venture to, thinking maybe if I went a little farther she would be there. I went crazy tracking her.

I only turned human if I needed to talk to someone; otherwise, for two years, I had mostly remained in my Dark Dweller form. I slipped from town to town through the night, living on fresh deer carcass. Even a year after returning home, it remained hard for me to stay in my two-

legged physique. The Dweller did not want to go back. It wanted out and it wanted to kill.

"I think I can handle a drop." I tapped my glass on the bar, trying to get Mike's attention. This was a precarious time for me: still sober enough to feel my raging anger, but drunk enough to act on it. I wasn't adequately numb yet. A few more drinks and I'd hit that blissful place where I didn't feel or care. Sleep hadn't offered peace to me in years. Drinking myself into oblivion was one of the only ways I found it.

"Cole is expanding a deal with the Apocalypse Riders. A few of them want to go with us for the drop tomorrow. To have it known we have their back. They've had some trouble with the Portland Hells Angels."

My mind immediately flashed back to Puck and McNamm, two ex-riders of the club. Cooper must have forgotten. He would never intentionally bring up anything related to her anymore. I had flown off the handle too many times when they had. The thought of Puck's and McNamm's hands anywhere on her body still made me see red. Good thing they were already six feet under, because the pain I would inflict on them now. They had made it out easy. The killer in me wanted them alive again, just so I could hunt them down and tear them apart bit by bit. Slowly.

Glass shattered breaking around my hand.

"Jesus Christ, Dragen!" Mike yelled from the other side of the bar. "You want to add that to your tab as well? If ya ever pay me, that is."

I dug into my pocket and pulled out my wallet, slapping a hundred on the counter. "Here. Will that shut you up, old man? Now can I have another fuckin' drink?"

Mike's eyes narrowed. He had always respected us, giving us more leeway than he gave others. I think deep down Mike sensed something different about our group and had a healthy fear of us. I knew I had been pushing that line with him. Just another thing I didn't care about.

Cooper rubbed his face as Mike swept away the broken glass and then filled a new one with cheap liquor.

Cooper turned and faced me when Mike got out of earshot. "We're all done with your shit, Eli. We've given you space, but seriously it is time." He stressed the last three words. "I don't know what happened with her, but I can guess . . ."

It was instantaneous. I pushed off my stool. Fury roared under the skin. The topic of *her* was off limits.

Cooper sighed. "Jesus man you need to get it together. You are completely unraveled. *She* is gone Eli. You need to deal with that."

They had stopped saying her name some time ago. Owen had ended up flat against a wall with a broken nose one night when he referred to her by name.

Brycin . . . one simple word evoked a torrent of emotions. The absence of feeling my blood humming in her still had not eased. You'd think by now I would be back to how I felt before I gave her my blood. But, like I changed her DNA, she seemed to have changed mine. Now I only felt emptiness there.

To be fair, the night I hit Owen was the night the Unseelie King had tracked me down. He had never officially dropped the reward he placed on Brycin's head for breaking her contract with

him. I figured he put it there so he had others looking for her as well. They came up with nothing. He told me it was pointless. If the Unseelie King couldn't find you . . . you were probably dead.

That was the night I officially understood she was gone. For good.

"Fuck sake, Eli, calm down. I won't bring her up again." Cooper kicked at my stool. "Now, sit the hell back down."

Air filtered roughly through my nose as I breathed out. It took me several moments before I calmed down enough. As I sat back down on the seat my phone buzzed in my pocket. A slightly trashy, but beautiful, dark haired brunette showed up on the screen. Her lips puckered in a kiss.

I clicked it off and shoved it back into my pocket. In my current mood I had no doubt I would end up knocking on her door later this evening. But no matter what, she could never fulfill me or the Dark Dweller which raged inside. Only one had ever appeased the animal. Though nothing would ever tame it; there was only one it truly craved. One it would never have again.

"Will you answer her so she will stop calling me, looking for you?" Cooper nodded towards the phone in my pocket.

I frowned and took a sip of my drink.

"Natasha is coming tomorrow so you better deal with her."

My frown deepened. She was only interested in her father's dealings when they involved me. I still recalled the night Natasha had kissed me at that bonfire party when I was looking for Brycin. That night everything changed. Our connection solidified.

Natasha had been convenient and easy. I had never led her to believe I was in it past the fucking. She always seemed to want to make me the guy who would change for her. I wasn't the first guy she screwed in hopes he'd eventually fall in love with her, but she seemed most determined for it to be me. I had always been upfront and honest, but she only heard what she wanted. That wasn't my fault. She was a good lay; desperation to claim me had her open to anything, to try anything. I used it to my benefit. Compassion was not a Dark Dweller trait.

Cooper turned back to his beer at my non-response. We drank in silence. Tonight the alcohol was not calming me down. My shoulders hunched more and my muscles twitched. The beast was hitting itself against the man-form I contained it in.

I stood. "Come on, let's ride." Being on my bike was sometimes the only other way, besides drinking, to quiet my inner monster for a while.

Cooper stood and slapped another bill on the counter. "Thanks, Mike."

Mike gave us a nod, and I could smell the relief he felt at our departure. My presence seemed to cause an air of tension, sensing at any moment I could violently turn. Humans seemed to feel the thin line of sanity I was walking.

We went outside, my steel-tip boots kicking up dirt in the parking lot. My legs straddled my black beauty.

"Where to?" Cooper hopped on his baby, next to me.

"Let's just ride."

He nodded in understanding. This is what we did when we needed an escape. No destination.

No thought. Wherever the road took us.

The tires squealed as I pulled out onto the pavement, my engine revving high. The moment the wind brushed over my scalp, I felt better. I had shaved my head in one of my agro moments. The severe look suited me better now. People had always feared me, but this only made them know, instantly, I was not someone to mess with.

My wheels flew over the asphalt. The high speed wasn't enough tonight. The bike's odometer shook, trying to reach the red. My hand twisted the throttle until it could no longer turn. The distance between Cooper and me widened. For miles I pushed it, barely staying on the road.

Red and blue light came out of the darkness, swirling behind us. I knew who it was. He was out searching for me. This only upped my recklessness. *Well, he found his man . . . let's see if he can catch him.* I sneered, almost willing Weiss to start shooting at me. The fact I wouldn't die from his bullets only made me want to push the envelope more. What did it matter?

"Pull over." A voice came over the speakers on top the police car.

My answer was to flip him off.

He has a warrant out for you. You really want to piss him off? Cooper said through our link. Most had given up communicating with me through our link. Pointless when I ignored them.

Let him try and catch me, I replied back. *You're a Dark Dweller, Cooper, get some fuckin' balls.*

The sigh through the link was loud. I knew him and, no matter what, he would follow me down this road. We don't leave brothers. Cooper hit the gas and came up even with me.

Come on, it will be fun. I egged him on.

If my bike gets impounded again . . . Cooper trailed off in warning.

Stop being a baby.

"Pull over immediately," Weiss' voice came from behind us.

Ready?

Yeah . . . sure.

We both punched our gas pedals and the bikes lurched forward. We glided around the curves. The cop car losing pace as it tried to round the bends.

Too easy. Just as the thought came out, I spotted two police cars blocking the road in front of us. Guns drawn as they hid behind their open doors.

A gun shot rang through the air.

"Shit!" Cooper yelled. The bullet ripped through his tire. His wheels came out from underneath him. He fell to the ground, cracking his shoulder. His bike skid across the pavement as he rolled. The motorcycle continued to slide, causing sparks to fly, crashing into the bumper of the police car.

"*Ciach ort!*" I hit my brakes, curving in front of Cooper. My brother was down; my defenses to protect him went up.

"Freeze!" One of the cops yelled.

Ignoring him I reached down for Cooper's injured arm. He was out. "Wake up, Coop." I nudged him with my foot. Panic rose in my chest. The beast danced at the surface.

Weiss' vehicle halted close behind us, blocking us in a tighter circle, only pushing my instincts into a higher gear.

"Stop, Mr. Dragen. Do not move!" Weiss pointed his gun as he climbed out of the car.

My head turned to him, a roar involuntary coming out of me. Weiss stumbled back a little, shaking his head. I knew my eyes had flashed red. I could feel the heat rising in my skin, shifting, and my nails beginning to grow, my back hunching.

Learned instinct still wanted me to hide my true self and push the change back down. Everything else in me didn't care. I could tear through these guys in seconds without the other knowing. Why did I pretend they had the upper hand?

When Weiss looked back, he re-gripped his gun, swallowing hard. Like every human he dismissed what he saw.

"Let's not make this hard. You are surrounded. If you surrender without a fight, I'll be sure to make a note in your report."

I laughed. My nails were still longer than normal, and they dug into Cooper. The pain woke him up. He groaned, using my arm to pull himself up, he saddled in behind me.

"I am going to fuckin' kill you later," he mumbled.

"Let's get out of here first." Again my own words rubbed me wrong. Why was I running from them? What could they actually do to me?

"Mr. Dragen, I said don't move. I will shoot you."

A sardonic grin crept up my lips. "Oh, please do." I climbed off the bike.

"What the hell are you doing?" Cooper took the handles, procuring the weight of the bike from me.

"Giving the officer what he wants." I held my arms out wide. "Go ahead." I tapped the middle of my chest.

As I stepped toward Weiss, his finger seemed to itch to pull the trigger. "What happened to Ember Brycin, Mr. Dragen? She's been missing for three years. The last time I saw her she was covered in blood and her friends had gone missing."

My boots froze mid-step.

"Did she finally turn against you? See you for what you really are? Is her body, along with her father's and her friends', buried in a shallow grave on this allusive property of yours?"

It was like an axe had been driven into my chest. His theory once again was way off, but his words, of her being dead, hit too close to home.

I heard Cooper swear. My back started to curve again, my clothes began to tear. A menacing growl vibrated my vocal chords. Cooper revved the engine turning the bike towards me.

From there everything went sharply south. Cooper's movement had the other two officers shooting at us. My slightly altered shape, high-tailing it for Weiss' throat, had him firing. I felt each and every bullet dig into my skin, and I welcomed the pain.

Cooper sped up next to me.

"Get on," he screamed.

I hesitated. The need to tear the sheriff's throat out was so strong. I needed to kill, to have his

blood dripping from my teeth.

NOW! The volume from Cooper's link split my head, breaking my bond to kill Weiss. Another bullet plowed into my side. With a roar I turned instead and began to run down the side of the mountain. My hands and legs becoming more equal in length as my body changed. My clothes ripped completely away as the beast emerged.

With one last look over my shoulder, I saw Cooper pop a wheelie and break past Weiss, knocking him to the ground. The two other officers shot at the back of him, but the bike disappeared before they even got back to their cars.

I turned back and tore through the forest. I roared again, anger and guilt thundered in me. Once again I had screwed everything up because someone uttered her name. She was dead, and I not only hated her, I resented her ever coming into my life.

Chapter Three

The morning light brought no brightness to my day. I craved the dark nights. Most days I remained in my room, staying there till night fall.

I rolled over with a groan, rubbing at the healing scars where each bullet had been. Remaining in my Dark Dweller form the rest of the night had helped heal me, but the bruises and soreness were still raw and painful.

I needed to check on Cooper. I paused remembering he lost his bike in the ordeal last night. *Yeah . . . I'll wait a bit longer.* I leaned against the headboard. He was gonna be so pissed. I'd have to buy him a new Harley next time we got paid.

"Eli." A fist pounded on my door. "Get up, it's time to go," Gabby said through my door.

Right. The drop.

"I'll be out in a minute." I snarled, swinging my legs over the bed. I stood, rubbing my bare ass as I walked to the dresser. I yanked it open and looked for my least dirty jeans.

My fingers stopped on a t-shirt, and I caressed the fabric with the familiar paint stains on it. Even though I knew I was alone, my gaze still darted around the room. If anyone caught me . . .

No one knew about this. No one ever would. It was the last thing I had of her.

The bank had just taken possession of her house when I snuck in. Her smell was rich and thick through the house. It had taken me to my knees the first time I had entered. The crushing pain of her loss had made it hard to breathe. My brain kept thinking that she would walk out of her room at any moment, put her hands on her hips, and ask what the hell I was doing there?

Then the slight stink of the Strighoul and a mix of Vek's and Ember's blood, stained on the wood floor, would remind me. The smell and sight of her blood had me exiting the house. I swore to never go back. But the need for her, to be near her again, if only by her smell and possessions, pulled me back. I'm not sentimental, but I found myself stuffing the paint stained t-shirt she slept in, her sketch pad, baby book, and a few other keepsakes into my bag. The bank would sell or donate it all, glad to get rid of it. It would be gone forever. Brycin would officially disappear from my life.

I stuffed her shirt farther back in my drawer and snatched a pair of jeans and light weight t-shirt. The summer in Olympia had been unseasonably hot. Usually it stayed pretty mild, but it was as if my personal hell had come to life.

Shading my eyes from the glaring sun, I walked out on the porch. Cooper leaned against the rail, his arms crossed.

"Hey man . . . I am so . . ." I was stopped when his fist smashed into my face. The force took me to the ground, blood gushing from my nose.

Cooper stepped on either side of me, grabbing my shirt. His fist poised to punch again. "If you ever do something like that again—I *will* challenge you."

To "challenge" me meant he would fight me for my position in the clan. It didn't have to be a fight to the death, but it got close enough. If I lost, it would be worse than death. I didn't think

Cooper could take me in a fight; I was sure he knew it, too. But that made it even worse. Even if he knew he'd lose, he'd rather challenge me than continue under my authority. I never imagined losing Cooper's respect. It hit me hard. Shocking me.

"You got it?" He tugged at my shirt again.

"Yeah. I got it." I let the blood trail out of my nose, my eyes locked with his.

"You scared the fuck out of me last night. Reckless and stupid. If you had done that to anyone else but me, this wouldn't have been a warning this morning. It would have been a challenge."

I took in his words and nodded in understanding.

He opened his palm out to me. I grabbed it as he yanked me back up.

"You owe me a bike, fucker."

I patted his back. "Yeah, I do."

"Hey girls, if you're done making out can we go?" Gabby yelled from the cab of Cole's SUV. The merchandise was already packed in the back.

"Cole's letting me take his bike today. So we got Gabby covered front and back."

I nodded and headed out for my bike, pushing on my sunglasses.

There was a long scrape on the side of my bike, ripping the sleek, black paint. "Dammit," I mumbled, rubbing at the chipped paint.

"You're lucky that was all. I just skimmed Weiss' door." Cooper climbed onto Cole's bike. "You know they are gonna be out in full force looking for us. We need to be on guard today." Cooper slipped on his helmet. We didn't wear them often. But today, hiding our faces was a good plan.

"Let's keep off of any main roads or ones he knows we use." I grabbed my helmet and slid it on.

Cooper nodded and started the engine.

I swung my leg over my bike, which fitted me perfectly.

Just like Brycin.

The thought was already out before I could squash it. Plenty of times I had thought about her on the bike with me. Her back pressed between the handle bars, her legs wrapped around me, the engine vibrating and humming beneath us as I rode her so deep.

My dick went hard at the thought, tightening with need.

"Eli?" Cooper's voice broke into my fantasy.

I looked up at him.

"Let's go man." He hit the gas and took off down the road, following the SUV.

With a deep breath, I pushed all thoughts of her back down and followed them. She had been leaking through too often lately. It had to stop. My teeth ground together, my resentment of her building even higher. She did this to me. She was something I should hate anyway. Her kind. Her name. Everything. I would not let some woman, especially a Dae, turn me into such a pansy. She was dead. She had affected me enough in life; I could not let her reach out from whatever grave she was in as well.

At a stop light, my phone buzzed against my leg. Natasha's face stared back up at me.

“Yeah?” I answered.

“Hey baby. Where are you?” she purred through the phone

“We’re on our way. Be there in five.” I hung up.

She really was a good screw when I desired one, but I needed to end it. She would always want more, and I felt nothing for her.

We pulled up in our designated meeting spot near an abandoned warehouse in an area which I even considered dodgy. The moment I climbed off my bike and the helmet was off, Natasha had her arms wrapped around me, her lips devouring mine.

“I missed you last night,” she whispered in my ear.

I pulled back. “Uh, yeah, something came up.”

Her hand moved down my chest, she looked quickly over her shoulder. The group was not looking in our direction. Her hand crept lower.

“Did you miss me?” Her fingers slide down my pants.

“Natasha, not now.” I tried to step back, but her fingers wrapped hungrily around my cock. It reacted instantly. Memories of the fantasy with Brycin, I played out in my head earlier, flooded back.

Having her in my head, and not the girl standing in front of me, sent anger through my limbs. I grabbed Natasha shoulders and pushed her back. “I said not now.”

My dick was not pleased with me. Even though it never seemed to be fulfilled with Natasha, she was at least a release.

She bit her lip. Pain flashed quickly through her expression before she forced her mouth into a smile and winked. “Sure. Later.”

“Dragen.” Bobby, the leader of the Apocalypse Riders, sauntered over to me. “Haven’t seen you in a while. Good of you to come.”

I shook his hand. “Been busy.”

“I am looking forward to this partnership. Hope we’ll have more future runs with you guys. Take over some of the leg work.”

Since Lorcan had left, taking more than half of our group, we couldn’t do as much. Apocalypse was a new club and wanted to start making their mark. We needed men; they needed our status. It was a mutual collaboration.

Natasha’s hand again filtered across my ass. “I’m sure our partnership will be very gratifying.”

Bobby pressed his lips together at his daughter’s not-so-subtle insinuation. My reputation with women was no secret around the biker community. He knew he couldn’t stop her from seeing me, but as a father, he hated it. He and I both knew his little girl was gonna get hurt.

“All right, let’s get going. The drop off is an hour away.” I clasped by hands together. “Bobby, I’d like you and two of your men to ride in front with Cooper and two other to ride in back with me. Gabby will be in the middle.”

Bobby nodded. “Sounds good.” He went back to his men getting them organized.

“I’ll ride with you.” Natasha turned to face me, her arms wrapping around my middle. No

matter how long it had been or how many times Natasha had touched me, my first reaction was always to push her away. I wondered why. We were both getting what we wanted out of this. But it pissed me off somewhere inside me I felt like I was betraying *her*. We had never claimed “rights” on each other. Hell, before I fucked Brycin, she had been playing around with an Incubus asshole. I was free to do who and whatever the hell I wanted.

“You’re frowning again.” Natasha stood on her tip toes and kissed me. I didn’t fight it. Nor did I fight her riding with me. I didn’t have it in me to fight. If I wasn’t angry, I was numb. Those seemed to be the only two emotions I felt anymore.

As we rode out, Natasha’s need to capture me through sex was relentless. It was the only way she thought I would fall for her. If she was good in bed, I wouldn’t be able to stay away from her. Girls like her didn’t understand that sex was just sex to us. We could always find it somewhere else. It was the girl who made us want to come back, not the pussy.

Natasha was nice enough but boring as hell. She wanted to please me too much to ever risk challenging me. There was nothing to talk about. Not that I felt like talking to anyone lately. The only thing which got her huffy with me was my lack of commitment to her. She would get all pouty and irritating. I would just leave and in a day she would be calling, begging me back into her bed. Brycin would have been furious at the way I was treating her or the fact I was taking advantage of Natasha’s insecurity. She would kick my ass across the state and back.

I grinned at the image of Brycin all huffed up, pushing at my chest, as she laid into me. Her two different eyes would glow bright with anger. The vision was so crisp and clear I almost imagined I could smell her. The deep rich campfire scent, mixed with earth and cinnamon.

A hand pushed at the button of my jeans, bringing me back to reality. My cock was starting to get restless. The beast in me needed to let off steam. But I pushed her hand away. I had a job to finish. I was already in the dog house with my family. I needed to complete this job without incident . . . then my dick could take over.

My patience and my mood were hitting violent territory by the time we got to the site. The beast had taken over so much it was hard working past the basic needs of sex and food. Everything in me was taut and stressed as I tried to keep my mind on the transaction. Usually when those basic things were ignored, I was easy to enrage. Okay, I had been easy to rile since the day I had lost her.

I looked at my phone. Cole had put in it the combination to the shed where we were dropping off the merchandise. I went and unlocked it, as everyone else started unloading.

It was in that instant a vibration crippled my body, dropping me like a brick to the ground. Fire ignited in my veins, zipping the blood through my body so fast it hurt.

“Eli?” I heard Natasha come to my side.

I groaned as the ache turned up a notch, my breath halted in my lungs.

“What the hell is wrong with him?” Gabby dropped down on my other side.

“I don’t know.” Natasha fluttered over me nervously.

The pain eased. I gulped in a breath of air.

My heart pounded in my chest. *No way—it couldn’t be.* But there was no denying it. The

feeling of her had been so engrained in me, there was no way I could ever forget it. It was like everything around me had returned to color.

She was alive.

Pushing past the two obstacles in my way, I got to my feet. Voices were talking to me, but I didn't hear anything but the pounding of my blood in her, calling to me.

Logic fled and desperation to go to her was my only instinct. I went for the first thing which would take me to her. I was in the SUV pulling out of there before anyone could react.

Like it always had, the closer I got the more the feeling of her pumped through me. I followed the blood link taking me up into the mountains, where the road ended. I was out of the car running. Soon I could smell her . . . and others.

Jared!

My world stopped when I spotted her through the trees. She still wore the same outfit I had last seen her in, down to the dirt-stained tank top, the one we had relentlessly fucked each other on.

Anger hit me. She still smelled like me, like sex. It was as if no time passed for her at all.

Because it hadn't.

She hadn't died. She had left me . . . and had gone to the Otherworld.

She stood there looking down at the cityscape of Seattle below. Next to her stood Jared, Kennedy, and another form. I took a deep breath in.

Fuck. Lily.

Brycin had gone to help her friends escape. The most idiotic, stupid, reckless thing to do. She had foolishly thought she could face the Queen? The fact she was back with some of them proved she could do it, which pissed me off. She had been an idiot, but she hadn't needed me. *She never has*, another voice said. My chest trembled with ire. She stood there, dirty and bruised, looking gorgeous, and not realizing, and probably even caring, what had happened to me in her absence.

The beast in me roared and wanted nothing more than to take her right there—claiming what was mine as I plunged into her over and over. I locked down my muscles, but I prickled with the need for her. There was another part of me which loathed her very existence, I resented the effect she had on me, and what I had done and been like the last three years—because of her. I had felt guilt over West and Jared, but she had been the main reason I had lost respect with my clan and almost lost my place. I had been a wreck, barely hanging on to my sanity so I could survive.

And there she stood. Like nothing happened.

Resentment filled my chest, stirring me to move from my spot.

I could snap her neck and it would all be over—for good.

"What the hell?" Jared exclaimed, looking down on the city. He had been born and raised on Earth and never experienced the time difference between the worlds. His hand went up touching the lower back of the tiny framed girl, Kennedy.

Interesting.

Kennedy shook her head. "I-I don't understand. This can't be possible."

Seriously, they had been locked away in the land of Fairies, and they were gawking at the newly built city?

I gripped my hands into fists, trying to push down the storm of emotions whirling in me. “Clearly it is possible.”

They all jumped, whipping around. Ember went down in a defensive stance, ready to fight. Then her head cocked to the side, her eyes widening with awareness as she looked around wildly. She felt me now.

I stepped out of the shadows.

She gasped, her eyes running over me, taking me in. Her cheeks flushed, unconsciously licking her bottom lip as she looked away from me. Her breath shortened. I affected her. Good.

“Eli!” Jared bounded over to me. A goofy, elated grin appeared on his face. His arms wrapped around me and I stiffened. It was automatic. To see the kid safe was all I wanted, but now he stood in front of me, I found it hard to show him. All emotion except anger had been turned off for so long I didn’t know how to respond to his hug.

“Good to see you, J.” I gave him a pat and pulled back.

Ember’s eyes were on me, watching my every move. Skeptical. My eyes boldly met hers. Whatever she saw caused her muscles to tense up and take a small step back. She was wary of me. I knew she could also sense something was off about me. The beast was now more of who I was than the man.

My gaze drifted over the group, landing on Lily. Muscles underneath my shirt tightened.

“Lily.” I addressed her coolly. She was not someone I had expected or ever wanted to see again.

“Elighan.” Her voiced wasn’t as guarded as mine. Emotion trickled through, hinting at her hate.

Ember’s eyebrows merged further down her forehead looking between us. “You guys know each other?”

Unfortunately, we did.

I smirked, “We go way back, don’t we?”

Memories of the last time I had seen Lily flashed through my head. My jaw crunched together, blocking them.

“That we do.” Lily pushed back her shoulders, reminding me of Ember. She defied her fear with rebellious disregard.

Brycin shook her head. “Of course you do.” Resentment filled her tone and eyes. She understood it was one more thing that had been kept from her. Another secret. Her eyes flashed bright as they landed on me. “Why would you lie to me? Why would you and Lorcan say you killed my mother when you didn’t? Why would you do that?”

There was so much she should never learn about me.

Lily’s eyes penetrated into mine with accusing hatred, which only infuriated me more. Lily was no innocent here. Stepping closer, my fists balled at my sides. “I never actually said I did. You said I did. But if you really want the truth . . .”

“Ember, this is not the time or place for this,” Lily cut me off. Her vicious stare didn’t move from my face.

Ah. None of us were being truthful then. She wanted to keep our past a secret from Ember as much as I did.

“How . . . how is this possible?” Kennedy still stood staring at the city below, seemingly oblivious to the friction around her. But, I didn’t buy it. Granted she seemed to be genuinely confused about how a city had become fully rebuilt in what, to her, felt like a few weeks. But, it wasn’t the complete reason. She was too sensitive, her abilities too strong. She was trying to defuse the tension, breaking up our conversation.

That was fine with me.

“A lot of things can get done in time,” I said.

“In time? I’ve only been gone for a couple of weeks.” She looked back at me, baffled.

Oh, this little tidbit was gonna be fun to share. None of them had a clue how much time had really passed and what had happened in their absence. “Maybe in the Otherworld, but remember time is not the same there as it is here on Earth.”

Kennedy took another glance below. “So, what are you saying? How long have I been gone?”

“I’m saying you have been gone for more than a few weeks.” I was enjoying this a little too much—the beast relishing the cruel game. I wanted them to feel the harsh reality of time being taken from them. I pointed my gaze at Jared and Kennedy. “It has been about four years now.” Then I turned to Ember. I wanted her to feel my anger the most—what I had been through while she was there. “You have been gone almost three years.”

“What?” All reacted except Lily. She understood. She had grown up moving between worlds.

Another part of Brycin’s disappearance hit me. Why had I never thought of it before? Of course he would have been a part of this. Torin. This whole time she had probably been with him. He was who she probably had run to after being with me. There was no other way she could have gotten there on her own. He would help her. He’d do anything for her. Their connection to each other was another dagger in my side.

“A lot has taken place while you guys were away.” I leaned up against a tree, looking directly at Brycin. I couldn’t seem to keep my eyes off of her. Everything about her enticed me and pulled me in. Everyone else seemed to almost disappear when I was near her. She looked up; a muddle of emotions reflected in her beautiful eyes. How could one person affect me so much? Someone I should hate. There was no logic, just emotion. I had come to resent her for making me so weak. For needing someone so much, especially when we were doomed from the start. Fucking her or killing her were my two strongest desires. Maybe it would give me peace to kill the very thing which tortured me. But this time, her death would be by my hand.

Rage trembled in me.

“I couldn’t feel you. I couldn’t sense you at all. So I figured you were either dead or had done something exceedingly stupid. Seems it was the latter. But I am not the only one you should be worried about, Ember. Since your disappearance, you are number one on the Unseelie King’s most wanted list.”

That spiteful part of me was rewarded. Brycin's eyes widened as she took in the information. Fear and defiance crossed her face.

In that instant I wanted to kiss her.

I was split in battle: one instinct wanted to destroy my weakness; the other wanted to wrap my arms around her and protect her from the world and the things that would hurt her.

How long before that thing was me?



DARKNESS OF LIGHT BONUS SCENE

Chapter 5 from Eli Dragen's POV

By Stacey Marie Brown

“Have a seat Mr. Dragen.” The officer motioned to the chair. There was a slight irritation to his tone. Officer Paul had dealt with me on numerous occasions.

With a resigned sigh I plopped down. Paul whipped out the handcuffs and locked my wrist to the chair, which only made me smirk. I was amused at the flimsy piece of metal they thought could hold me down.

“I will be back.” He tugged on the metal making sure it was secure.

“Yeah. I think I know the dance by now.”

Officer Paul gave me a bemused huff and turned, leaving me in the small confines of the waiting room. It reeked of human smells, bad coffee, and the hint of cleaning products. The scent of the police station was something I was used to. I should be. I had already been here twice this week. For the month, I was hitting about eight visits, so far. Sadly that was not a record for me.

It was frustrating. I could easily out run the sheriff. Actually, I could out do him in anything, but Cole was adamant about us not using our abilities in public. Standing out or bringing any more attention to us was something he embedded daily into our brains. Except I was never one to listen.

I had difficulty with staying out of trouble. My entire personality stirred up people and trouble. Only Cooper was close to my number of arrests and that was because he was usually with me when I was causing a disturbance. West got in his fair share, but that fucker had the knack to charm a nun out of her britches. His arrests ended with a slap on the wrist and a verbal warning most of the time. Lorcan was too sneaky to get caught. If I cared, I could have probably gotten away, too. I just didn't. It was sick, but I kinda enjoyed pissing Sheriff Weiss off. Especially because he could never find anything to really hold me on. I wasn't stupid.

Sliding down further to get comfortable, the hard plastic chair creaked as I shifted in my seat. These seats were too fucking tiny for me. I pulled a book out of my back pocket. The cops liked to leave me sitting for a long time, and I had learned early on to bring something to read when I went out.

Most of my arrests were connected with Mike's Bar and some asshole thinking he didn't have to pay up what he lost a game of pool. My so-called age had some thinking they didn't have to play by the rules with me. They didn't like some “young punk kid” taking their money. All of us in my club appeared young to the human world. It hadn't taken long for us to earn respect of most of the bike gangs around. But there was always one or two who thought he could take us. It never got old showing the pricks how wrong they were.

Tonight's arrest was one of those times. The guy was in intensive care, and I was handcuffed to a chair in the police station. I already knew there would be no charges made against me. That was not how the biker world worked. Our common enemy was the cops. We dealt with each other on our terms.

In less than an hour they'd release me. I just had to be patient and wait it out.

I flipped to the dog-eared page and started reading. Even as I let my mind escape into my book, my body was aware of every single thing in the room: every person, every noise, every smell. My instincts were always on, ready to act. Nothing in here was a threat . . . not to me.

Then that all changed.

I smelled her before she entered. An assault of smoldering fire, cinnamon, and the soft scent of earth went up my nose, intoxicating my brain. It was like rich soil and olives being baked in the sun—what you'd imagine Italy or Greece to smell like. My head spun as I took another breath. It felt like a tsunami of tequila was poured into my head and chest. Tequila was known as the fight or fuck drink. I wanted to do both.

My gaze lifted, peering under my hood, seeing what Otherworld threat had just walked in.

Fae. Damn.

Even if this girl wasn't Fae, she was danger from head to toe. My dick responded immediately, going rock hard. Her back was to me as she put her money into the coffee machine, her firm ass taunting me. My eyes locked onto her, running over every inch of her body. Her long black hair hung to her waist and was striped with flaming red streaks. She was tall and a little more athletic than I normally liked. But her body seemed to be demanding for me to put my hands on it and to explore every inch.

Fuck.

Shaking my head, I looked away trying to break the spell the girl had on me. The endorphins she was putting off struck every nerve in my body. I wanted her bad. This never happened to me before. At least not this potent. I pulled down my hoodie further, blocking the bulge that was building up in my pants.

During our time on Earth, we had run into lots of Fae. Most were Dark. We tended to leave each other alone and go our own way, but I could feel this one was different. I couldn't get a sense of Light or Dark from her. That was not a good thing. There was only one kind of Fae that I knew who were both, and none of those were alive anymore. There were not any Fae around this area we didn't already know about. Was she just passing through?

I edged deeper back into my hood, bringing up my book to cover my face. To outsiders my body appeared relaxed and calm. I was anything but. My muscles constricted, ready to strike.

She glanced over her shoulder towards me. Yeah, she was aware of me, too. When she turned, her eyes drifting over to me. The air in my lungs halted.

Holy shit. She had two different colored eyes.

It took everything I had not to react. I clamped down tighter on my book, feeling my claws pricking at the surface. *There was no way . . . no fucking way.*

Was this girl a Dae? She had the traits—the two-toned hair and eyes. If so, she was both Light and Dark.

She seemed naively unaware of her surroundings. It was almost like she was clueless to the danger constantly after her kind. There was no way a Dae would just be out walking around, free or unguarded. But I could smell no protection spell on her. Didn't she know what she was?

No. I had to be wrong. It was well known, even to us stuck on earth, there were no more Daes alive. All had been found and killed.

Every. One.

The girl grabbed her coffee and a magazine and then sat in a row of chairs perpendicular from me. Her gaze quickly found its way back to me. She was trying to be sly, looking like she was reading her magazine, but I could feel her eyes burning into me.

Deep-seated hate and anger burned up my esophagus like acid. The desire to leap over and rip her into shreds consumed me. The beast inside was telling me I was not wrong. This thing was a Dae. My beast part growled, licking its lips to taste her blood. What her kind stood for was everything I despised. Every time she looked over at me, my instinct was to attack her. The killer in me was locking on its prey.

I shifted in my seat to break the link between the beast and its target. The girl jumped up defensively, her coffee splashing over the rim of the cup onto the floor.

So the Dae wasn't as dense as I thought. She could sense the threat. But she wasn't that bright either. If she was truly wise she would be running for her life.

She mumbled something to the onlookers and kneeled down to clean up the spill on the floor. Her skin was like ivory, and I could see the slight embarrassed blush her cheeks. A few freckles were also sprinkled over her nose. The flash of me handcuffing her, bending her over an officer's desk, my cock slamming deep into her, raced into my head. My dick twitched in longing. I hastily shut that fantasy down.

Fury at my own traitorous thoughts heated my body. It itched to act and to get out of this room before I did two violent acts to this girl. Only one of those I would let myself do.

She sat back down, readjusting herself with the magazine in one hand and what was left of her coffee in the other. It took only a few seconds before she was sneaking glances at me again.

Getting women to notice me was never my problem. If anything it sometimes became a nuisance. But I liked to fuck, and they liked to fuck me. This one watched me with the same female interest, but there was also something more in her attentive eyes. There was a defensiveness and irritation, but what got me was the curiosity. It was like she knew I was somehow different but didn't understand why. Could she not know about Fae? Could she be that ignorant?

"Look up," I heard her mumble to herself. No one else would have ever heard her, but I wasn't like everyone else.

I wanted to be disgusted by her voice, by her demand. It only made me want to do what she asked.

Hell fuckin' no. My head automatically shook slightly in response. I could feel the heat of mortification flood her body, flushing her cheeks. Then it swiftly changed to anger and gradually hurt.

Her emotions were blatant and open, like a human. She couldn't possibly have grown up in the Fae world. Hiding what you felt was something you learned from birth. You gave nothing away. Emotions were a weakness, and we would use them against you. One thing Fae knew how to do was hide secrets and feelings.

This girl was a walking diary.

Officer Paul strode into the room and headed for me. Relief showered down on me. I needed to get away from this girl before I did anything I'd regret.

"Okay, you're free to go, Mr. Dragen. You know the drill. Sign the forms and you can leave." Paul unlatched the cuff around my wrist.

I saw the girl's eyes widen as she watched me get un-cuffed. Her fear spiked, the sound of her pulse thumped in my ears. She had no idea of true terror: the fact my teeth wanted to tear into her flesh to take revenge for what her kind did.

I stood, keeping my head deep underneath my hood. I was enjoying her fear and playing with her. The girl's gaze moved up my body, and her hands balled tightly in her lap. I almost stumbled as her fear shifted into another emotion. Endorphins filled the room and pulsated with desire and need. My beast part responded, but not in the way I thought. It wanted her back. I usually didn't care when a woman noticed my arousal. She was different. She was a Dae. She should only disgust me. I would never let this abomination know she got me so hard it hurt to walk or even breathe.

Never.

As I walked by her, I tilted my head just enough so she could see my mouth. This Dae would know fear.

I smiled.

I knew that with a certain smile, I could have a woman begging me to fuck her; with another kind of smile I could make most people back off and stay clear of me. But with this smile I could make the most hard-ass prick pee themselves in fear. Without knowing truly why, they could sense their life was about to end.

This is what I wanted this girl to know. If I ever saw her again outside of these four walls, she was dead.

By the way she froze when I walked by, my message had been conveyed.

Good.

Just the way I like it.



FIRE IN THE DARKNESS BONUS SCENE

Chapter 2 from Eli Dragen's POV

By Stacey Marie Brown

Fuck.

That was my only thought when I saw the Dark Fae follow her into the shipyard. My legs had never moved so fast. My body wanted to change—the Dark Dweller in me screaming to get out and protect what was mine. *No, not yet.*

Cole and Cooper were going up through the rafters. Literally to get a drop on them. I was the distraction. Phookas were not dumb, but they were greedy and quick to act. I would have to use that to my advantage.

I slipped up to the cargo door, peering in. Even in human form, both men resembled a mountain goat. Phookas could change into several shapes: a dog, rabbit, and sometimes a small horse. But they usually had a dominant form. It wasn't hard to figure out which one was theirs.

"Move it." The taller, bigger one behind Ember pressed a gun firmly against her head. Her face was strong and definite. This girl was one of the most stubborn pains in the ass I'd ever met. My lip tugged up in a grin. Even defeated Brycin would not go down willingly.

The metal of the gun reflected the little light being let in from the top windows as he jabbed it again into the back of her head. A growl started to vibrate in my chest. I squeezed my eyes shut. Damn that fuckin' woman. She was gonna make me do something really stupid just because I couldn't keep my shit together. With a deep breath I stepped into the doorway. It took everything I had to not lose it right there and tear those two Fae into pieces. I had not spent this long keeping her alive for her to be snatched away now.

Seeing her again, this close up, was my own personal hell. Fuck was still the only word I thought, but it held a much different meaning. I had watched her for over four weeks, keeping most of the Fae that hunted her away, but I never got too close. If I did she would take off. Through our blood bond she could feel when I got near.

The second, smaller Phooka asshole pulled out iron cuffs from his pocket and was about to put them around her wrists.

"I don't think you want to do that." I leaned casually on the door jamb. I could take these two down in a matter of seconds. The only thing that stopped me was the gun. The bullets were Fae made, coated in iron. She would die. Suppressing another growl, I crossed my arms over my chest.

"And my night only continues to get better and better," I heard her say as she sighed with annoyance. Here I was trying to save her ass so you'd think she'd be a little more grateful. But no, not Brycin.

I scoffed. "Is this how you treat your savior? Your liberator, your rescuer, the redeemer?"

“Oh, hell. Are you and your ego done preening?” she sassed back. I loved provoking her. She gets all puffed up. But I was a sick motherfucker—I liked getting her all riled up. Actually, I enjoyed it even more when she riled me. Those were the times I wanted to put my cock deep into her and never let it see the light of day again.

“Knight-in-shining armor then?” I offered up.

“Please. Goat-boy here is more likely going to be my knight-in-shining armor than you.” She pointed to the guy holding the handcuffs. She was dirty, her hair ratty and limp. She had cuts and bruises everywhere visible and dried blood around the edges of the holes in her clothes. She looked like hell. And all I wanted to do was lay her on that concrete and screw her till we were both scraped up, bruised, and bleeding.

I shut away the images. Those were only gonna get me to act rashly. I had to concentrate.

“Ouch,” I responded. I kept my focus on her, but I could see Cole and Cooper moving above the two Phookas’ heads. “Now you’re just trying to be mean.”

“You haven’t seen me even get close to being nasty.” She crossed her arms. This was foreplay for me.

“Threat or promise?”

“That is a pro—.”

“What the shit is going on?” The man behind her finally spoke. Ember jumped, looking like she almost forgot he was there. The ugly asshole with the gun was getting angry and edgy. “Who the hell are you?”

“Someone your mommy told you not to mess with.” I was looking forward to this. Most Dark Fae have gotten used to us being gone from the Otherworld. They were getting lazy, sloppy, and arrogant. But our name still caused so much fear it got me giddy. I wanted him to fully see me. Know who he was dealing with. I stepped out from the shadows. A small gasp came from Ember. She gulped. I could hear her heartbeat from where I stood. The blood in her veins rushed frantically around. Good to know I could still affect her.

“This is our take. Get lost.” The Phooka was trying to play the tough guy. I could smell fear start to rise from his pores. This was too much fun.

“I don’t think so. You have something belonging to me, and I’d like it back now.”

Ember stiffened at my words, her face going hard. Anger flared through her. It was all directed at me. I knew Lorcan had gotten to her—had told her that I was actually using her so I could turn around and trade her to the Unseelie King. There wasn’t anything about that statement that wasn’t true. I had been. My family came first . . . that’s what I was telling myself anyway.

Somewhere along the way Brycin got under my skin. To be honest, it was way before I gave her my blood. What a stupid fuckin’ move that was on my part. Yeah, she affected me, but I could have walked away. Now I was finding that difficult. My blood flowed through her, calling to me. I had my fair share of seducing and being seduced by Sirens, Succubi, Demons, Tree and Water Fairies, and even a few humans. All were very memorable times. But nothing compared to the pull I felt with this one. It was like she wrapped my dick in a spell and, with no problem,

could lead me anywhere. I craved her. I felt listless and off when she was gone. This only pissed me off. Made me resent her.

I didn't need anyone.

"Sorry, we found her first. She's worth a big reward, and we're gonna be the ones to cash in." The Fae behind her pointed the gun at me. Iron didn't affect me, but Fae-made bullets did. Not that I would let him know that.

"You really think that's going to stop me?" I nodded toward the gun. Even if they shot me, nothing would stop me from getting to her.

"It would hurt like hell and slow you down enough."

"No more than a pinprick." I smirked.

Okay, we're in position, Cole said through our link.

I kept my eyes zeroed in on the two Dark Fae. If either even adjusted a hair, I would know about it. I saw Ember's gaze go briefly up to the rafters then quickly drop back down acting like she didn't see a thing. *Good girl.*

I then let my body shift. My clothes ripped from my body. I enjoyed this, watching the true fear grow in people's faces when they realized what I really was. I had a few piss their pants. Always enjoyable.

"Holy shit! You're a Dark Dweller," the main Phooka exclaimed, wiggling the gun in my direction. "The Queen led us to believe you were all dead."

"Sorry to disappoint," It was getting harder for me to talk as my body continued to change. My spine arched up, the daggers popping out of my skin. The spikes were poison-tipped. One touch and you'd be praying for death.

The Phookas were getting panicky. Not a good thing with them. I knew my eyes must have flashed red because the Phooka with the gun started to shake. The gun went off, the bullet hit several inches from my feet. *Now they're just pissin' me off.*

Cole and Cooper jumped, changing form mid-drop. Right as they landed on the men, Ember dropped to her knees getting out of the line of fire and out of the Dark Fae's grip. She crawled away from the fighting men. She looked up at the door and took off for it. She was going to try and get away from them . . . and from me.

I wasn't the only one who noticed her escape. The Phooka with the gun pointed it at her retreating frame; his finger squeezed the trigger. Rage burned through me. I growled and tore across the room. I hit him just before he shot, the bullet going into the wall beside her. I wanted this asshole dead. Bones crunched as I knocked into him. The Phookas dropped their human form. Growing their own lethal spiky horns. Their goat forms were large and tough. We were larger, tougher, faster, and much more deadly.

Go get her. We got this, Cole said in my head. They didn't need me. They barely needed both of them. This was child's play for us. Still I craved to kill them. It was painful to turn away, but I had to get Brycin before she got too far.

I transformed back into my human form. In either form I could feel her. I knew exactly where she was.

At a full run I dove through the window. The shards of glass tore into my bare ass—stinging like hell. Glass rained down on us. I used my body as a shield as I landed firmly on her. She immediately started thrashing and grinding against me trying to get free. My dick was suddenly awake and wanting.

Ciach ort!

“Stop fighting me.” She needed to stop right now, before I ripped those tattered jeans off her and made her really thrash.

She stopped. Her stunning, two different colored eyes fastened on mine. I didn’t care that she could feel me stiff against her. It made her heart flutter faster. It only made me want to fuck her more.

She started wrestling against me again. “Let me go.”

“Try again.”

“Get off of me.”

“Nope, not that one either,” No. I was perfectly happy here.

“Do you have her, Eli?” Cooper yelled from inside the building.

Damn. Guess fun time was over now. “Yeah.”

Cooper came out. I ignored the smirk and shake of his head. “Yep, I’d say you definitely do.”

He had accused me many times since she had come into my life that she unhinged me. Half of our clan left with that same notion, following Lorcan. I couldn’t deny she both irritated and excited me. I wanted her, but I could not have her. I could never have her. I was the succeeding Alpha in our Clan. I would do my duty in the end. I always knew it would wind up like that. She was a Dae. Everything I despised. Because of what she was and my past, I should have killed her the moment I met her.

“Get. Off. Of. Me. Now!” she snarled at me, a flicker of desire under her words.

This only made things harder. Literally. I stood, pulling her up with me. Her gaze drifted down to my cock and widened and then quickly glanced to the side. I smirked.

“You’re naked.”

“And you’re observant.” I needed to stop. I was Second in Command. I would not let this little Dae get the best of me. I had a job to do. I grabbed her arm and pulled her around the corner where our black Cadillac Escalade Hybrid sat. “Now get in.”

“Are you kidding me?” She jerked against my grip. “You think I’m going to get into the car? I’m not going anywhere with you.”

“It is not a choice.” I didn’t have an option either. I had to trade her. She would become the Unseelie King’s problem and no longer mine.



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